

The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant

Covenant Faith

Lesson #12 for June 19, 2021

Scriptures: Galatians 3:11; 6:14; Romans 4:1-7; 5:1; 6:23; 1 John 5:11-13; Leviticus 7:18; 17:1-4.

1. Is salvation a gift? Is faith a gift? Where does it come from? Is God, our only Source of true faith? Why does God consider faith so important? Why did Paul suggest in Acts 16:31 that faith is the only requirement for salvation? If faith comes from God, how does God give it to us? After we interact with God and He gives us faith, do we have it? Or, does He just credit us with it in an account somewhere in heaven? What does faith have to do with the life and death of Jesus Christ? Let us never forget that the questions and accusations against God had to be answered by evidence from God Himself, Jesus Christ. In several points, the ideas expressed in the *Bible Study Guide* differ greatly from my theology.
2. Why does God want to save us? In what sense is this world a testing place for the plan of salvation? What is our role in the great controversy? And what is the role of law? Did Jesus somehow meet the requirements of the law on our behalf? What would that mean?

When men and women can more fully comprehend the magnitude of the great sacrifice which was made by the Majesty of heaven in dying in man's stead, then will the plan of salvation be magnified, and reflections of Calvary will awaken tender, sacred, and lively emotions in the Christian's heart. Praises to God and the Lamb will be in their hearts and upon their lips. **Pride and self-esteem cannot flourish in the hearts that keep fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary....** All the riches of the world are not of sufficient value to redeem one perishing soul. Who can measure the love Christ felt for a lost world as He hung upon the cross, suffering for the sins of guilty men? This love was immeasurable, infinite.

Christ has shown that His love was stronger than death. He was accomplishing man's salvation; and although He had the most fearful conflict with the powers of darkness, yet, amid it all, His love grew stronger and stronger. **He endured the hiding of His Father's countenance, until He was led to exclaim in the bitterness of His soul: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"** His arm brought salvation. The price was paid to purchase the redemption of man, when, in the last soul struggle, the blessed words were uttered which seemed to resound through creation: "It is finished."...

The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. That Christ, so excellent, so innocent, should suffer such a painful death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, our thoughts and imaginations can never fully comprehend. The length, the breadth, the height, the depth, of such amazing love we cannot fathom. The contemplation of the matchless depths of a Saviour's love should fill the mind, touch and melt the soul, refine and elevate the affections, and completely transform the whole character.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 2, 212.1-213.0.†

3. If our souls have been transformed through contemplation of the love of God, does that

suggest that there is a real change in us?

Galatians 6:14: As for me, however, **I will boast only about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; for by means of his cross the world is dead to me, and I am dead to the world.**—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Galatians 6:14). New York: American Bible Society.†

4. Try to imagine how that statement sounded to the people to whom Paul was writing! The cross was supposed to be the most humiliating form of death used on those who were regarded as traitors to the Roman government. Was Paul crazy?

1 Peter 1:18-19: ¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.** (1989). (1 Peter 1:18–19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

5. So, what did Peter mean when he said we “were ransomed”?

In contrast, Christ ransomed us from the slavery of sin and its final fruit, which is death, but He did it with His “precious blood,” His substitutionary and voluntary death on Calvary. Again, this is the foundation of all the covenants: without it, the covenant becomes null and void, because God could not have justly fulfilled His end of the deal, which is the gift of eternal life bestowed upon all who believe.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, June 14.

6. Why is that? Was it because God was incapable of fulfilling His end of the deal? Or, was He just unwilling to do so? The truth is that Jesus demonstrated the truth about God, His character, His love, and how He chooses to run His government on love. No one else could answer the questions that had been raised by Satan in the great controversy. No one else could refute Satan’s accusations against God. Satan’s accusations were against God Himself, and thus, they must be answered by God Himself.
7. Notice what Paul and John have told us about sin, its results, and the results of having a true relationship with Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:23: For **sin pays its wage—death**; but God’s free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.—*Good News Bible.*†*

1 John 5:11-13: ¹¹The testimony is this: God has given us eternal life, and this life has its source in his Son. ¹²**Whoever has the Son has this life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.** ¹³ I am writing this to you so that you may know that you have eternal life—you that believe in the Son of God.—*Good News Bible.*†*

8. How do you understand the following words?

Only Someone who is equal to God Himself, in whom life exists unborrowed and underived and eternal, could have paid **the ransom required to free us from the debt owed to the law**. This is how all the covenant promises are fulfilled; this is how we have the promise of eternal life, even now; this is how we have been ransomed from sin and death.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, June 14.†

9. So, who decided how serious this debt was? And what should be paid?

10. In Scripture Abraham was regarded as the ultimate example of faith.

Genesis 15:6: Abram put his trust in the LORD, and because of this the LORD was pleased with him and accepted him.—*Good News Bible*.*

11. Was it foolish for Abraham to believe God's promise of a son by Sarah when Abraham was 100 and when Sarah was 90 and beyond having children? Does the ability to believe outlandish things which are promised by God, mean that we have real faith? Why was Abraham credited with/accounted as righteous? Was it true that even under very difficult circumstances which seemed impossible, he did what was right in obedience to God's commands?

