



2024 2Q The Great Controversy Lesson 5 Faith Against All Odds

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SABBATH

When you hear ideas like the lesson title, *Faith Against All Odds*, do you have a clear understanding of this is? What is faith?

From dictionary.com the word faith can mean:

1. confidence or trust in a person or thing: *faith in another's ability.*
2. belief that is not based on proof: *He had faith that the hypothesis would be substantiated by fact.*
3. belief in God or in the doctrines or teachings of religion: *the firm faith of the Pilgrims.*
4. belief in anything, as a code of ethics, standards of merit, etc.: *to be of the same faith with someone concerning honesty.*
5. a system of religious belief: *the Christian faith; the Jewish faith.*
6. the obligation of loyalty or fidelity to a person, promise, engagement, etc.: *Failure to appear would be breaking faith.*
7. the observance of this obligation; fidelity to one's promise, oath, allegiance, etc.: *He was the only one who proved his faith during our recent troubles.*
8. *Christian Theology.* the trust in God and in His promises as made through Christ and the Scriptures by which humans are justified or saved.

The Greek for faith in the NT is *pistis* and is translated *belief, faith, trust* and means to have confidence. In English the best overall single word would be trust.

Can someone have faith/belief/trust/confidence in a faithless or untrustworthy person, idea, or system?

What is to be the basis of our faith?

What does it mean to have faith against all odds? Doesn't it simply mean that we trust Jesus no matter what!

And how is it that we experience this faith or trust? By coming to know God in truth, in reality, for who He actually and truly is. And this is why Jesus said life eternal is knowing God (John 17:3), because when we come to know Him we automatically will trust Him.

It is the lies about God that we believe that keep us from knowing Him that undermine a deeper trust in God.

Many people instead of trusting God directly, trust in the mechanics of their religion—they trust in the sacraments, they trust in the rituals, the ceremonies, the observance of law, Sabbath keeping, right eating. Or they trust in someone to represent them and plead for them to God, whether Mary, the saints, or Jesus Himself. They trust in a legal payment of sinless human blood, but they don't actually know and trust God because they believe lies—that God killed Jesus, or that God cannot forgive outright, that God requires legal payments or sacrifices be offered to Him in order to get Him to forgive and not punish. All of this prevents genuine faith/trust in God.

WEDNESDAY

The lesson asks us to read Ephesians 2:8-9:

- For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV84).

What does this text mean? What law lens do we understand the words through?

- What is grace?
- What does it mean to be saved?
- From what are we being saved?
- What is faith?
- How is faith a gift of God?

If we have the idea in mind that God's law functions like human law, then from what are we being saved?

- We are being saved from the so-called just punishment of God for our sins, from the punishment for our law-breaking.

But if we have design law in mind then from what are we being saved?

- We are being saved from sin, from the condition of being out of harmony with God's design laws for life.

And this salvation is offered to us because of God's grace—God's graciousness in His active, willful, specific, direct intervention by the use of His powers to work out for us, through His right hand agent Jesus Christ, the cure, remedy, solution, to our sin condition because there is absolutely nothing we can do to heal or fix this terminal sin-condition ourselves. Our response to this amazing grace is to choose to trust or have faith in Him and willingly cooperate with Him and He then heals and fixes us. Thus I render this passage in the Remedy as:

- It is only because of God's grace that you have been healed through trust—and you did not create this trust yourself, but it was established through the evidence of God's character revealed in the gift of Jesus Christ. This is not by some human work—No way!—so there is no room for anyone to boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 REM).

The lesson also asks that we read Romans 3:23, 24, but let's read versus 21-26 to get a clearer picture of what Paul intends. We will read it from the NIV first, then contrast it with the GNT, and finally the Remedy. As you hear these words, consider the law lens you are hearing/thinking through:

- But now a **righteousness** from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This **righteousness** from God comes through **faith** in Jesus Christ to all who **believe**. There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are **justified** freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a **sacrifice of atonement**, through **faith** in his **blood**. He did this to **demonstrate** his **justice**, because in his **forbearance** he had left the sins committed beforehand **unpunished**—he did it to **demonstrate** his **justice** at the present time, so as to be **just** and the one who **justifies** those who have **faith** in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26 NIV84, emphasis mine).

What do you hear? What is the message? Do you hear something healing or something legal?

