

CONFIDENCE BUILDING SERMONS

WITHOUT A DOUBT (Can I Know That I Am Saved?)

The messages which I will be bringing you this week, the Security of Salvation, stem from personal religious problems that I have had to wrestle with over the years. But this is not the justification for these messages, for I have talked with hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists who have shared similar problems. On a number of occasions I have asked Seventh-day Adventist groups whether they were sure of their salvation. When I have asked for a show of hands, on no occasion were more than few raised. I have been told by those in our own persuasion and by those of other persuasions that Seventh-day Adventists are a very insecure people. Why? Why can't we claim to be saved? The answer usually given is that we have been warned not to do this. We base this warning on Christ's Object Lessons, page 155: "Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading. Everyone should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, we are not beyond the reach of temptation." And so we feel that there is some virtue in being insecure, as if claiming to be saved, accepted by Jesus Christ, would be presumptuous.

A missionary, driving down a road in a truck, came across a group of natives who were carrying heavy baskets of wares on their heads. He stopped to pick them up. After several miles he looked back on them to see how they were doing and he was surprised to find that they were still carrying their baskets on their heads. He stopped the truck and turned and asked them, *Why* don't you put those heavy baskets down and rest while you are riding?" "Oh, no!" they replied, "You've done enough; the least we can do is to carry our own burdens." This is what Seventh-day Adventists have done through the years. We have carried our own burdens as if salvation were dependent upon our activity. We have been reluctant to state with conviction that we are saved.

It should be noted that at the time this was written, Ellen White was not referring to any virtue in insecurity. She was speaking to individuals who believed that once they were saved they were always saved, and that nothing could change this. It was a false security to which she was referring. Thus she says, "When we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, we are not beyond the reach of temptation." It is when one says "I am saved/" with that frame of reference, that it is wrong.

There is a sense in which we can say that we are saved. It is evident that Ellen White never intended to obviate this security. She states, "*We* should not make self the center, and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved" (SC 72). "It is not the will of our heavenly Father that we should ever be under condemnation and darkness" (GC 477). "Even his physical health improves by the realization of his security in Christ" (CH 28). In line with this counsel, she herself claimed this security: "I have no assurance that my life will last long, but I feel that I am accepted of the Lord" (FE 548). The apostle Paul manifests the same assurance in II Timothy 4:6-8, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." We too should know that we are saved. We are told in I John 5: 13, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." This same view is given in the following counsel: "*We* should know that we are enjoying the favor of God, that He smiles upon us, and that we are His children indeed, and in a position where He can commune with us, and we with Him." (RH March 29, 1870). To Seventh-day Adventists this may sound like strange doctrine - highly dangerous to some, a welcome relief to others. But can we find a basis for this conviction in God's revelation? Can we know that we are saved? Where shall we start our investigation this week? If we want to find out what salvation is all about, the logical place to begin is at the cross. For it is here that salvation is centered, and if we are to find security in salvation it must come through the cross.

As we reflect tonight on the significance of the cross for our salvation and security, we might begin with a question, Why did God have to go to such lengths to save man? Couldn't it have been simpler? Someone has said that God has moved heaven and earth to save us. What does this mean? Why did God have to go to such lengths to save us? Let me suggest two reasons.

First of all, God was morally responsible for man. You will recall that sin began in heaven when God was misunderstood. God's purpose in creation was called into question, and one being stood before the heavenly intelligences and claimed that God's motives were not pure. It was asserted that God's desire to secure their allegiance through love was all a front; that no one could serve God for His character. Satan claimed that God must use

extrinsic means, He must bribe, He must threaten; he claimed that there was nothing native to the character of God that could establish world government. Could God be served just because He was God of love? The universe was in doubt, because Satan made the challenge, "Everyone would turn against You if they weren't afraid of YOU."

It was at this time that our earth was created. Man was brought onto the stage of action not having witnessed what had gone on in the heavenly universe. He was not biased. He was made in such a way that the choices he made would, through biological reproduction, be exposed to the universe looking on. Both God and Satan would woo him.

Ellen White tells us that "we were brought into existence because we were needed" (ST April 22, 1903). The universe studied the situation: could God secure their allegiance? How would Satan react? Who was right? What really were the basic principles of government by which the universe was to be established? And so, in the sense that God needed a vehicle for the revelation of His love, man finds his significance. But we find that man, instead of becoming a part of the answer to God's problems, soon became a part of the problem. Now what is God going to do? Not only does He have a rebellious heavenly universe to contend with, but now He has a rebellious earth to contend with. But man had not sinned in the full light of the revelation of God's love as had Lucifer (DA 761-762). There was still a chance for man. There was still hope that by seeing a fuller revelation of God's love he could be helped.

