

STEERING CLEAR OF THE MARK

Before we open God's word this morning, I'd like to thank those of you who support this ministry. Some of you have been faithfully doing so for about 20 years now. Twenty years ago I never would have thought that we would still be here, but instead be enjoying the company of Jesus and the holy angels and all the host of the redeemed, but here we are, still battling the enemy of our souls. I hope you're not getting tired of the battle and about to give up. I hope you're having victory in your life, but if not, I want you to know that there's still time for you to overcome the sin that so easily besets you. We can be thankful today that human probation is not yet closed, there's still opportunity to be justified by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus and become like Him in character rather than continuing to get caught up in the vicious cycle of sinning and repenting. Because one of these days, if we don't learn how to have victory every day, we're going to end up sinning one time too many, and then there will only be a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. So I encourage you to renew the battle, because we are well able to defeat the enemy and go up someday soon to possess the Promised Land, but only if we realize where our strength and our righteousness lies.

I've spent nearly 30 years of my life laying, cleaning, and repairing wall-to-wall carpet. And I used to get a trade magazine every month called "Installation and Cleaning Specialist." And every month when it came in the mail I would read it from cover to cover, because I wanted to be the best that I could be at what I did. Even though I already knew most of what was in that magazine by years of experience, I still read it, because every once in awhile I would read an article that would give me valuable information about how I could improve my skills, or how I could do a more satisfactory job for my customers, and maybe even stay a step ahead of the competition in the process. Everyone who has ever been in business knows that these kinds of things lead to customer satisfaction and job security. And so I did my very best to be as knowledgeable and thorough in my profession as I could possibly be.

And as we think about these things, shouldn't these characteristics carry over into our Christian lives and our ministry for the Lord? As a people who are looking for, and hopefully hastening the day when Jesus returns, shouldn't we be the best that we can be? Shouldn't we be searching God's word from cover to cover—even though we may already know much of what's in it? Looking for some little tidbit that will help us improve our characters; something that will help us be a little more skillful at leading others to Jesus? Something that will help us stay a step ahead of all the false competitors and fanatics out there who are leading people astray? Shouldn't we be

specialists at what we do? And shouldn't our specialty have something to do with **Revelation 14:6-12**?

Notice what it says in *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9, page 19*. "In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention."

How is it with you friend? Are there other things that are absorbing your attention? Is there some preacher you're listening to that rarely, if ever, mentions and explains the importance of the three angels' messages, but is always off on some tangent that has nothing to do with our character development? Are you caught up with the cares of this life and have little time to educate yourself in these messages so you will know what you might be hearing is true or false?

You know, we don't have to do anything but neglect our devotional life to end up being fooled by all the false prophets that would come to us in sheep's clothing, so I would encourage you to spend quality time every day becoming better acquainted with God's word so you can truly be a watchman and light bearer to perishing souls, of which there are many.

Today we don't have time to talk in depth about all three of these special messages, and so I would like to zero in on number three. Now that doesn't mean the first and second angels' messages aren't important, and even the fourth angel's message of **Revelation 18** for that matter, but there are quite a few statements in the Spirit of Prophecy that single out the third angel's message as becoming more and more important as we near the end, and surely we are very near the end. I'd like to read you four very short statements about this from the pen of God's last day messenger.

The first is from *Signs of the Times, January 25, 1910*, "The third angel's message increases in importance as we near the close of this earth's history."

The *1888 Materials, page 1710*, "The third angel's message in its clear, definite terms is to be made the prominent warning."

Colporteur Ministry, page 138, "The proclamation of the third angel's message, the

commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus, is the burden of our work.”

And ***Testimonies for the Church, Volume 6, page 241***, “The third angel’s message is the gospel message for these last days, and in no case is it to be overshadowed by other interests.”

If you go through all the Spirit of Prophecy statements dealing with the third angel’s message, and there are over a thousand of them, you’ll find that it’s referred to as, “The last note of warning,” “The last message of mercy,” and “The binding off message” to name a few, and you’ll also find that it’s connected to a health message that is as important as the right arm is to the body. The third angel’s message is also the message that separates the wheat from the tares. It’s also closely associated with the latter rain and the loud cry as the third angel is joined by the fourth. And please notice, it’s called the loud cry of the third angel not the fourth, once again giving it prominence. And so, you can see it would take much more time to cover all the different facets of the third angel’s message than we have time for today.

