

Chapter Ten

Avoiding Errors in our Gospel Understanding

Most of the denominations of professed Christianity would classify their understanding of the plan of salvation as ARMINIAN, Seventh Day Adventists included. ARMINIANISM is certainly preferable to UNIVERSALISM and CALVINISM, as mentioned in an earlier chapter. But ARMINIANISM, in avoiding the errors of UNIVERSALISM and CALVINISM, does not teach corporate legal justification and legal pardon for all mankind. Arminianism sees the gospel not as the good news of what God has done for all mankind in giving salvation to all but as merely a provision. Therefore the “in Christ” concept of the gospel is limited in Arminian theology.

The “In Christ” Concept

We already explained in the chapter on ‘The Two Adams’ that the Son of God in the incarnation became the Last Adam, i.e. He became a corporate, representative Man embracing all mankind. The entire human race was “in Christ”, what He did, He did for all and all have it in Him as an accomplished fact. Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 5: 14.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: {2 Corinthians 5: 14} KJV

This was one of the highlights of the 1888 message of righteousness by faith but was foreign to Arminian, and therefore, to Adventist theology.

The other aspect of being “in Christ” is well known to all of us because it is the only aspect which is emphasized in Arminian theology. The individual who responds to God’s love revealed in what Christ has done for all mankind and who gives himself in full surrender to Jesus is said to be “in Christ” by faith.

There are therefore two aspects or phases of the “in Christ” concept.

1. All mankind was, and is in Christ as a “physical-spiritual” reality. So what Christ did for all, all did it and have it in Him, whether or not they know or believe it.
2. Only those who believe the Good News and accept Christ as their personal Saviour are “in Christ” by

faith and have all that He did for them as a practical character experience which gives victory over sin and produces heart-obedience to God’s word.

Both the 1888 message and the Spirit of Prophecy present both phases and not one to the neglect of the other. Consider the three (3) passages.

By his obedience to all the commandments of God, Christ wrought out a redemption for man. This was not done by going out of himself to another, but by taking humanity into himself. Thus Christ gave to humanity an existence out of himself. To bring humanity into Christ, to bring the fallen race into oneness with divinity, is the work of redemption. Christ took human nature that men might be one with him as he is one with the Father, that God may love man as he loves his only begotten Son, that men may be partakers of the divine nature, and be complete in him.

The Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the only begotten Son of God, binds the human agent, body, soul, and spirit, to the perfect, divine-human nature of Christ. This union is represented by the union of the vine and the branches. Finite man is united to the manhood of Christ. Through faith human nature is assimilated with Christ’s nature. We are made one with God in Christ. {R.H. April 5th, 1906}

Ever since Adam’s sin, the human race had been cut off from direct communion with God; the intercourse between heaven and earth had been through Christ; but now that Jesus had come “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3), the Father Himself spoke. He had before communicated with humanity through Christ; now He communicated with humanity in Christ. Satan had hoped that God’s abhorrence of evil would bring an eternal separation between heaven and earth. But now it was manifest that the connection between God and man had been restored. {D.A. page 116}

The parable of the merchantman seeking goodly pearls has a double significance: it applies not only to men as seeking the kingdom of heaven, but to Christ as seeking His lost inheritance. Christ, the heavenly merchantman seeking goodly pearls, saw in lost humanity the pearl of price. In man, defiled and ruined by sin, He saw the possibilities of redemption. Hearts that have been the battleground of the conflict with Satan, and that have been rescued by the power of love, are more precious to the Redeemer than are those who have never fallen. God looked upon humanity, not as vile and worthless; He looked upon it in Christ, saw it as it might become through redeeming love. He collected all the riches of the universe, and laid them down in order to buy the pearl. And Jesus, having found it, resets it in His own diadem. “For they shall be as the stones of a

crown, lifted up as an ensign upon His land.” Zechariah 9:16. “They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels.” Malachi 3:17. {COL 118.2}

But Christ as the precious pearl, and our privilege of possessing this heavenly treasure, is the theme on which we most need to dwell. It is the Holy Spirit that reveals to men the preciousness of the goodly pearl. {C.O.L. page 118}

The Adamic Condemnation Reversed for all Mankind

Another problem with Arminianism is that it does not teach that the condemnation which came upon all mankind because of Adam’s disobedience has been atoned for and therefore reversed by Christ’s death.

But the Apostle Paul is clear on this matter.

Therefore as by the offence 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. {Romans 5: 18} KJV

This verse exposes Calvinist and Arminian error. Calvinism restricts the gift only to the “predestinated elect”. Arminianism restricts the gift only to believers. Paul declares that the free gift was given to all men! That is the reason we have physical life and physical blessings whether we know it or not. Those who believe, receive the gift of eternal life!

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; [and] he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. {1 John 5: 11-12} KJV

Consider these quotations:

He took in his grasp the world over which Satan claimed to preside as His lawful territory, and by His wonderful work in giving His life, He restored the whole race of men to favor with God. {Manuscript 50, 1900}

The world has been committed to Christ, and through Him has come every blessing from God to the fallen race. He was the Redeemer before as after His incarnation. As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. He has given light and life to all, and according to the measure of light given, each is to be judged. {D.A. page 210}

A ransom has been provided at infinite cost, and it is not because there is any flaw in the title which has been purchased for lost souls that they do not accept it. It is not because the mercy, the grace, the love of the Father and the Son are not ample, and have not been freely bestowed, that they do not rejoice in pardoning love, but it is because of their unbelief, because of their choice of the world, that they are not comforted with the grace of God. {S.T. June 6th, 1895}

Arminianism and Legalism

Unless we see and appreciate the amazing love of God, revealed at Calvary, in giving all mankind free legal pardon (charizomai), our motivation for obedience will be self-centered rather than God-centered. The love of God must be our motivation for obedience. If God’s love is not our motivation then subtle forms of legalism, motivated by some aspect of self, will characterize our experience. One such aspect of legalism is fear of judgement and of punishment and, or, hope of reward. Another aspect of subtle legalism is salvation by faith and works. These subtle forms of Arminian legalism are the major causes of lukewarmness and are not easily discerned except by the eye salve of the Holy Spirit through the true gospel.