12. What actually saves us? If righteousness is by faith and justification is by faith and sanctification is by faith, clearly, **it is faith that is the key**. So, what exactly is the role of faith? And how is it "imputed" to us? **Does God declare us righteous when we aren't really? Would that be a theological lie?** Was Abraham really the friend of God? Or, wasn't he? After his sin with Bathsheba, David wrote two psalms (Psalm 32 & Psalm 52) that speak about these issues. Paul referred to David's words in Romans 4:1-8.

Romans 4:1-8: ¹What shall we say, then, of Abraham, the father of our race? What was his experience? ²If he was put right with God by the things he did, he would have something to boast about—but not in God's sight. ³The scripture says, "Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous." ⁴Those who work are paid wages, but they are not regarded as a gift; they are something that has been earned. ⁵But those who depend on faith, not on deeds, and who believe in the God who declares the guilty to be innocent, it is this faith that God takes into account in order to put them right with himself. ⁶This is what David meant when he spoke of the happiness of the person whom God accepts as righteous, apart from anything that person does:

⁷"Happy are those whose wrongs are forgiven,
whose sins are pardoned!

⁸ Happy is the person whose sins the Lord
will not keep account of!"—*Good News Bible*.* [This quotes Psalm 32:1-2.][‡]

Looking again at Genesis 15:6, we can see that various translations have rendered the term as "counted" (Hebrew, *chashab*) or "reckoned" or "credited" (*RSV, NIV*) or "accounted."

The same term is employed in other texts in the books of Moses. A person or a thing is "reckoned," or "regarded," as something that person or thing is not. For instance, in Genesis 31:15, Rachel and Leah affirm that their father "reckons" ("regards" or "counts") them as strangers, although they are his daughters. The tithe of the Levite is "reckoned" ("regarded" or "counted") as if it were the corn of the threshing floor, although it is obviously not the corn (*Num. 18:27, 30, NIV*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, June 16.[§]

13. Do you agree with the following statement from our Bible study guide?

God is accounting the sinner as righteous, although the individual is actually unrighteous.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, June 16.[†] [Is this a theological lie?][‡]

14. Can a truth-telling God who gave us the ninth commandment really call us righteous?

This great truth, that of being declared righteous, not because of any act that we can do but only because of faith in what Christ has done for us, is the essence of the phrase “righteousness by faith.” Yet, it is not that our faith itself makes us righteous; rather, faith is the vehicle by which we obtain the gift of righteousness. This, in essence, is the beauty, the mystery, and the glory of Christianity. All that we believe as Christians, as followers of Christ, finds an important root in this wonderful concept. Through faith, we are accounted righteous in the sight of God. All else that follows—obedience, sanctification, holiness, character development, love—stems from this crucial truth.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide for Wednesday, June 16.†**

15. Are we really changed by faith?

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages 668.3.† [Doesn't that sound like someone who is really changed? This is a process. God does it for those who trust Him and invite Him to change their lives.]‡**

16. So, we are left with one great question: How are we to get the righteousness of Christ? Does it become ours? Or, is it just credited to us? Second Corinthians 3:18 says that by beholding we become changed. Is that really true?

Romans 5:1: [What does justification have to do with peace?] Now that **we have been put right with God through faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

17. So, how does faith accomplish that fantastic transformation?

18. What can we actually do to strengthen our faith? The only thing we can do to strengthen our relationship with God is to improve our faith. What is faith? As we have noted before, based on all of Scripture, a biblical definition of faith stated so well, so many times by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, is as follows:

***Faith* is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well-known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be. [We cannot say “will be” because we remember the story of Lucifer!]**

***Faith* implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed to be willing to believe what He says as soon as we are sure He is the One saying it, to accept what He offers as soon as we are sure He is the One offering it, and to do what He wishes as soon as we are sure He is the One wishing it, without**

reservation, for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven. [See Acts 16:31. Compare Romans 14:23.]