The Greek for faith and trust is the same, and the Greek for righteous/righteousness and justify/justice is the same.

The NIV seems to suggest that God sent Jesus to die to show God's justice, which through the human law model means the right or proper punishment, which some people use this text to teach that God executed Jesus in our place to pay a legal penalty—to do a human style of inflicted punishment justice. But justice is simply doing what is right, to justify something is to put it or set it right, to rightify it, which is the righteous or just action. But we hear the words justice and righteousness differently, yet in the Greek they are the same word.

So notice how the GNT renders this, and I am showing this to demonstrate that my rendering of righteous and righteousness instead of just and justice in the Remedy is not something I have made up, but is a legitimate translation of the Greek:

- But now God's way of **putting people right** with himself has been revealed. It has nothing to do with law, even though the Law of Moses and the prophets gave their witness to it. God **puts people right** through their **faith** in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who **believe** in Christ, because there is no difference at all: everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence. But by the free gift of God's grace all are **put right** with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free. God offered him, so that by his **blood** 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. (Romans 3:21-25 GNT, emphasis mine).

Do you see how when the translators use righteous and righteousness instead of justice it changes the tenor of the passage and leads our minds to a clearer understanding of reality? The issue in this cosmic war is not about power but about God's trustworthiness, and Satan has accused God of being unjust by not punishing sinners, for that is how Satan works—he uses power over others to coerce and punish, but God uses power to heal and to save.

Jesus died to demonstrate the truth of God's righteousness, God's character, that death does not come out from God as an infliction, it comes from unremedied sin when God stops using power to hold its destructiveness at bay. We see this first in Gethsemane when Jesus fell down dying as the weight of sin was separating Jesus from His Father and an angel had to revive Jesus because more truth was yet to be revealed. And at the Cross, Jesus, the sinless one, demonstrated what happens when God let's go and stops using power—for God did not use any power to harm His Son, but simply let Him God to reap what Jesus freely chose to do. And Jesus chose to become sin for us even though He knew no sin personally. And the rest of the universe saw Satan unmasked as the liar that he is and God vindicated as the righteous holy source of truth, love, liberty and life that He is, when God did not do anything to harm Jesus, yet Jesus died.

But sadly, Satan has succeeded in infecting Christianity with the lie that God's law functions like human law and instead of understanding the truth that God, at infinite cost to Himself, revealed to us, billions continue to believe and teach that God's justice is the infliction of punishment, the justice of imperialism, the justice of the kingdoms of this world, the justice that Satan uses.

We are called at this time in history to reject the imposed law lie and return to worshiping God as Creator and understanding His laws are design laws, and then we understand the incredible truth of who God is in reality, as Jesus revealed Him to be and we are won to love and trust Him and not trust in the mechanics, payments, or interposers between us and God! This is **one** of the reasons Jesus came to die as our substitutionary Savior—to reveal the truth to win us back to trust. So, I rendered this passage in the Remedy as follows:

- But now God has revealed **a healthy state of being**—a character that is right and perfect in every way—that did not come from the written code, but is exactly what the Scriptures and the Ten Commandments were pointing your minds toward. This **perfect state of being** comes from Christ and is created within us by God when we place our **trust** in him. Our **trust** in him is established by the evidence given through Jesus Christ of his supreme trustworthiness. There is no difference among any ethnic groups, for all humanity is infected with the same disease—of distrust, fear and selfishness—and is deformed in character and falls far short of God's glorious ideal for humanity. Yet all who are willing are **healed** freely by God's gracious Remedy which has been provided by Jesus Christ. God presented Jesus as **the way and the means of restoration**. Now, through the **trust** established by the evidence of God's character revealed when Christ died, we may partake of the Remedy procured by

Christ. God did this to **demonstrate that he is right and good**—because in his forbearance he suspended, for a time, the ultimate consequence of us being out of harmony with his design for life—yet he has been falsely accused of being unfair. He did it to **demonstrate** at the present time how **right and good he is**, so that he would also be seen as being **right** when he **heals** those who **trust** in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26 REM, emphasis mine).

Now, let's examine the lesson:

Read first paragraph,

- God has provided salvation as a gift. His Holy Spirit leads us to accept by faith what Christ has so freely provided through His death on Calvary's cross. Jesus, the divine Son of God, offered His perfect life to atone for our sins. (Adult SS Guide 2nd Q 2024, The Great Controversy p. 42).