The overwhelming emphasis of Arminianism is on what we must do in order to get God to save us. Therefore what is commonly called “faith” boils down to nothing more than egocentric effort to get salvation and security for the judgement. But true faith must be rooted in God’s love. We love Him because He first loved us and love produces trust. Nothing reveals God’s love as fully as the price paid for the cost of our salvation. Study carefully the following texts and Spirit of Prophecy quotations:

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son [to be] the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. {1 John 4: 10- 19} KJV

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. {Galatians 5: 6} KJV

If ye love me, keep my commandments. {John 14: 15} KJV

It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour’s matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary’s cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice,

and they follow Him. {D.A. page 480 – paragraph 3}

After presenting the goodness of God toward Israel, Joshua called upon the people, in the name of Jehovah, to choose whom they would serve. The worship of idols was still to some extent secretly practiced, and Joshua endeavored now to bring the people to a decision that they would banish this sin from Israel. "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord," he said, "choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Joshua desired to lead them to serve God, not by compulsion, but willingly. Love to God is the very foundation of religion. To engage in his service merely from the hope of reward or the fear of punishment, would avail nothing. Open apostasy would not be more offensive to God than hypocrisy and mere formal worship. {Y.I. June 20th, 1901- paragraph 3}

The Motive for True Obedience

It should be clear then that God's pardoning agape Love in CHARIZOMAI produces true obedience in the true Christian life. This obedience is the fruit of faith and, though our good works will be rewarded, they have no redemptive merit. We are not justified by faith and works but by faith which works.

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath [whereof] to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. {Romans 4: 1- 5} KJV

The world's Redeemer was treated as we deserve to be treated, in order that we might be treated as he deserved to be treated. He came to our world and took our sins upon his own divine soul, that we might receive his imputed righteousness. He was condemned for our sins, in which he had no share, that we might be justified by his righteousness, in which we had no share. The world's Redeemer gave himself for us. Who was he?--The Majesty of heaven, pouring out his blood upon the altar of justice for the sins of guilty man. We should know our relationship to Christ and his relationship to us. We are to trust God fully, and ask him to supply the least as well as the greatest want. The Lord encourages our confidence; and the great proof of our union with Christ, and the best manifestation of our love to him, is in yielding obedience to his claims. If you have love to Jesus Christ, which is an expression of the life of Christ in the soul, then you will do what he commands you. This is practical religion. Redeemed by the ransom money paid for your souls, you will go forth and show how much you love Jesus by obedience to his commandments. You are to bring forth fruit by doing his commandments, because you are branches of the living Vine. It is his prayer that his joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. {R.H. March 21st, 1893}

The faith that justifies always produces first true repentance, and then good works, which are the fruit of that faith. There is no saving faith that does not produce good fruit. God gave Christ to our world to become the sinner's substitute. The moment true faith in the merits of the costly atoning sacrifice is exercised, claiming Christ as a personal Saviour, that moment the sinner is justified before God, because he is pardoned.--Ms 46, 1891. ("Justified by Faith," January 6, 1891.) {8 M.R. No. 629}

Charizomai and Aphiemi

Our studies so far have shown us clearly that our sins have already been pardoned (charizomai). What is therefore the reason and motivation for confession and repentance at the individual level? The Bible teaches that every time we sin, we hurt Jesus, we give a poor witness to unbelievers and we give Satan opportunity to accuse us and God before the universe. An appreciation of the love of God revealed in the infinite price paid for our salvation will motivate us to stop hurting Jesus by ceasing to sin and also to give to the world, by our good works, an effective witness about God's government.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. {Matthew 5: 16} KJV

For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and [in his] Father's, and of the holy angels. {Luke 9: 26} KJV

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin. {Hebrews 4: 15} KJV

Satan claims that no one really serves God out of pure love, but rather as a tradeoff, that is, we serve God out of self-centered motives for what we can get (Job 1: 6-11). The Apostle Paul declares that self-centeredness was given up to the second death at the Cross. Therefore we confess and repent so as to receive the heart cleansing (aphiemi) of 1 John 1: 9. Selfless loyalty to God will demonstrate the power of the gospel and vindicate the character of God.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. {2 Corinthians 5: 14- 15} KJV

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. {Galatians 2: 20} KJV

In the final generation God will have a people whose primary concern will not be the salvation of themselves but ensuring that God wins the great controversy with Satan. By their sinless, selfless and mature loyalty to God, demonstrated in perfect obedience, they will prove the power of the gospel to make believers sinlessly righteous through the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ!

Here is the patience of the saints: here [are] they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. {Revelation 14: 12} KJV

And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. {Revelation 12: 17} KJV

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. {Revelation 12:11} KJV

Righteousness within is testified to by righteousness without. He who is righteous within is not hard-hearted and unsympathetic, but day by day he grows into the image of Christ, going on from strength to strength. He who is being sanctified by the truth will be self-controlled, and will follow in the footsteps of Christ until grace is lost in glory. The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven. {R.H. June 4th, 1895}

Indeed CHARIZOMAI reveals the love that produces APHIEMI and vindicates God's character through a victorious remnant!

Your Servant in Christ

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