And there’s still another very important aspect I’ve not yet mentioned. Those of you who have studied church history know what happened during the 1888 General Conference Session in Minneapolis. God gave two young men a special message, that if heeded, would have finished the work of taking the gospel to the world, and Jesus would have come to gather His people home long before now, and it’s that particular facet of the third angel’s message, and in that context, that I would like to focus on this morning, because it’s still that same message that will accomplish what church leaders and laity alike have failed to do for well over 100 years now.

You know, sometimes we read about how ancient Israel failed to follow God’s instructions and had to wander in the wilderness 40 years and in the end were responsible for crucifying the Saviour, but we have wandered around here in this world of sin almost three times as long and the nominal church of today has crucified the three angels’ messages, and especially the third, because they haven’t given it the way God said to give it! You can read something about that in ***Early Writings, pages 260, 261***.

I think it’s high time we get our act together, don’t you? The coming of the Lord has been delayed because the message of justification by faith, which is the third angel’s message in verity we’re told, has not been presented in its clearness. From the statements we’ve already read this morning, every other message must take a back seat to this message. And again, it’s not because other truths are unimportant, but

because nothing else makes sense and will be of no benefit to us without being freely justified by faith through the righteousness of Christ. Without the righteousness of Christ we're just spinning our wheels; we're just playing church, and I don't know about you, but I know by experience that trying to live the Christian life without Christ living within is a very frustrating way to try to live. Knowing what's right, but not being able to perform that which we know we must do in order to be citizens of the earth made new is very frustrating indeed. The apostle Paul mentions this kind of thing in **Romans 7**, but we don't have time to go there today. The answer to this dilemma, by the way, is in **Romans 8**, study it for yourself.

What I'm about to say may sound a little strange to you, but it has always been my goal, every time I preach a sermon, to basically preach the same thing, I just serve it up a little differently each time. Perhaps I've failed to do this a few times or haven't made myself as clear as I should have, but for years now I've tried to take the philosophy of Paul and make it mine. In **1 Corinthians 2:2** he said: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Paul tried various methods of reaching people with the gospel, but he found that only one method would bring the desired result, and that is, to make the sacrifice of Christ the focal point as he preached and witnessed to those he came in contact with, and in his later ministry especially, Paul never lost sight of the source of his wisdom and strength. In **Philippians 1:21** he said, "For to me to live is Christ." Is that your reason to live?

And notice what he said in **Philippians 3:8-10**, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, **(in other words, Paul was no longer counting on his own righteousness through obeying the law like he was doing before his conversion)** but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

There are two verses of scripture in **Galatians** that especially describe Paul's maturity in the faith. The first is in **chapter 6:14** where he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." And he said basically the same thing in **chapter 2:20** except with more forceful language that showed the depth of his understanding and commitment to

Christ. He said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Friends, the gospel of the sufferings of Christ in our behalf, and what it can do for us, is something to get excited about! Writing to those who get excited about worldly enterprises and amusements, but appear frozen and cold-hearted when it comes to the cause of Christ, Ellen White says the following in *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 2, page 213*, "Upon this theme it is sin to be calm and unimpassioned. The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm."

I will admit that this is something I need to improve upon. I'm naturally kind of stoic like most of the people in my family and in the area where I grew up, but I need to learn that it's OK to get excited about Jesus and the sacrifice He made for me. And why is it permissible to show some enthusiasm? Because Jesus Christ and Him crucified covers all the ground of man's needs. And it's our job as Christians to give people what they need, and not what they think they need or want. Remember what John the Baptist said when the unbelieving Jews asked him the question: "Who art thou?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness!" What an example! According to God's word, we are not to preach ourselves, or our agenda, "but Jesus Christ and Him crucified." We are to be a voice in this wilderness of sin that will point people to the only remedy for the sin sick soul.