What does this paragraph mean to you? What is the message you hear?

- What is salvation?
- From what are we being saved?
- What has Christ so freely provided through His death?
- What does it mean He offered His perfect life to atone for our sins?

What is atonement? The original meaning of the word, when used in the 1611 KJV of the Bible, meant to bring to alienated parties back into unity, back to oneness. So, what does it mean Jesus atones for our sins?

Does the law lens, and the level of moral decision-making matter in how we understand atonement?

The first four levels of moral decision-making are all based on imposed rules, fear, and selfishness:

1. Reward and Punishment
2. Market Place Exchange
3. Social Conformity
4. Law and Order

Levels 5-7 are based on design law, other-centered love and how God constructed reality to work:

5. Love for others
6. Principled-based Living
7. Understand friend of God

And the various atonement models correspond to these different levels of development, how people explain things in the way that their minds can comprehend. Like a child explaining why it is right to brush one's teeth because mommy has a rule, whereas the adult explains it through the laws of health. Neither person is being evil, both are doing what they believe is right, both are brushing their

teeth, but the child is immature, and still needs oversight and supervision to do what is right. Likewise, the immature in Christ are described as infants, children, not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. They are not rebellious, they are not disobedient, they are not doing evil—they are simply children and as such are still not trustworthy members of the family. In the same way you wouldn't trust your loving child to decide for themselves their meal plan, what foods to eat—not because your child is evil, but because they are immature and will innocently choose unhealthy things that harm them. So they need ongoing supervision and protection from a loving parent—this is the purpose of the written law.

This demonstrates the problem in much of Christianity, we have a lot of people with good hearts who haven't matured as Paul counsels us to do, who are still teaching things in childlike understanding and thus they are not yet trustworthy friends of God, instead of doing right because it is right, because if they understand and agree, they think it is a matter of law keeping and avoiding legal trouble.

So, let's look at the atonement models through the seven levels.

LEVEL 1: Reward and Punishment

Right and wrong is determined by receiving rewards and avoiding punishment.

- **Satisfaction Theory** of the atonement: God said don't do something, but when Adam and Eve disobeyed their sin dishonored and offended God. Therefore, in his justice, he responds with angry vengeance to execute the disobedient to satisfy his wrath. But Jesus stepped in between God and man to become humanity's substitute. Thus, instead of killing man, God killed his Son in our place and this is how his justice is satisfied.

LEVEL 2: Marketplace Exchange

Right and wrong is determined by an equitable agreement between two parties, also known as quid pro quo – "I'll do something for you if you do something for me."

- **Ransom Theory of the atonement:** Because earth and humanity are now the legal property of Satan and under his control, the devil claimed legal rights to this earth and the lives of the descendants of Adam and Eve. Therefore, God struck a bargain with the devil to exchange the life of Christ for the lives of the rest of humanity.

LEVEL 3: Social Conformity

Right and wrong is determined by community consensus, for example, when a child says, "But everyone else is doing it."

- **Governmental Theory** of the atonement: In order for everyone to be convinced that God is fair and right in dealing with sin and sinners when He inflicts punishment, somebody had to pay the price. That somebody is Jesus, because He's the only one who could pay that price to get mankind off the hook.

LEVEL 4: Law and Order

Right and wrong is determined by a codified system of rules, impartial judges, imposed punishments, and respect for authority.

- **Penal Substitution Theory** of the atonement: Jesus died to pay the legal penalty the law demanded and the heavenly judge imposed. The law must be kept. Man broke the law, thus justice demands and requires the imposition of the proper punishment. Someone had to be executed to pay the legal penalty. Jesus became our substitute and was executed in our place by God the Father (as the righteous judge) to pay that penalty. In doing so, the integrity of the law is maintained and sinners can be pardoned, but only if they claim the legal payment made by Jesus

LEVEL 5: Love for Others

Right is determined by doing what is in the best interest of others. Wrong is determined, not by a checklist of rules, but by not doing what is actually helpful and beneficial for another.

- **Moral Influence Theory** of the atonement: Sin separated us from God and corrupted our hearts, so that we no longer trusted God, but God loved us too much to let us go, so Christ's death was the means to reach us with his love and restore us to trust in him.