Now, that being the case, and considering the fact that God had asked man to help solve His problem, how would it look if God were not willing to help man with his problem? And so to the question, Why did God go to such lengths to save man? The first answer we must give is that God must exercise mercy. His character is at stake. What He does with the creature He brought into existence to be a revelation of His love, and who now turns against Him, will ultimately reflect the nature of His character.

Not only was God morally responsible for man; He was morally responsible for government. God can't excuse man; He can't hide His face from sin. Sin contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction, and it is not just something that we do, it is something that we are. It is rebellion against God, it is a selfishness, and for God to blink at it would be to deny reality, to tell a lie. It would be like saying, "You can sin and live happily ever after." Since God cannot excuse sin, the sinner responsible for its execution must bear the consequences of his choice. At the same time, God cannot change His law because that law is a reflection of His character. It runs throughout the fabric of the universe; it represents a restatement of reality. This is not arbitrary on God's part. There is no other way as long as God is God and the universe is of the order He created.

Therefore, while God must exercise mercy, He must also maintain justice,

for ". . . justice and mercy are the foundation of the law and government of God" GC 503),

How is God going to reconcile this problem? This becomes significant when we realize that "the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe" (PP 68). Thus, God must "declare His righteousness, that He might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26), God's character is staked on the reconciliation of Justice and mercy. How can God do this? How can God maintain government and yet exercise mercy?

In order to maintain justice, Christ must die as a sinner. Why must this be? If law and sin are to be seen for what they are, the sinner must reap the consequences of his actions. This is the only way sin will be seen for what it is. Whoever is responsible for its execution must be responsible for demonstrating its consequences, so the sinner must stand before the universe and reveal the consequences of his choice.

But man cannot be expected to reveal the tragic consequences of his sin, for in the process he would be destroyed, and we've just seen that God cannot allow this. He must exercise mercy for man. Man must not exhibit the full consequences of his own rebellion. What is God going to do?

What if it could be shown that man was not responsible for what he did? Oh, but you say, this is dangerous. Isn't man free? Didn't man make the choice? Let us say that a five-year-old boy picks up a rock and huris it through a large window of the next door neighbor. Now, if anyone is going to be taken to court, who will it be? It will be the parent. Why? The parent didn't throw the rock, nor did the parent make the child throw the rock; but the parent brought the child into existence and to a certain degree the parent is responsible for the activity of the child. Thus, there is only one Being in all the universe who can assume responsibility for man. This is not play acting: this is real responsibility, and it falls on whomever is responsible for man's existence. This is not to say that God is responsible for the execution of man's sin, but He is responsible in that He made man with this capacity. And so you will recall that as Adam blamed Eve, "the woman that thou gavest me," and she blamed the Creator, "Weil, you made the serpent," that ultimately it reflected back on God. And what did God do? Did He say, "No, it is not my responsibility?" He said, "Yes, it is my responsibility. I brought you into being." And so we find that the Creator does assume the responsibility for man's sin, and He can do so legitimately because He is Creator. Now we can understand why He must partake of humanity; He must pay the consequences. He is responsible; He is now the sinner.

Consider our Lord as man's substitute. Let us move quickly in our thinking to the closing days of His life on earth and behold Him on the last Thurs-

day evening as He suffers in a way that no man has ever suffered. We see Him becoming separated from the Father because He feels so guilty for the load He is bearing, and we don't know who suffers most—the Father, the Son or the Spirit: They are all there, and the Father and the Spirit must not step in to stop the suffering. This increases Their own anguish. Watch this separation. The responsibility He is bearing becomes so great that the body weakens and exudes large drops of blood. We see Him reaching the point where He should have died, and then an angel comes to strengthen Him so that He may live on. Others get to the point of death and die, thus relieving them of further suffering. But to really taste the consequences of sin one must experience separation from God. This is the second death. We see Christ strengthened after He should have died from the load of this awful responsibility. We hear His crying, "If it be possible, take this cup from me, but not my will but thine." We hear Him repeat that prayer, and we see Him groan and suffer and become separated from the Father. Then we see Him on the cross, and the separation becomes so great that we hear His cry out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" We are told that He could not see through the portals of the tomb. Even though He died a victor, He died, as far as He was concerned, with a sense of eternal separation. That was "curtains" for Him.

Now I don't know how much any of you have felt the awful guilt of doing something wrong. I remember when I was eleven years old I was visiting my cousin on the farm. While I was there the family dog had a litter of pups. As the pups got old enough to walk around, they would get lost and we would go out to find them and play with them. I remember one evening as I was looking for the pups through some tall weeds, I wasn't careful where I was walking and I accidentally stepped across the stomach of one of them. It let out the most awful shriek I have ever heard. I reached down and picked it up, but the pup was dead. I felt terrible. For days I accused myself of negligence, of carelessness. I made myself sick over it. Yet, this is not the worst thing a person can do. Maybe it is a little thing compared to some of the serious things that we can do that are wrong, that make others suffer. But when you realize your fault, you feel an awful responsibility, you feel an awful guilt that weighs you down. Furthermore, if I had had a more sensitive nature, I would have felt it even more. And what if it had been more serious? Now look at Christ who is as sensitive as anyone can be, who bore the sense of responsibility and guilt, not just of having stepped on a puppy, but for all of the immorality of the human race. He didn't cause this, but He was bearing the responsibility. The universe was looking on aghast and they saw the separation taking place, and they saw our Master die.