Faith also means that, like Abraham, [Genesis 18:22-33] [Job, (Job 42:7-8)] and Moses, [Exodus 32:5-14; Numbers 14:11-25] God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?"—[Sentence in brackets was also stated parenthetically many times by Dr. Maxwell. *Job* and Bible citations in brackets are added.][‡]

Notice these words from Ellen White.

The only way in which he [the sinner] can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account. Christ's righteousness is accepted in place of man's failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, **treats him as though he were righteous**, and loves him as He loves His Son. **This is how faith is accounted righteousness; and the pardoned soul goes on from grace to grace, from light to a greater light.**—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*,* Book 1, 367.1.^{†‡} Compare 6SDABC 1073.8.

When through repentance and faith we accept Christ as our Saviour, the Lord pardons our sins, and remits the penalty prescribed for the transgression of the law. The sinner then stands before God as a just [righteous] person; he is taken into favor with Heaven, and through the Spirit has fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Then there is yet another work to be accomplished, and this is of a progressive nature. The soul is to be sanctified through the truth. And this also is accomplished through faith. For it is only by the grace of Christ, which we receive through faith, that **the character can be transformed.**—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*,* Book 3, 191.2-3.^{†‡}

19. We still do need to remember that "faith works!"

James 2:17-18: ¹⁷So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, "One person has faith, another has actions." My answer is, "Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions."—*Good News Bible*.*

Romans 16:26: Now, however, that truth has been brought out into the open through the writings of the prophets; and by the command of the eternal God it is made known to all nations, so that all may believe and obey.—*Good News Bible*.*

20. But, if we are saved because of something that happens in the books of heaven, something that is credited to us, couldn't God just credit everyone (by bookkeeping) and save all of us?

21. So, what is the meaning of *substitution* in this whole process?

No matter what we do, our human nature is sinful and unworthy in comparison to the purity of God's righteousness. By accepting Christ's substitutionary death for us through the covenant, we can stand worthy in the

sight of God. And however much God cleanses us, changes us, molds us into reflections of His image, we must always have Jesus as our perfect Substitute. This is the essence of the gospel and our great hope, our covenantal hope.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 158.

22. Our Bible study guide suggests that in order for the new covenant to be ratified, blood had to be shed. Why must blood be shed in order to have a covenant?

Their plight is serious indeed. They cannot cleanse themselves of sin (Prov. 20:9), and no deeds of law will ever enable them to stand before God justified (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16). Hence the atonement, to accomplish for sinners what needed to be done, had to be made by someone else in their behalf. Christ is utter self-giving, even in death. He is the means of our return to God. Through Him we have access to the Father (Eph. 2:18), an access to be appropriated by faith (Eph. 3:12), faith in Him “whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (**Rom. 3:25**).—Dederen, R. “Christ: His Person and Work,” (2001). *Handbook of Seventh-Day [sic] Adventist Theology** (electronic ed., Vol. 12, pp. 174–175). Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.^{†‡}

23. Romans 3:25-26 is supposed to tell us how righteousness is received by faith.

Romans 3:25-26: ²⁵⁻²⁶God offered him, so that **by his blood** [Footnote: 3.25-26 by *his blood*; or by *his sacrificial death*.] **he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to demonstrate that he is righteous.** In the past he was patient and overlooked people’s sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, **in order to demonstrate his righteousness.** In this way **God shows that he himself is righteous** and that **he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.**—*Good News Bible.*^{*†‡§}

24. Often, people regard the Old Testament as a time of great legalism. But, Genesis 15:6 tells us that Abram before he became Abraham was the quintessential example of faith!

How amazing that the Old Testament, often viewed as the ultimate example of what legalism is all about, is really the foundational expression of the covenant promise of salvation by faith. Back in Genesis 15:6, we can see this in the famous verse: “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (*NKJV*). This, of course, in talking about Abram (not yet Abraham). The Hebrew is clear: Abram believed “in” the Lord; that is, he not only believed that He existed, but he also believed His promises, even the ones that seemed impossible, such as that he would one day father a great nation. [As one child has said: “Faith is believing what you know ain’t so!”]

What about other promises of God that seem impossible? Such as that we, though sinners, can be accounted righteous, and even made righteous, in His sight? Talk about belief in the impossible!

[Famous preachers and theologians in the past have made some fantastic statements and claims about faith.]

“Faith eats her manna and leaves not a morsel for worms to breed in. . . .
“The faith of Abraham could lead strings of camels and flocks of sheep away

from Haran to Canaan. His was the faith which could drive the tent-pin into a foreign soil, or roll up the canvas. . . .