LEVEL 6: Principle-Based Living

Right is understanding the design protocols and principles upon which life is constructed to operate and intelligently choosing to live in harmony with them. Right is not doing something because a rule says to do so, but because it actually work this way.

- **Recapitulation and Christus Victor Theories** of the atonement: Christ's life, death, and resurrection is understood to be the only means to fix what sin had done to God's creation. When mankind sinned, the condition of humankind was changed, placing us out of harmony with God and his design for life. Humankind was now held in bondage by their own condition of sinfulness (carnal nature), their terminal state (death), and the lies about God told by Satan. Christ came to break these powers and fix what sin has done to this creation. Thus "he who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God." 2Cor 5:21.

LEVEL 7: Understanding Friend of God

Those at this level not only have love for God and others (Level 5), not only understand God's design protocols for life (Level 6), but also understand God's purposes and intelligently choose to cooperate in fulfilling their role in His purposes.

Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:15, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

- **Healing Substitution Reality:** The plan of salvation is understood to have a deeper and broader intent than just the redemption of the human species. Both level five and six are true: God’s character of love has been misrepresented, His methods of truth, love, and freedom have not been fully understood, so God had a larger purpose than just the salvation of humankind; He was also solidifying the unfallen beings in loyalty to His design methods and character of love.

The Bible uses the language of satisfaction, ransom, and government and thus there is a level seven understanding of these ideas on atonement.

Level 7 Understanding of Satisfaction Theory

- Creation is out of harmony with God and in a terminal condition.
- God is like a parent whose child is dying of leukemia—what is the only thing that will satisfy?
- A remedy that heals and saves!
- “He will see the **result** of the suffering of his soul and be satisfied.” (Isaiah 53:11, emphasis mine).

Level 7 Understanding of Ransom Theory

- A ransom is the price required to free someone from bondage.
- What holds us in bondage?
- Lies about God and our carnal natures.
- What is the price to set us free?
- Truth and a new nature (bread and wine).

Level 7 Understanding of Governmental Theory

- God rules on design law—love, truth, and liberty.
- God can heal minds—i.e., win to love and trust—only in harmony with His methods: “God’s kindness leads you toward repentance.” Romans 2:4
- Thus, God’s government and design laws are sustained as the only method upon which life, health, and peace operate.

Penal Substitution?

- This language is not in Scripture—it is made up. It was invented by Martin Luther to undermine the teaching on Purgatory as he taught all sins of all people for all time were placed on Jesus and punished in Jesus and thus there remains no sins for the saved to be purged in purgatory.

When we trust Jesus, we open the heart and receive the indwelling Holy Spirit who takes the victory of Christ and reproduces it in us; we get new desires, motives, attitudes, and are reborn with a new heart and right spirit; we become partakers of the divine nature; it is no longer our sinful selves living, but Christ living within us. And this is our reality when we trust or have faith in Jesus!

What do you understand Jesus' death accomplishes that provides salvation for human beings?

What is the cause of death? Is it from sin, the sinfulness in us separating us from God or is death inflicted by God as punishment for sin?

Jesus came to reveal the truth to destroy the lies and to restore the perfect pure righteous spirit of love and eradicate the contamination of fear, selfishness, guilt and shame from humanity.

Thus Jesus partook of the life given to Adam, contaminated and infected by Adam, and Jesus purged the infection and restored sinless righteousness into humanity and became the new head of humanity, the second Adam, the vine of life that we must be grafted into through faith in order to receive the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Holy Life of God that brings renewal, refreshing, cleansing, new motives, new desires, so that it is no longer our old fear-ridden, selfish, sinful selves living but Christ lives in us. We become partakers of the divine nature. And thus we are literally restored to at-one-ment with God through the victorious life of Jesus Christ.

Read second paragraph,

- Divine justice demands perfect obedience. Christ's perfect life stands in place of our imperfect lives. The divine law we have broken condemns us to eternal death. The Bible is clear. Through our sinful choices, we have "fallen short" of God's ideal for our lives. We have sinned. Left to ourselves, we cannot meet the just, righteous demands of a holy God. As a result, we deserve eternal death. But there is good news. The apostle Paul assures us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23, NKJV). It is a gift, undeserved; if it were by works, we would earn it, and if there is any one truth that shines out of the gospel, it is that we cannot earn salvation. (Adult SS Guide 2nd Q 2024, The Great Controversy p. 42).

What do you hear in this paragraph? What is the message?