Now let me say very reverently, if our Lord had been sitting in an overstuffed easy chair He would have died. The cross didn't kill Him. Man didn't kill Him. It was this sense of separation that twisted His heart—this is what killed Him. There is the responsibility that He took. This is the responsibility that He bore. The universe was looking on and getting a

picture of that separation--of the sense of that guilt. Thus, no one will ever say that God excuses sin.

Now note this: no one else who has ever lived or ever will live (and this includes Satan himself) will ever exhaust the fullness of sin's consequences. Those who are lost will live up to the point of their moment of truth to see what they have done. When they reach that point, God in mercy will cut it short in righteousness-but not so with Christ. The Father never stepped in to cut it short in righteousness; sin had its full work with our Master.

What was the result of this? Sin was fully exposed. No one will ever say that man got away with anything. Whatever God does from here on, no one will ever say that God could have changed His law, because we see that sin brought separation to the very heart of God. By dying as sinner, God established justice.

But this is not enough. In order to exercise mercy, Christ must die sinless. Why? Notice the claims which Satan has made: "When Satan was thrust out of heaven, he determined to make the earth his kingdom. When he tempted and overcame Adam and Eve, he thought that he had gained possession of this world; 'because,' he said, 'they have chosen me as their ruler.' He claimed that it was impossible that forgiveness should be granted to the sinner, and therefore the fallen race were his rightful subjects, and the world was his" (PP 69). Note Satan's argument to God: "You made Adam a testing ground. He is the head of this new race. As long as he serves You he is Your property, he is Your subject, You can do with him as You want. But now that he has chosen me he has sold out, he does not belong to You anymore. You've made your point about justice, but You can't apply it to man. He is not Yours."

Consider Satan's motives: "If you destroy me, you've got to destroy man. We are both sinners." But God can't do that. "All right, if you take man, if you save man, you've got to take me too. We're all in the same boat, we're all part of the same kingdom. To be human is to be a sinner and every man has testified to that." Now note: these claims were false to their very core, but it did not appear that way and God must answer things, not just as they are, but as they appear to be. Even though Satan has no right to make such claims, Christ must establish His right to 'repossess the human race-to show that to be human is not to be a sinner, to show that the human race has not completely abdicated to Satan, to show that God can be served by love, even by humans.

Thus we find Christ taking the role as representative of the human race. The Creator of Adam, the only One who could assume responsibility, now steps in in his behalf. We see the exhibition of a perfect life. "He was a representative of the human race before heaven and earth. He was to stand as man's substitute and surety. He was to live the life of humanity in such a way as to contradict the assertion that Satan has made, that

humanity was his everlasting possession, and God Himself could not take man out of his adversary's hands" (ST July 30, 1896), "Christ had come to disprove Satan's claim. As the Son of man, Christ would stand loyal to God. Thus it would be shown that Satan had not gained complete control of the human race, and that his claim to the world was false. All who desired deliverance from his power would be set free. The dominion that Adam had lost through sin would be recovered" (DA 115).

So we see Christ dying, not only as sinner but Himself sinless. Through this sacrifice we find the destruction of Satan's claim. We find that "the death of Christ was an argument in man's behalf that could not be overthrown" (GC 502). We find God's claims being vindicated. "The world does not acknowledge that, at infinite cost, Christ has purchased the human race. They do not acknowledge that by creation and by redemption He holds a just claim to every human being. But as the Redeemer of the fallen race, He has been given the deed of possession, which entitles Him to claim them as His property" (Letter 136, 1902). "Jesus paid an infinite price to redeem the world, and the race was given into His hands; they became His property (3T 372),

By dying as sinner Christ established justice; by dying sinless He secured the right to exercise mercy. "The death of Christ was expedient in order that mercy might reach us with its full pardoning power, and at the same time that justice might be satisfied in the righteous substitute" (ST May 30, 1895). "Justice and Mercy stood apart, in opposition to each other, separated by a wide gulf. The Lord our Redeemer clothed His divinity with humanity, and wrought out in behalf of man a character that was without spot or blemish. He planted His cross midway between heaven and earth, and made it the object of attraction which reached both ways, drawing both Justice and Mercy across the gulf. Justice moved from its exalted throne, and with all the armies of heaven approached the cross. There it saw One equal with God bearing the penalty for all injustice and sin. With perfect satisfaction Justice bowed in reverence at the cross, saying, 'It is enough'" (General Conference Bulletin, 4th quarter, 1899, vol. 3, p. 102). Thus we read in the words of the Psalmist, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalms 85: 10). We see in all this the revelation of the character of God. We see God vindicated in the reconciliation of Justice and Mercy, because at the base of this whole controversy is the problem, "What is the universe going to think of God?" Life will never be secure until God is fully revealed. Oh, but you say, how does this relate to our security. Certainly this is a beautiful picture of the love of God, but what about our security. Here is the point: salvation was an issue with God and was secured by God for God's sake before we ever came on the scene of action. It was secured not just for us, it is much deeper than that; it was part of God's self-revelation and vindication before the universe. This is something that stands independent of anything we do in response to it. This is established in the nature of God. But you insist, "What is so significant about that?" Namely this: our deeds