I remember years ago, and I'm talking probably 30-40 years ago, I got involved in a multilevel marketing program and I went to some meetings where they try to get you all revved up about the product so you will go out and sign other people up under you and supposedly you can make a lot of money, and I did get all excited about. In fact when I got home from that meeting I was fired up. It was a good product and there was the possibility of making a lot of money, because some people had already done so, and so I believed I could too. When I got home my wife was visiting with a friend that had come over and I immediately started sharing my enthusiasm, and the gal that was visiting said, "How can I sign up", because my enthusiasm was contagious, and I signed her up. A few weeks later when reality hit and she realized things weren't going like she expected, I asked her why she bothered signing up in the first place, and she said, "I didn't sign up because I thought it was a good product, I signed up because you were so excited about it." You see friends, if we are not enthusiastic about the truth, how can we expect others to get excited about it?

I'll share one other short experience before we move on. Back in the 70s I became a Literature Evangelist, and all the colporteurs used to go to a rally each year to get fired up about selling books, and during one of those rallies the publishing director, in his pep talk, said something that has stuck with me through the years. He said, "If you want to sell books you've got to have enthusiasm; it just has to ooze out of you", and it's true. When it came to selling a lot of books, those who were excited about it always did better than those who weren't, and of course it always helps to believe what you're selling will change lives for the better like it has changed your own.

Let me read you a few more Spirit of Prophecy quotes and then we'll go to our Bibles. ***Testimonies to Ministers, page 91***, "The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family. All power is given into His hands, that He may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of His own righteousness to the helpless human agent. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure."

There are at least three important points we can glean from this statement. #1, Jesus imparts His own righteousness to us, why? Because we don't have any, and as long as we have fallen flesh, this will always be true. There will never be a time this side of heaven when we will be able to dispense with Christ's righteousness. #2, Christ's righteousness will always, without exception, be obedient to the Ten Commandments, because that's what righteousness is all about, and if we attempt it on our own, we are attempting an impossibility. And #3, these two points will justify us in the sight of God if we will by faith accept it as fact.

Now remember, the warning part of the third angel's message in **Revelation 14:9-11** is not a part of justification by faith. The warning must be given, because without it we would not know why the message is important, or how to steer clear of the mark, but the warning cannot justify us. A person can be justified by faith without a knowledge of the third angel's message, in my own experience I can testify to that, because I accepted Christ and was justified before I knew anything about this last day message, and I'm not downplaying the warning, but the warning alone can't save us. Unless we

come to Christ and receive forgiveness and cleansing from sin and the power to obey, just knowing who the beast is and what the mark is will not benefit us if we don't understand and experience **verse 12**; does that make sense? And we'll be reading that in a few minutes.

Testimonies for the Church, volume 6, page 19 says, "The message of Christ's righteousness (**not our own**) is to sound from one end of the earth to the other to prepare the way of the Lord. This (**Christ's righteousness**) is the glory of God, which closes the work of the third angel."

Also *Selected Messages, Book 1, page, 372*, "Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, 'It is the third angel's message, in verity.'"

Friends, there is not a stronger word in the dictionary to define the third angel's message. It's justification by faith in verity, or in very truth! If you reduce it down to its lowest common denominator; justification by faith is what it's all about. It's the crux of the message that must go to the whole world. And of course keeping the commandments is an important part of that message, but all things in their order, and we'll see the proper order in a few minutes.

So at this point let's turn in our Bibles and read **Revelation 14:9-12**, and let's see what we can learn about this most important message. "And the third angel followed them (**the other two**), saying with a loud voice (**that means everyone that's listening will hear this message. Some people are deaf to the truth, but those who have a desire to know will hear. And here's the message**), if any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture (**that is, without mercy**) into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. (**Now, when some people read this they think it's saying that people are going to burn forever in the fires of hell, but that is totally inconsistent with the rest of Scripture on the subject. All this means when it says, "The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever", is that it's irretrievable. Even after a fire goes out the smoke still ascends. The point is, once a person receives the mark of the beast, there will never be another chance for them to be saved. Their destiny is fixed and they are eternally lost. Then verse 12 says**) Here is the patience of the saints (**here is the cheerful**

endurance of the holy ones, even in the face of the persecution they will endure for obeying God rather than men): here are they that keep the commandments of God (**or we could say “Here are they who have stopped sinning”**), and the faith of Jesus.”