What is divine justice? What law lens are you understanding it through? Justice is doing what is right or just and that is always defined or determined by the law. For instance, it is just or right to punch someone in the face in boxing, it is unjust to do so in soccer. It is just to drive 160 mph on the autobahn in Germany it is unjust to do so on the interstate in Tennessee. The law determines what is right or just.

So, how we understand God's justice is directly determined by how we understand God's law. The justice of creatures is the justice of imposed law, which is always the infliction of what is deemed to be just punishments. But the justice of the Creator is to eliminate all defects, all disease, all injury, all harm, all pain, all suffering, to eliminate death and to restore all things to perfection. God's justice is healing the oppressed, not punishing the oppressor—why? Because breaking design law always injures the one who breaks it and results in its own punishment unless the person is healed by the Creator.

The lie of Satan is that God's law functions like human law and therefore God is required by law to use power to inflict punishment and if He doesn't do it, then He is not just.

Why does God's justice demand perfect obedience to the law? Justice is doing what is right, so we could say God's right way of doing things demands perfect harmony with the laws of reality, or that God demands that those who want to live must breathe. Why? Because that is how life is constructed to operate. So, God's right way is the way of life which is perfect harmony with how He built it to operate—and the plan of salvation is healing and restoring all who trust Him into harmony with His design law. Thus the new covenant is writing His laws on our hearts and minds.

What does it mean that Christ's perfect life stands in place of our lives?

In reality, according to Scripture, how many "breaths of life" did God breathe into human beings? One! God formed Adam out of the dirt of the Earth and breathed into him the breath of life. Every other human being throughout history is an extension of that same breath of life. Eve was created from living tissue taken from Adam, from that same breath of life. And God gave Adam and Eve the ability to procreate and after they sinned, they contaminated that breath of life, that animating energy, that spirit with fear and selfishness and thus through Adam we are born with a spirit of fear. But God, through Jesus gives us a spirit of power and love and sound mind.

Understand reality, after Adam sinned, God still had the ability to form a new body out of dirt and breathe another breath of life into another body and create another human—but that person would not be part of Adam. That person would be a similar yet distinct creation not of this creation. In order to save the humanity that God created in Eden, Jesus had to partake of that very breath of life, that animating spirit that Adam contaminated and purify it, purge the infection of fear and selfishness. And He did that. Jesus' humanity was descended through David as Paul tells us in Romans, and he was born of a sinful woman as Paul writes in Galatians, a woman born under law, the law of sin and death. And through Mary Jesus partook of the very life given to Adam and contaminated by Him. But Jesus' Father was the Holy Spirit and in Jesus He had the Spirit of love and trust and was able to choose only to live out the life of righteousness, love, and trust, despite being tempted in every way just like us through the spirit of fear that came down from Adam through Mary. We see this in Gethsemane when His humanity tempted Him with fear, with anguish, with the selfish temptation to not go through the Cross. But with every temptation Jesus rejected the temptation of fear and selfishness and chose to love perfectly, living out the spirit of righteousness and thereby developed and solidified a perfect mature human character and at the cross He destroyed the infection of fear and selfishness He inherited through Mary. He rose in a purified humanity with only the spirit of love animating Him and became the second Adam, the new head of humanity and thus stands in the place where Adam was created to stand in the heavenly counsel. His human life stands for all humanity for He is a real human who picked up humanity broken and damaged by Adam and perfected it.

What do you think of the following:

- The divine law we have broken condemns us to eternal death. The Bible is clear. Through our sinful choices, we have “fallen short” of God’s ideal for our lives. We have sinned. (Adult SS Guide 2nd Q 2024, The Great Controversy p. 42).

When did you or I or anyone other than Adam, Eve, and Jesus, ever have a choice not to be a sinner? Are we sinners because we have chosen to sin, or do we sin because we were born sinners?

This presentation in the lesson is a **classic and fundamental lie** that stems from the belief that God’s law is like human law and that the acts of sin are the problem, rather than the truth that Adam chose to sin and we are all born in sin conceived in iniquity (Psalm 51:5), that we didn’t have a choice to be anything other than sinners. So, it is a lie that we are in this situation by our choice. We are in this situation by Adam’s choice and by our birth.