-good deeds, misdeeds- are not **directly** related to salvation. Let me say it more strongly: **we are not given salvation because of our good deeds, nor are we deprived of it because of our misdeeds.** This is the root of the problem of security. Oh, you will all agree that we do not gain salvation by our good deeds, but very few Adventists will affirm that we are not deprived of it by our misdeeds. But one is just as true as the other. Because this is so important I am going to give special attention to it tomorrow night.

Let me illustrate. Several years ago a very interesting article appeared in one of our Southern California newspapers. I would like to read it just as it was written.

"A young man who lived in the western states had never done anything very wrong. But one day while playing a game of cards he lost his temper. Picking up a revolver, he shot and killed his opponent. He was arrested and tried and sentenced to hang.

II Because of the wonderful life he had previously lived, his relatives and friends got up a petition for him. It seemed as though everyone wanted to sign it. Before long other towns and villages had heard about it, and people all over the state eagerly signed.

"At last it was taken to the governor, who happened to be a Christian, and tears came to his eyes as he looked at the large baskets filled with petitions. He decided to pardon the young man; so, writing out a pardon, he put it in his pocket, then, dressed in the garb of a clergyman, he made his way to the prison.

"As the governor approached the death cell the young man sprang to the bars: 'Get out of here,' he cried, 'I don't want to see you. I have had enough religion at home. Seven of your kind have visited me already.'

II 'But,' interrupted the governor, 'Wait a moment, young man; I have something for you. Let me talk to you.'

II 'Listen,' exclaimed the young man in anger, 'If you don't get out of here at once I'll call the guard and have you put out.'

II 'But young man,' continued the governor, 'I have news for you-the very best. Won't you let me tell you about it?'

II 'You heard what I said,' replied the young man, 'and if you don't leave immediately I'll call the warden.'

II 'Very well,' replied the governor, and with a sad heart he turned and left. *III* In a few moments the warden approached. 'Well, young man,' he said, 'I see you had a visit from the governor.'

II 'What!' cried the young man. 'Was that man dressed in the garb of a clergyman the governor?'

II 'He was,' replied the warden, 'and he had a pardon in his pocket for you, but you would not listen to him.'

" 'Get me pen, ink, and paper/ cried the young man. And sitting down, he wrote, Dear Governor: I owe you an apology. I am sorry for the way I treated you . . .' and so on.

"The governor received the letter, turned it over, and wrote on the back, 'No longer interested in this case.'

"The day came for the young man to die. 'Is there anything you want to say before you die?' he was asked.

"Yes/ he answered, 'tell the young men of America that I am not dying for my crime-I am not dying because I am a murderer. The governor pardoned me. I could have lived. Tell them/ he continued, 'that I am dying because I did not accept the governor's pardon'" (The Arlington Times, August 26, 1954).

No one-no one will be lost because of his sins. That has been paid at the cross. If anyone is lost it will be because he has refused pardon. It is no longer the sin-issue, it is the Son-issue. Weil, you ask, "Why are deeds important? What difference does it make what I do?" It makes a lot of difference, because my deeds change me. My behavior will affect my thoughts, my attitudes toward life, my attitude toward God. And if I am careless in the things I do, I will get to the place where I no longer care about Him and I will no longer want that pardon. And when I come to the place where I turn my back on Jesus Christ, I am lost. But it is not my deeds-my good deeds or my misdeeds-that determine it. **It** is my relationship with Jesus Christ **that** counts.

You say, "Since we can be lost either way, what difference does it make whether we regard our deeds as directly or indirectly involved in salvation?" It makes a difference as to whether salvation is a free gift secured by God, and whether I am going to be secure or uncertain. Even as a Christian, I am sorry to say, I have made many mistakes. But I can affirm through Christ that these mistakes will not determine my salvation. As long as I am "in Christ" I am accepted and fully belong. My concern is that I do not do something to change my attitude toward Christ so that I will leave Him. I will show you tomorrow night that He will never leave us

How can we realize this security? Very briefly let me suggest these things First of all we must understand; we must understand the significance of Christ's sacrifice. Notice these comments from the Spirit of Prophecy, *II*The Lord would have His people sound in the faith-not ignorant of the great salvation so abundantly provided for them. They are not to look forward, thinking that at some future time a great work is to be done for them; for the work is now *complete*" (ESM 394-395). Again, *II*No sin can be committed by man for which satisfaction has not been met on Calvary" (1SM 343).