Now tell me, where is justification by faith to be found in these four verses we just read? Very clearly it's presented in **verse 12**, is it not? Again, the other three verses are a warning, and a very important one, but we need more than a warning; we need to know how to steer clear of the mark that these verses warn about! It's not enough to know that the beast is the papacy and that the mark has to do with the Sabbath/Sunday issue, because if you don't know the “Lord of the Sabbath” and you're alive to see these verses fulfilled, you will probably go to church every seventh-day until Sunday observance is enforced by law, and then you'll join the ranks of those who oppose the truth; you'll be among the group Jesus spoke of in **Matthew 7:22** that will say, “Lord, Lord, didn't we do thus and so?” And Jesus will say, “I never knew you”, “You were never a partaker of My righteousness, even though you looked like a commandment keeper, depart from Me.”

If I read the Spirit of Prophecy correctly, I believe here's what's going to happen. If you don't know the “Lord of the Sabbath,” you will go to church every seventh-day until you are threatened with loss of property and life and then you'll cave in under the tremendous pressure and receive the mark of the beast in your forehead or in your right hand, because without the faith of Jesus you will not be able to stand in your own strength, and even if you are stubborn enough to be martyred because you refuse to keep Sunday, you will still be lost if you don't have the faith of Jesus. Does that make sense?

Notice what it says in ***Testimonies for the Church, Volume 5, page 81***, “The time is not far distant when the test will come to every soul. The mark of the beast will be urged upon us (**“Us” means professed Sabbath keepers**). Those who have step by step yielded to worldly demands and conformed to worldly customs will not find it a hard matter to yield to the powers that be, rather than subject themselves to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death.”

One of these days in the near future there's going to be a change of positions. Those who outwardly keep the Sabbath now, but don't know the Lord will trade places with those who know the Lord, but are not now keeping the right day. And only a small number who are now keeping the Sabbath and truly know the Lord of the Sabbath will remain faithful when the going gets tough, because we are told plainly that the majority of professed Adventists will forsake us.

Let me read you a few short statements. ***Testimonies for the Church, Volume 1, page 608***, “In the last vision given me, I was shown the startling fact that but a small portion of those who now profess the truth will be sanctified by it and be saved.”

Testimonies for the Church, Volume 2, page 445, “From what was shown me, but a small number of those now professing to believe the truth would eventually be saved—not because they could not be saved, but because they would not be saved in God’s own appointed way.”

Testimonies for the Church, Volume 5, page 136, “. . .the great proportion of those who now appear to be genuine and true will prove to be base metal. . . To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test.”

The Great Controversy, page 608, “As the storm approaches, a large class (**and according to other statements that would be the majority**) a large class who have professed faith in the third angel’s message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition.”

In which camp will you be found? The majority of Christians don’t comprehend this, but what we do from day to day now, will determine which camp we will be found in tomorrow. Many think they can live as they please now, and when the last of the prophecies are being fulfilled right before their eyes, then they will do what they should have been doing all along. Don’t fool yourself. Sanctification is a process. We can’t grow up into Christ all at once when all of a sudden we see that the end is here. In the statements we just read, those who abandon the truth will be those who weren’t sanctified by the truth.

So don’t be like Felix when Paul was telling him what I’m telling you now. Don’t think that there will be a more convenient season sometime in the future when you can make a total surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. Today is the day of salvation, and if you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart today, don’t put off these convictions hoping it will be easier sometime later. It will never be easier in the future, only harder, because you will have had that much more time to feed your fallen nature, which will in turn make it that much more difficult for you to come back to God, if indeed you ever knew Him.

Now let’s focus on **Revelation 14:12**, because here’s where we find the solution to the

problem, or the information we need to steer clear of the mark of the beast. “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

Now let me ask you a question, which do we need first, “The faith of Jesus” or keeping the commandments of God? Let me put it another way. Can we keep the commandments of God without the faith of Jesus and in our own strength? No! Anyone who tries that is attempting an impossibility we’re told in ***Steps to Christ, page 59***, because our own strength is faithless. It takes the faith of Jesus in order to render acceptable obedience.