But God’s grace sent Jesus to give us a real choice, and the choice we have through Jesus is not to avoid being a sinner, but despite being born a sinner, we, through Jesus, can choose to be reborn righteous, to receive a new heart and right spirit, to leave the sinful life we inherited from Adam behind and live a righteous life through faith in Jesus.

So, we are not responsible for being born a sinner. We are not held accountable for that situation, nor will we be held accountable for the fact we have committed sins—what we are held accountable for is rejecting Jesus, refusing to be reborn in heart and mind, and preferring sin and sinful living to righteousness, truth, and love.

Notice what Jesus said,

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [God didn’t loan Jesus to us. He gave Him. Jesus became a real human being because God loved us. God doesn’t need Jesus to do something to God for God to love us. But God was in the Son reconciling the world to Himself. God as Creator understood that sin severs the connection to Him and life and will result in death unless He, the Creator, fixes the problem. And because God is love He sent His Son to fix the problem, to do for us that which we could not do for ourselves.] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [God is not in the condemning business, but the saving business. And Jesus came to save by positively removing the cause of death from humanity.] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. [From where does condemnation come? Those who hold to the human law view teach condemnation comes from the heavenly magistrate, from the heavenly courts upon those who haven’t accepted the legal payment of Jesus’ blood to pay for their sin crimes. But this is all false. Think laws of health, condemnation comes from the sin condition itself. Those who don’t believe or trust Jesus don’t open the heart to accept His healing presence, they don’t receive the rebirth experience, they don’t experience a new heart and right/righteous, spirit/life. Thus, they remain condemned, or terminal, because the condition we all inherited from Adam is that of sin and death, we are born dead in trespass and sin. We

are not born guilty, we are born terminal.] This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” (John 3:16-21 NIV84). [We are not held accountable for the condition with which we are born, we are held accountable for rejecting the free remedy of Jesus Christ—the light that has come into the world. Consider and HIV infected man and woman have an HIV infected baby. What did the baby do wrong? Nothing! The baby is not guilty, but it has a condition it did not choose, but without remedy will result in symptoms and death. If a free remedy is offered and the child at the age of comprehension persistently refuses the remedy—are they accountable for that? And what causes their condemnation the symptoms they have, or the condition which causes the symptoms because they refuse the remedy?]

What do you think of the idea that we deserve eternal death? Why? Does the law lens make a difference? Would you say to parents who had a child born with a terminal illness “Your child deserves death”? Why or why not? Why do Christians teach that we deserve death? Was it our fault we were born with this sin condition? It would be better to say—those who refuse life, refuse healing, refuse restoration deserve to reap what they have chosen which is death. But that is different than saying we deserve death because of our own sinfulness or sins.

SUNDAY

The lesson title is God’s Word Alone, and focuses on the importance that Scripture had to the Reformers.

Have you ever heard the Latin, *sola scriptura*? Which means Scripture alone for our doctrines and teachings?

Is it actually biblical to teach *sola scriptura* or in teaching only the Bible do we actually deny the Bible?

Does the Bible teach that God communicates to us only in Scripture, or that God communicates to us in a variety of ways, all of which rightly understood always harmonize, so that Scripture can be used as one of our sources of truth—but not the only source of truth?

Let’s use the Scripture to examine this question of whether the Bible teaches only Scripture, or does it teach using Scripture along with other threads of evidence that are to be harmonized?

- Who wrote the very first books of the Bible? Moses—who lived somewhere around 1200-1300 BC. Did Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and others have the Bible to read? Did God communicate with these people in some way? Was it through Scripture?

- After Moses, and later the prophets, wrote the Scriptures, how many copies were available? Did God restrict His saving work to only humans who could access the Scriptures? How much of the Scriptures do we think Naaman studied? Do we have indications He became a worshiper of the true God?
- And throughout human history, even since the Reformation and printing presses, have there been people who have never had a Bible to read? Are they lost without any hope or does the Holy Spirit still strive with them to bring them to salvation and communicate through other avenues? What other avenues?
- How did God reach Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Enoch, Melchizedek and others? Through direct conversation, dreams, visions, nature, impressions of the Holy Spirit?
- What was the avenue God used to reach Naaman, Nebuchadnezzar, and Darius? The direct witness of other people who themselves knew and trusted in God. Does God work to reach people through the testimony of His friends?
- Paul wrote, in Romans 1:20
 - For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:20 NIV84).