We talk about attaining salvation. Let me say that it is not within our power to attain salvation; but we don't have to! This has been attained by

God, independent of our activity. You must understand this. Nothing else I say the rest of the week will be significant unless you grasp this point. Second, you must accept. *II*The perishing sinner may say, 'I need not remain a moment longer unsaved. He died and rose again for my justification, and He will save me *now*!! (ISM 392). Weil, you say, *II*What must I do to accept?" "coming to Christ does not require a severe mental effort and agony. It is simply accepting the terms of salvation that God made plain in His word" (RH February 14, 1888). It is just this simple. Say, "Lord I want you." That's all, *III*want YO'u." No striving, no painful agony. Just say, "Lord I want you." All this talk about striving leaves me with mixed emotions. Is the Christian life one of striving? To say that life is not a struggle would be to mislead you. But a struggle for what? Salvation? Never! A struggling Christian? In the battles that we fight with self, yes. An insecure Christian, no! You will struggle, you will strive, but it is never with uncertainty. It is with complete confidence that you belong. If you have accepted Jesus Christ you are saved, and you can say that now.

You understand; you accept; and third, you trust. "If we will but keep our eyes fixed on the Saviour, and trust in His power, we shall be filled with 0 sense of security; for the righteousness of Christ will become our righteousness. . . . We dishonor Him by talking of our inefficiency: Instead of looking at our selves, let us constantly behold Jesus. . ." (MYP .107).

One of the great temptations we are going to face in these closing days is insecurity. If Satan can get us to turn our minds and our eyes from Jesus Christ and start weighing our own good deeds and misdeeds in determining whether or not we are saved, we are going to get discouraged, and when we get discouraged, we give up. If we are to have victory in Christ, we must be secure in His salvation.

Can I know that I am saved? WITHOUT A DOUBT!

THE WAR IS OVER (Can I Be Sure That I am Forgiven?)

What would you do if you had only five minutes to live? If you are 0 typical Seventh-day Adventist group, I can predict what you would do. First of all, you would confess your sins. Second, you would ask for more time because five minutes just isn't enough. I don't say this because you are worse than anyone else. I say it because you are 0 very conscientious people and if there is anything 0 Seventh-day Adventist doesn't want, it is to be caught with unconfessed sins.

When we reason this way we are making two assumptions. The first assumption is that between an act of sin and the confession of it we are lost. The second assumption is that confession secures our forgiveness. Neither of these is true. In the first place, sinning to 0 Christian does not imply rejection. We are told, "If in our ignorance we make missteps, Christ does

not leave us" (GW 263), Again, "Even if we are overcome by the enemy we are not cast off, nor forsaken and rejected of God" (SC 64). Now, if we are not forsaken and rejected, it implies that we are accepted, we belong, we are saved. Our Lord tells us in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Thus, "Christ will never abandon the soul for whom He died. The soul may leave Him and be overwhelmed with temptation, but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life" (MB 118-11;>). Right here you can see that many of us have made a wrong assumption regarding the unpardonable sin, as if somehow we tired God and He becomes disgusted with us, and after having put up with us long enough He leaves us Nothing could be more foreign to Scripture than that God leaves us When a Christian sins, it does not follow that he is rejected or lost.

In the second place, forgiveness is not based on confession. Notice this very challenging statement, "We should not think that unless those who have injured us confess the wrong we are justified in withholding from them our forgiveness. It is their part, no doubt, to humble their hearts by repentance and confession; but we are to have a spirit of compassion toward those who have trespassed against us, whether or not they confess their faults" (MB 113-114). Now, can you conceive of God asking us to do this if He were unwilling to do it Himself? You recall the thief on the cross who asked our Lord to remember him? What sin did he confess? Had he lived he undoubtedly would have confessed his sins. I don't doubt that. But he didn't live, and we have no record of his confession. Could it be that this was not central to his salvation? You remember the prodigal son who returned home? He had his confession memorized, but here we find one of the most beautiful interruptions in the whole Bible. The father meets him, cuts into his prepared confession, throws his robe around him, embraces him, and takes him unto his home. Why didn't he let him confess? Because the father had forgiven him already. These instances suggest that forgiveness is not based on our confession.

I believe that we have two great needs in our theology. The first is that we need a new look at and a new understanding of forgiveness. The second is that we need a new look at and a new understanding of confession. Let's take forgiveness first.