In ***Ephesians 2:8-10***, I believe we have one of the clearest teachings about the proper sequence of faith and works. Paul says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” **(So it’s clear as can be that we cannot save ourselves by works, but it’s also true as can be that good works will be the result of genuine faith, because verse 10 says)**, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Once we’re created anew in Christ Jesus, then good works and heart obedience will follow, but before that we can render only outward obedience at best, which is not sufficient in forming the kind of character Jesus can take to heaven.

Notice what it says in ***Desire of Ages, page 668*** “All true obedience comes from **(where?)** the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will **(or the power of choice)**, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.”

Is there not some incentive in this statement to do a little self examination? Is it our highest delight to do service for God? Are we having continual obedience? Do we hate sin? If not, then we do not have heart obedience, and if we don’t have heart obedience we will never form the right kind of character, and if we don’t have the right kind of character development, our professed Christianity will prove a failure, even if we’re good actors and keep all the commandments outwardly.

According to **Revelation 14:12**, we can only be commandment keeping saints because we “have the faith of Jesus”! And because we have “the faith of Jesus,” we are justified by that faith and will find obedience a delight, that’s “The third angel’s message in verity.”

Let’s take a look at a few Bible texts. It may seem a little elementary at first, but I’d like to start by reading a few verses that reveal the source of all righteousness. For the sake of time we’re going to go through these quickly, so you might want to jot these down so you can check them out later.

Daniel 9:7 says, “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee.”

Psalms 145:17, “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.”

Psalms 36:6, “Thy righteousness is like the great mountains.”

Psalms 119:137, 138, “Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.” **Verse 142**, “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.”

And so, without question, the Scriptures testify to the fact that God is the source of all righteousness, and none of it, zero, is inherent in fallen man. In other words, we can’t manufacture it on our own. Now that is not to say that just because all righteousness comes from God that that excuses us somehow, and that it’s impossible for us to do righteousness, because we’re told in *Christ’s Object Lessons, page 312* that, “Righteousness is right doing, and it is by **(our)** deeds that **(we)** will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine.”

And so, is it possible for you and me to do righteousness even though we don’t have any that originates in us? Yes, but only as we get it from the One who is righteous. Please don’t get the idea that we only receive the righteousness of Christ vicariously and that that’s all we need. It’s true that we are made righteous through the actions of another person, that person being Christ, but here’s the thing, we can do righteousness once we receive the righteousness of Christ, does that make sense? We can and will do righteousness if we have the righteous One living within, and that’s the only way it’s ever going to happen.

In **1 John 3:7** it says, “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous even as He is righteous.”

And **Revelation 19:8**, speaking of the church, it says, “And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.”

And so, the members of the church can do righteousness, and they will, but they can only do it when the One from whom all righteousness comes lives inside, and that happens through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

The book of Romans is an excellent place to show that all these things are true. Let me fire off a couple verses. **Romans 3:10** says, “There is NONE righteous, no not one.” **Romans 7:18**, “In our flesh, there dwells no good thing!” And **Romans 1:29** says, “We are FILLED with ALL unrighteousness.”

The words **filled** and **all** and **none** indicate totality, friends! In view of these texts and many more like them, it's beyond me how some Christians can think that they have self-righteousness to add to God's perfect righteousness. I've always thought it strange, and sad, that so many people could miss the simple yet profound truth of righteousness by faith, and I think the reason they miss it is because it's so hard for the proud carnal heart to accept the fact that it doesn't have any! There's a deceitfulness in our fallen nature and the proud carnal heart to think that we can save ourselves somehow, or add something to a free and perfect gift, and it's not easy to admit that we are helpless and totally powerless apart from Christ. And so, through the flesh we can be fooled into believing a lie.

Let's turn to **Galatians 1** and find out what Paul called this some of self and some of God gospel so we can make sure we aren't fooled by it.