What do we learn about God from nature? What kinds of laws does nature operate upon? And shortly after writing that God reveals Himself in nature so that men are without excuse Paul writes in 2:12-15:

- For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

What is the new covenant? Having the law written upon the heart and mind. Paul is saying that these people who have never had the Bible brought to them, but who have responded to influence of the Holy Spirit enlighten their minds to the truth about God revealed in nature that they are reborn to be children of God.

In the book the *Desire of Ages* we read the following, in perfect harmony with what Paul wrote in Romans:

- Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the **heathen** are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the **heathen** are those **who worship God ignorantly**, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, **yet they will not perish**. Though ignorant of the written law of God, **they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature**, and have done the **things that the law required**. Their

works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God. (Desire of Ages 638).

- And the Bible teaches God speaks to us through reality, through life experiences. It tells us to
 - Taste and see that the LORD is good (Psalm 34:8 NIV84).
 - Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” (John 20:28 NIV84).

So, what role does Scripture play in our relationship with God and finding truth?

Is there a danger in using any of these threads of truth alone?

What is the danger?

- Science alone leads to godlessness
- Experience alone leads to mysticism or nihilism
- Scripture alone leads to confusion, 41,000 different Christian groups arguing that the Bible supports their view

When we return to design law, we harmonize all three threads and find reality, the truths that reality itself is built to operate upon.

And this results in our ability to read the Bible and be blessed by it. But sadly, there are many in the “Bible only” camp who are like those that Jesus said these words to:

- You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39-40 NIV84).

How sad, these faithful Bible students ended up rejecting and crucifying Jesus—all the while thinking they were worshiping God. Could Christians experience the same problem? How? By separating the threads and reading the Bible through human imposed law systems, which teaches a false god who is the source of pain, suffering, and death as so called just punishment.

MONDAY

The lesson points our attention to the Reformers translating the Bible into the language of the people.

What do you understand about inspiration and the legitimacy of translations?

Are the words of the Bible inspired? No—the people who wrote the Bible were inspired by God with truths but those prophetic penmen chose the words familiar to them, from their experiences and

knowledge base, to express those truths. Thus, the words are not inspired, the men were, and the inspired truths are in ideas or meaning being communicated by the words.

Thus, it is legitimate to replace Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words with new language words as long as the original ideas, meaning, and truths are brought through.

Here is a historical view of how inspiration works, do you agree?

- The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all “given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language. (Great Controversy v.3)

What about translations—what makes a translation legitimate? Is it that the translators have a theological degree? Is a translation done by committee better than one done by an individual? What if one knowingly paraphrases? What about the KJV, is it literal or a paraphrase? KJV paraphrases 60% of the time and adds many words not in the original. Why? Because it is necessary to bring over the meaning in the most accurate way.

The purpose of Scripture is to reveal truth—to the degree it is written in a format or style that prevents the truth from being understood it serves no divine purpose. For instance, a Bible written in Korean would serve no purpose for me, for I cannot read one word of Korean and could not benefit in any way as no truth could be communicated to me from that language as long as I cannot read it.

So, to the degree a Bible translation or paraphrase makes the true meaning more clear to the reader the more effective it is in God’s cause. To the degree the translation obscures the true meaning the less effective it is in serving God’s purpose.

This of course in no way suggests the very best Bible translation ever done, with the most accurate language possible, could be rightly understood without the enlightening presence of the Holy Spirit. We always need the Holy Spirit to rightly understand Scripture, regardless of the version we are using.

What versions have you found to be most helpful? Have you found it beneficial to read in more than one version to get a better sense of the underlying meaning?

TUESDAY

Read first paragraph,

- One day while studying in the university library, Martin Luther came to a turning point in his own life. He discovered a Latin copy of the Bible. He never knew before that a book like this even existed. With sheer delight, he read chapter after chapter, verse after verse. He was amazed at the clarity and power of God's Word. As he pored over its pages, the Holy Spirit illuminated His mind. He sensed the guidance of the Holy Spirit as truths obscured by tradition seemed to leap off the pages of Holy Writ. Describing his first experience with the Bible, he wrote, "O that God would give me such a book for myself!" (Adult SS Guide 2nd Q 2024, The Great Controversy p. 41).

Aren't we all thankful and appreciative of Martin Luther? What an incredible witness. I can't imagine the struggles, difficulties, problems he had to deal with. His ability to recognize truths and challenge falsehood and ultimately translate the Bible into German for the people was a turning point in the Reformation.