There are three key statements that I want to make regarding forgiveness. The first statement is this: forgiveness is **provided** through Christ apart from any asking or endeavor on our part. It is easy for us to think that our prayers are the basis for our forgiveness. But forgiveness is never based on our prayers. It is based on Christ's prayer on the cross, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do," Ellen White makes this comment: "That prayer of Christ for His enemies embraced the world. It took in every sinner that had lived or should live, from the beginning of the world to the end of time" (DA 745)1, Was that prayer answered? Yes, it was. And Calvary backs that up. That isn't to say that everyone accepts it; but it was granted. Let

me repeat-forgiveness is not based upon our prayers; it is based upon Christ's prayer.

Furthermore forgiveness is an accomplished fact for the *racel* apart from any human response. We talked about this last night. We talked about reconciliation taking place independent of any response we would make in the future. It was an issue with God; it was a matter of revealing His character to the universe; it was a problem which God solved apart from our reaction to it. We are told by the apostle Paul in Romans 5: 10 that II While we were *enemies* we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son. II Forgiveness has nothing to do with what we do now in our prayers, in our *confessions* or in our deeds. This was accomplished through Calvary. We are told that II The atonement of Christ sealed forever the everlasting covenant of grace. It was the fulfillment of every condition upon which God suspended the free communication of grace to the human family. Every barrier was then broken down which intercepted the freest fulness of the exercise of grace, mercy, peace and love to the most guilty of *Adam/s racell* (MS 92, 1899). Forgiveness is provided through Christ apart from any asking on our part.

The second statement about forgiveness is this: forgiveness must be individually **accepted** before it effects our salvation. II Justification is a *full* complete pardon of sin. The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is no more to doubt God's forgiving *gracell* (ST May 19, 1898). *Remember!* this acceptance is not what makes forgiveness possible. That was made possible independent of our *effort* independent of our asking independent of any reaction that we make to it. But for it to be efficacious in our behalf we must accept it. Freedom is very important in God's enterprise. While we are forgiven, while we are reconciled, while there are no barriers to stand between us and God, we must accept it before we can be saved through it.

The third statement about forgiveness might be a little harder for some to understand. The first two, I think, are not difficult, but this third statement might be. Forgiveness when accepted, becomes an **abiding** state. Before elaborating this statement, I must qualify it. When I speak of the sins committed by a Christian, I am not speaking about sins of apostasy. There is a difference. Apostasy is turning from Christ. It says, *II Lord, I don't want yoU. II* I am not talking about that kind of sin; I am talking about the mistakes, the misdeeds that all Christians commit in their finiteness. Recognizing this, note the following: II Pardon and justification are one and the same thing. Through faith, the believer passes from the position of a rebel, a child of sin and Satan, to the position of a royal subject of Christ Jesus, not because of an inherent goodness, but because Christ receives him as His child by adoption. The sinner receives the forgiveness of his sins, because

these sins are borne by his Substitute and Surety. The Lord speaks to His heavenly Father, saying: 'This is My child. I relieve him from the condemnation of death, giving him My life insurance policy - because I have taken his place and have suffered for his sins. He is even My beloved son.' Thus man, pardoned, and clothed with the beautiful garments of Christ's righteousness, stands faultless before God. The sinner may err, but he is not cast off without mercy" (MS 21, 1891 >.

Please observe that as the sinner "receives the forgiveness of his sins," he enters a new state. This is a position, a standing; this is not something that is spasmodic. This is something that is abiding. Furthermore, note that it is not received because of anything that we do or that we are. And yet, if one asks a person if he is a Christian, often the answer is, "I try to be; I hope so; I'm working on it." What would you think if you asked me if I was married and I replied, "I try to be; I hope so; I'm working on it?" What we must understand is that we are Christians not because of our characters, or our deeds, but solely in terms of Christ's character, and what He has done for us. We have a standing with Him. It is no longer the sin-issue, but the Son-issue. But you ask, "What about the sins I commit after becoming a Christian? Do not these destroy my standing?" Consider again the statement: "The sinner may err, but he is not cast off without mercy." What could be more plain? According to Paul, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8: 1>. We stand forgiven, and this is an abiding state as long as we are in Christ.

"Weil," you say, "perhaps we are no longer in Christ when we sin, at least temporarily." Note, this is an either-or situation; there is no halfway. We are told, "*We* are decided, whole-hearted Christians or none at all" (IT 126). And our Lord Himself stated, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matthew 12:30>' Either we are Christians or we are not. There is no in-between. Either we are in Christ or we are not. Some say that when we sin we are no longer in Christ until we confess our sins. This is foreign to Scripture. Let me present to you three of the illustrations which Scripture gives us of the abiding relationship between Christ and the believer.