Galatians 1:3-9, “Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

Also **chapter 3:1-3**, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified

among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

It was a great sorrow to the apostle Paul that Israel, "his kinsman according to the flesh," missed this truth so miserably. Listen to what he says in **Romans 9:31, 32**, "But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

Romans 10:3, 4, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

Now this does not mean that obedience to the law comes to an end when we receive the righteousness of Christ as some teach; but simply means that the end result of Christ's righteousness is made manifest in obedience to the law.

The point is, righteousness by faith is not just a theory, it's an experience! It's a "submitting to the righteousness of God" and not the exalting of our own righteousness, of which we are completely destitute. It's essential for us to understand that this thing called righteousness by faith can only be accomplished in our hearts and lives by the power of God, and not by any power we possess. Our part is simply to cooperate with the One who has all the power and all the righteousness, and by this cooperation, through faith, we become partakers of it. Then like the psalmist we can say: "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." That's the new covenant promise, God puts His law in our hearts and minds, and when it's in the heart to obey, then it will truly be possible to be a commandment keeper.

Now, it's obvious as you read the Bible that some kind of provision was made whereby unrighteous men and women could become righteous, because the word of God mentions this in several places, and **Matthew 23:34, 35** is a good place to start as we look for examples. Jesus here is speaking to the unbelieving Jews, and He says, in **verses 34, 35**, "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the

(what?) righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.”

Genesis 7:1 is yet another example, “And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.”

Also **Romans 4:3**, “For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”

In other words, even though Abraham had no righteousness of his own, he became righteous when he believed what God said. Because of his faith God accepted him as righteous, and of course his obedience followed, didn't it? I think it was John Calvin who said something like, “We are saved by grace through faith alone, but faith is never alone.” I can't tell you exactly what Calvin meant by that, or what was in his head, but what it says to me is, genuine faith will always be made manifest by obedience and never without it. That's why **James 2:20** says, “Faith without works is dead.” Years ago I heard an illustration that has stuck with me, and it's this; faith and works are like Siamese twins, if you try to separate them you kill them both. In other words, it's impossible to have true faith without action to follow it up. That's why the fulfillment of God's promises are only realized by those who believe and then work in accordance with their faith. James said, “Show me your faith without your works, and I'll show you my faith by my works.”

2 Peter 2:4-8, “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)”

Here we see that both Noah and Lot were righteous men. Think about this for a minute. If you can see and hear the filthy conversation of the wicked and not become vexed, or tortured and harassed in spirit, it's an indication that you have not received the righteousness of Christ. Is that a fair assessment? This is the reason, by the way, that we're not supposed to live in the cities, especially if we have children. It's a law of the

mind that by beholding we become changed. And so, if we want to become like Jesus we have to do everything we can to behold Him rather than placing ourselves in an atmosphere where we are beholding wickedness all the time.

In **Luke 1:5, 6** we see yet another example of two people made righteous, “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both **(what?)** righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” Is that what you want God to be able to say about you as your life is examined and investigated? It will be if you are made righteous by faith.

Let me just say this; if Jesus abides in your heart, you cannot enjoy sin! You can't do it, because Jesus and sin cannot exist in the same heart at the same time. This is proof positive that no one can be saved in sin. If you are committing sin, it's because you have chosen not to abide in Christ, and if that's the case, you are in a lost condition at that point in time. “Every day that you remain in sin; you are in Satan's ranks; and should you sicken and die without repentance, you would be lost.” I read this statement to you last time from ***Review and Herald, December 24, 1889.***

Now I want to take a little detour for a minute. Do you know how many times this statement I just read to you can be found in the Spirit of Prophecy compilations? Take a guess. You won't find it even once. You won't find it in any other place than ***Review and Herald, December 24, 1889.*** And I can't help but wonder why something so important can only be found in one place. You won't find it in any other place like you'll find the many, many times you can read other statements, and I find that interesting, don't you? Let me tell you something, when you read the same statement over and over again in many places, and other statements just once, that tells you that there are certain things church leaders want emphasized and other things kept out of sight as much as possible. Just something for you to think about as you come across some of these more obscure statements that many people find objectionable and unpopular, and yet they are inspired and absolutely essential for us to understand if we would have a correct view of what's necessary to be saved in God's kingdom.