Yet, as much as we admire Luther, we must remember Luther did not know all truth, and in fact, Luther had serious limitations in his understanding.

Luther's famous position of *sola scriptura* isn't the same as yours and mine, why? When Luther said it, he only meant 62 books of the Bible, while we mean 66. Luther did not accept as inspired Jude, James, Hebrews, and Revelation.

Think that through. If you don't accept those four books as inspired, will certain truths not be included in your understanding as you put the pieces together?

Consider having a jigsaw puzzle and trying to put the pieces together to see the picture, but a number of pieces are not included, would that alter the conclusion?

Luther never had a Great Controversy in heaven over God's character and trustworthiness, because he rejected Hebrews and Revelation. Thus, for Luther, the sin problem is all about us. Luther never realized God's law is design law, but continued to see things through imposed Roman law and thus Luther invented penal substitution theology. He did this because he wanted to undermine the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, which taught certain sins not having been purged during this life needed to be purged after death before the soul could enter heaven. Luther defeated that teaching with penal substitution theology which taught that all sins of all people from all time, past, present, and future were placed on Jesus our righteous substitute and punished in Him at the cross so that no sins are left unpunished for those who accept by faith His substitutionary sacrificial payment to be purged in purgatory.

Yet, as much as this was beneficial to remove the fear and manipulative control of purgatory it kept the veil of imposed laws lies obstructing the truth of God's character and government. And thus the Reformation continued on after Luther as other Reformers came along and discovered more truths not advocated by Luther.

THURSDAY

The title is Obedience: The Fruit of Faith

What does this mean to you?

What types of obedience are there? Paul deals with this in Romans, there are two types of law—imposed law and design law. The imposed law view leads to the old covenant, which is the obedience that springs from law, from rules, from threats, from punishments and/or rewards. And that obedience is always false, for it springs from selfishness and fear.

Paul contrast the obedience of law with the obedience of faith, or love and trust, from a heart that loves God, loves others, and loves truth, loves reality, a heart that wants to live healthy, wants to be in harmony with what is right—because it is right, because life actually works best that way. This is the obedience of an understanding friend of God, not the obedience of a servant.

The imposed law view, with its legal requirements, results in the obedience of servants, do it because the master said it. But what God wants is our understanding friendships, our agreement, that we do what we do because it is in our heart to do it because we have been fully persuaded in our own mind that it is best.

Now, being fully persuaded in our own mind, having our hearts converted so that we truly want the ways of God, does not mean we in our own strength live the godly life—no, we make the choice, but God provides the power.

The victorious life is a life of daily cooperation with God where we are in living engagement with God through His Holy Spirit. The Spirit enlightens, woos, convicts, instructs, leads, and brings us to decision points, and we are left completely free to say yes or no, and when we say yes to the truth, then we receive divine power to succeed. But we don't get the power until we say yes.

One of the founders of the SDA church described it this way, and notice that this is actual, it is real, it is something happening within the believer. It is not declarative, it is not fantasy, it is not legal.

- We are laborers together with God. This is the Lord's own wise arrangement. **The cooperation of the human will and endeavor with divine energy is the link that binds men up with one another and with God.** The apostle says, "We are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). **Man is to work with the facilities God has given him.** "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," He says. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12, 13).—(2 Mind Character Personality p.694)
- **There are two grand forces at work in the salvation of the human soul. It requires the cooperation of man with the divine agencies--** divine influences, and a strong, living, working faith. **It is in this way only** that the human agent can become a laborer together with

God. **The Lord does not sanction in any one of us a blind, stupid credulity. He does not dishonor the human understanding**, but, far from this, He calls for the human will to be brought into connection with the divine will. **He calls for the ingenuity of the human mind, the tact, the skill, to be strenuously exercised in searching out the truth as it is in Jesus. . .**
. Ye are labourers together with God. (Our High Calling 310).

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

NEW IN SOUTH AFRICA: The Job Pamphlet is now available in Afrikaans available on the Come and Reason website under the languages tab. Should anybody in South Africa want to order a physical copy they can contact Jacques van den Heever at southafrica@comeandreason.com

Come And Reason South Africa ONLY: Telegram support/discussion/prayer group and should anybody would like to join they are welcome. <https://t.me/+dwEVCIVrXoM1MDc0>



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