The first is found in John 15: Christ is the vine, the believer is the branch. "This union with Christ, once formed, must be maintained. Christ said, 'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.' This is no casual touch, no off-and-on connection. The branch becomes a part of the living vine. The communication of life, strength, and fruitfulness from the root to the branches is unobstructed and constant" (DA 676). Yet, in our thinking we tear them apart, and make of it an off-and-on-again affair. This is human tradition; this is not according to Scripture. Forgiveness, belonging, or acceptance is an abiding state to those who are in Christ. The

sinner may err, but he is not cast off, forsaken, rejected of God. This means that he is accepted even in the interim between his sin and his confession. A second Biblical illustration found in Romans 7 is that Christ is married to the believer. If we would have it the way we often think of it, it would mean that every time a mistake is made there must be a divorce. Then, after confession is made, there is a remarriage, and so on. Now I ask you, what kind of a marriage relationship would that be, and how would it ever be possible for two people to grow in companionship?

A third Biblical illustration is in Romans 8. There we find that God adopts the believer as His son or daughter. What would you think of a father who expelled his son everytime he made a mistake, and not until he came back on his knees and said, "I'm sorry," would he accept him? How could the child ever have a meaningful relationship with his father? If this is inconsistent at the human level, how incongruous must it be at the divine level? The idea that when we sin we suddenly become lost is purely of human devising. I think it is instigated by Satan, because if we can be made to believe this, it will be very easy for us to become discouraged.

But what about this interim between sin and its confession? Let us say that you sin, you do something selfish. Let us say, just for the sake of illustration, that it takes ten minutes before you are willing to face what you have done and express sorrow for it. You can make this any length of time that you want. I select ten minutes just for illustration. Now, let's say that at the end of five minutes you are killed. Must you be lost? If salvation is based upon our misdeeds, yes; but if you followed me last night, this is not the Gospel. The Gospel, the good news, is that salvation is based upon Christ, wholly and completely. What I do once I accept Christ (and I'm not talking about becoming a better person) does not in itself determine my salvation. Then, what difference does it make what I do? As I stated last night, what I do affects me, my thinking, my outlook, my attitude toward Christ. I become what I do. If I am not careful about what I do; if I am not constantly trying to expose myself to the love of God where I can overcome these misdeeds, I will get to the place where I couldn't care less about Christ. When I get to that place, then I am lost. Why? Not because Christ has left me, but because I have left Him.

We are told that ". . . by faith we are to grasp the full and entire pardon. Here is where thousands are failing. They do not really believe that Jesus pardons them personally, individually. They fail to take God at His word. . . Many who have all their lives walked under a cloud, would be filled with amazement as they view the channels overflowing with mercies instead of dark clouds with wrath and denunciations . . . If by living faith we accept this wonderful salvation, we shall never perish as guilty transgressors of God's holy immutable law. . . . But many fail to act upon this faith, and therefore God is dishonored. They go about as if under a weight of woe and condemnation, when they might have peace and comfort and hope and fullness of joy" (RH September 21, 1886).

A young lad walked up to a guard at the Washington Monument with his entire life's savings clutched in his hand. Securing the guard's attention he opened his hand and said, "I want to buy the Washington Monument." There in his hand was twenty-five cents. The kindly guard had to explain. In the first place there are some things that are not for sale. In the second place, even if it were for sale, twenty-five cents wouldn't be enough to buy it. but the wonderful part about it was that the boy didn't need to buy it. He already owned it! That's the way it is with forgiveness. We come to Christ with our twenty-five cents worth of confession. In the first place it isn't for sale, and if it were, our twenty-five cents worth of confession wouldn't buy it. We already own it! Because we are in Christ, everything that is His becomes ours. We live and abide in a constant state of forgiveness and acceptance.

"Weil," you say, "Why confess if our sins are already forgiven? If they are all taken care of, let's forget about them." This is a logical question. Why confess our sins if they are already forgiven?

Very simple. To keep our hearts open that we may continue to receive God's forgiveness. Let's say I don't confess. What's going to happen to me? I'm going to begin to take Christ for granted. I'm going to forget that when I do something wrong I haven't broken a law-I've broken a heart. And how long can I continue this course before I reject Christ?

Confession doesn't move God; it keeps me confronted, day by day, with the things I do that would lead me away from God. And I must never take Him for granted. That's why I don't believe that in our private prayers we should ever say, "Lord, forgive my sins." Besides being too general, this doesn't make sense. They are already forgiven. The question is, what specifically have you done today to wound him? Maybe you've been irritable to someone. Then, why not just confess that to them? Because when we hurt any of God's children we hurt God. What kind of brashness would this be on our part if, considering what He's done for us, we take Him for granted and don't even bother to say, "Lord, I'm sorry for what I did to You today"? Rather than making this confession unnecessary, this personal relationship makes it all the more mandatory. It is only as we continue to confess; and to recognize specifically what we have been doing against our Lord that He can help us overcome so that we do not get to the place where we no longer care.