“It is a practical, active, living, week-day, every-day faith. I will speak very broadly and plainly, and say we need a bread-and-cheese faith, . . . a faith which believes that God who feeds the ravens will send us our daily bread; a faith . . . that . . . does not live in the region of fiction.”—Charles Spurgeon, “Hearken and Look,” *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia*, vols. 1, 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 43, 47, 48. (See *Isa. 51:2.*)—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 158-159.^{‡§}

25. So, when it comes down to punch time, what has God risked?

“How can Divinity risk so much in behalf of humanity? How can God declare completeness (perfection) for people who, though in process, have not fully attained? How can He declare as accepted persons who by nature are unacceptable? How can the Godhead risk Their reputation by extending such daring grace?

“The answer is threefold. [God is looking for progress, not perfection!]

“First, God does so because He accepts our sincere prayers and efforts toward spiritual maturity as perfection. . . . [God sees that as progress.]

“Second, Christ is able to take such action because the faith that He sees in us is not really ours; it is His. He sees His faith in us and honors that faith. It is ours in that we are the repositories of His love, the objects of His grace. But it is His because saving faith is of divine, not human, origin. . . .

“Third, God acts with such confidence because in the final analysis it is not on us that the Father focuses; it is on the righteousness of Christ’s robe that covers us.”—Calvin Rock, *Seeing Christ: Windows on His Saving Grace*, pp. 158, 159.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 159; remember the description of the judgment in Zechariah 3:1-5].^{‡§}

26. All of this raises the question that is so often asked: “Are you saved?” Can we give a definitive answer to that? *To save* or *salvation* are words from the Greek word *sozo*. *Sozo* is a verb. And what does it mean? **Remember that the word *sozo* or *to save* in Greek, also means *to heal*.** Can we actually be healed?

Different faiths view salvation in different ways. The Baptists place salvation in the past. It is an event that took place at the cross. All sins were forgiven at that point. People who believe in predestination put salvation at the “Holy Council,” where certain people were appointed to be saved or lost. Roman Catholics place salvation in the future, after a person who dies believing in Jesus is purified in purgatory. These are punctiliar views of salvation, meaning that salvation takes place at one point in time.

Seventh-day Adventists, however, have a linear view of salvation. Salvation has a past, present, and a future. **It is a process**—a series of divine acts and human responses.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 160.[†]

27. In light of all that God has done for us under the watchful eye of the entire universe—God’s government is totally transparent,—what have we been told about God’s attitude toward human beings?

If we were to cherish an habitual impression that God sees and hears all that we do and say and keeps a faithful record of our words and actions, and that we must meet it all, we would fear to sin. Let the young ever remember that wherever they are, and whatever they do, they are in the presence of God. No part of our conduct escapes observation. We cannot hide our ways from the Most High. Human laws, though sometimes severe, are often transgressed without detection, and hence with impunity. But not so with the law of God. The deepest midnight is no cover for the guilty one. He may think himself alone, but to [218] every deed there is an unseen witness. **The very motives of his heart are open to divine inspection. Every act, every word, every thought, is as distinctly marked as though there were only one person in the whole world, and the attention of heaven were centered upon him.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 217.4-218.0.†

In the parable the shepherd goes out to search for one sheep—the very least that can be numbered. **So if there had been but one lost soul, Christ would have died for that one.**—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lesson** 187.2.† Compare *Signs of the Times*, December 16, 1903, par. 1.

We should feel the responsibilities that rest upon us as Christians, and labor as though we realized the value of souls, remembering that **one soul saved in the kingdom of God is worth more than ten thousand worlds like this.**—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* April 1, 1880, par. 1.†

28. Paul used Abraham as the great example of faith. See Romans 4:1-4 as quoted in Item #12 above.

Look at Genesis 17:17. How did Abraham respond to God's promise of a son by Sarah?

Genesis 17:17: Abraham bowed down with his face touching the ground, but **he began to laugh** when he thought, "Can a man have a child when he is a hundred years old? Can Sarah have a child at ninety?"—*Good News Bible*.*†

Does that sound like a great example of faith? Compare Genesis 18:9-15.

29. Consider the following from Ellen White's morning talk to ministers at the General Conference Session held in November, 1883, at Battle Creek, Michigan.

God does not give us up because of our sins. We may make mistakes and grieve His Spirit, but when we repent and come to Him with contrite hearts, He will not turn us away. There are hindrances to be removed. Wrong feelings have been cherished, and there have been pride, self-sufficiency, impatience, and murmurings. All these separate us from God. Sins must be confessed; there must be a deeper work of grace in the heart. Those who feel weak and discouraged may become strong men of God and do noble work for the Master.—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works** 35.2.† [How can we learn to live by these words?][‡]

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