People will ask, "How many times can I commit the same sin and receive God's forgiveness?" I answer, "Weil, what's the largest number you can think of?" They give some figure I've never heard of and I say, "Square that, or take it to the tenth power, or as far as you want to go, square infinity if you have to," and of course, that's impossible. "That many times?" "Yes." But that really is not the issue. How many times can we continue to wound Christ and still be sorry? That's the problem. Not that we will ever exhaust His forgiveness, but that through our indifference, through our callousness, through our failure to recognize those specific things which we do which

stand between us and Christ, we will get to the place where we don't want forgiveness. Our misdeeds, unless we constantly face them, are going to interpose a barrier between us and Christ. Sin hardens our hearts, and it is only as we recognize the specific manifestations of it that we can keep the communication open.

Confession softens our hearts. It helps to clean out our moral systems. It helps us to see the points where we are weak. We say, "Lord, I'm awfully sorry for what I did, won't you help me in this specific thing?" And our Lord says, "Certainly, I will." This is why confession is important. It permits God to help us at the points of our weakness.

Let us say that a little boy sneaks into his parent's bedroom in the morning before they are awake, goes over to his father's trousers, slips his little hand into a pocket, pulls out a dime and quickly walks out. Let us say, just for illustration, that his father was not asleep but had one eye open and saw the little boy take the dime. Now the father isn't going to go broke because he lost a dime, but he feels badly. Why? Because of what his boy did, because of what it is going to do to the boy. He feels badly that his son would do this to him. It is not the dime, it is the relationship. The father is hurt. Does he cease to love his boy? Does he think, "He is no longer my son until he makes this right?" No. The father loves him even more. If there is anytime in their relationship when the father forgives him more, it is a time when the lost least recognizes his need of it. After awhile, maybe several hours, maybe several days, the son begins to hurt. He feels terrible for what he has done, so he goes back to his father and, handing him the dime, says, "Dad, I took this dime from you. I'm awfully sorry. Will you forgive me?" The father puts his arm around him saying, "Son, I forgive you." Does he mean that for the first time since the son took the dime he is now giving him forgiveness? No! He's been forgiven all along. But the son now needs to be reminded. It needs to be pointed out. Let us consider that instead of saying, "I forgive you," the father says, "Son, I love you." Sometimes that's just as good as saying, "I forgive you." Does the father mean that he didn't love him before, and that now, because he brought the dime back, he loves him? No, he loved him all along. But at a time when the son is crushed, the father wants to remind him that he is loved, that he is forgiven.

So we are told in I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We confess our sins and the Lord says, "I forgive you." Now, does that mean we weren't forgiven all along? No! He is just reminding us so that we might be encouraged, so that we can be free with Him, so that we don't have to hide, so that we don't have to cover up. When we do that, when we keep these things to ourselves, when we never bring them out in the open, it becomes impossible to grow; so God reminds us of His love and forgiveness so that we don't have to become defensive about our mistakes.

Another application we can make of this text (and I haven't heard this done, but it is perfectly legitimate) is to interpret: "If we confess our sins,

he is faithful and just in forgiving our sins." For God to say we are forgiven when we act like we do requires some accounting by God. In fact, He will be called to vindicate His forgiveness of us, and we will talk about this later when we consider the investigative judgement. But we should understand at this point that our confessions can be used by God as evidence to Satan that we have chosen Christ, and thus, God is not violating our freedom or disregarding moral order by granting us forgiveness. Our confession testifies that we have not spurned God's pardon. Therefore, GÖd can be just in forgiving our sins, something which He could not do if we didn't want it.

Some people will say, "Doesn't this view open up the floodgates to sin? Isn't this dangerous to know that we are forgiven even before we ask, when we are in Christ?" One of the wonderful things about my family, that never ceases to amaze me, is that they love me, even when I do things that are unloving. And I have gotten to the place where I firmly believe that if tomorrow, say, I were to become irritable to them, they wouldn't reject me-they'd still love me. Because I know this, because I'm convinced of it, do you think that this is going to become the occasion for my laxity? On the contrary, this is the very basis why I would be ashamed to do this. It is because they are what they are, because they do love me in spite of myself that when I do things that are wrong I feel ashamed. Rather than opening up the floodgates to sin, it is as we see and fully understand the love that God has for us that these floodgates of sin can be closed.

In 1956 it was reported that far back in the Philippine mountains a little pocket of Japanese soldiers had been located. Completely cut off from the world and the news, these men had lived all the years since the end of the war unaware that hostilities were over, in fear that their discovery would be their death. When they were found and plans were made for their reparation one of the soldiers killed himself in panic.

Other embattled men and women, cut off from the news of God's acceptance, live comparably hidden, fearful lives, even in the busiest centers of civilization. Uncertain about how things stand between God and themselves, between heaven and earth, they build camouflages to cover their quaking panic. They doom themselves. The fact is that the war was won nineteen hundred years ago and acceptance is at hand. Men need not be fearful of God's intent or uncertain about His attitude toward them. The good news is that we are forgiven, that we live in complete pardon through Jesus Christ. His message to the prisoners of fear is "Come out of hiding. THE WAR IS OVER!"