The examples we've been reading about those Bible characters who were made righteous by faith are proof that there were people all along the way who laid hold of the righteousness of Christ and had the evidence that their lives were pleasing to God. The question is, how was it accomplished? Again, one of the best places to find the answer is Paul's letter to the Romans. At the very beginning of his letter, Paul lays the

foundation of righteousness by faith, and remember, this is what the third angel's message is all about.

Romans 1:16, 17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." "The just shall live by faith." Those six little words started the Protestant Reformation nearly 500 years ago, and I think it would be well for us to understand what they mean, don't you?

It's the gospel of Christ that reveals the righteousness of Christ, and it's also the gospel that tells us how to obtain it, and that is, by faith! And if you'll turn to **Romans 3** we'll see how Paul presents it in greater detail.

Romans 3:20-31, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. . . **Verse 31**, Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

When Paul says, "A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law", he means exactly what he says. When I came to Christ and accepted Him as my Saviour, I was justified by faith without having had obedience to the law; that came afterward. That's why Paul said, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." After I accepted Christ, then came obedience; then the law was established in my life, because it was now written in my heart, as it says in **Ezekiel 36:26**.

Also notice what Paul says in **Romans 4:1-6**, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh

is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.”

So important and fundamental is justification by faith to Christianity that Paul goes on in the rest of the chapter to restate and repeat and press home what he’s already said.

In **Verses 20-25** he says, **(Abraham)** “Staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”

Also **Romans 5:1, 2** where it says, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have **(what?)** peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

This is the peace and hope that many of the brethren back in 1888 could have experienced, but instead rejected. And this is what has kept us wandering in the wilderness now for well over 100 years. That’s a long time, too long! And I know there’s always the danger of dwelling too much on justification to the neglect of sanctification, and I don’t want to be guilty of that this morning, but you can’t be sanctified without first being justified; that’s why the third angel’s message is so important.

Back in the years around 1888 there were certain of the brethren who preached the law until they became as dry as the hills of Gilboa. That’s what Sister White said in ***Review and Herald, March 11, 1890***. Listen to what she said, “As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain. We must preach Christ in the law, and there will be sap and nourishment in the preaching that will be as food to the famishing flock of God. We must not trust in our own merits at all, but in the merits of Jesus of Nazareth.”

In the ***1888 Materials, page 557*** she said almost the same thing, only a little different. She said, “Let the law take care of itself.” **(Now think about that for a minute)** “Let the law take care of itself. We have been at work on the law until we get as dry as the hills of Gilboa, without dew or rain. Let us trust in the merits of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

May God help us that our eyes may be anointed with eyesalve, that we may see.”

“Let the law take care of itself.” What do you suppose she meant by that? Here’s what it says to me. When I came to Christ over 40 years ago and was justified by faith at that time, no one had to tell me that I must now keep the commandments of God. I knew instantly that I must now put God first in my life. I knew I was not to worship idols. I knew I should not mention God’s name in an irreverent manner. I knew it was the right thing to do to treat my parents with respect. I knew I was not to murder anyone. I knew I was supposed to be faithful to my wife. I knew not to steal and lie and to be satisfied with what I had and not what someone else had. What I didn’t know was that I was supposed to worship God on His special day and keep the fourth commandment as taught in God’s word; that I had to be taught, because of the Sabbath being buried under years and years of man’s traditions, and that’s why when we share the third angel’s message we must emphasize the seventh-day Sabbath and who changed it and why, because the Sabbath is the only commandment of the ten that is not naturally as obvious as the other nine. People must find out that there are not nine commandments and one suggestion. The Sabbath is just as much a command as the rest, and people need to realize that, and it’s our job to enlighten them, because very few people are able to discover that point on their own without help.

Now I realize that the commandments are far reaching and that there are spiritual aspects we must learn more about as we go along, but the basics most people already know. Even non-Christians pretty much know what’s right and wrong according to the commandments, they just need a new heart so they will want to do what’s right, and that’s what justification by faith will do for them, and that’s what a correct understanding of the third angel’s message will do for them.

I must quit, but I just want to make sure we understand that the third angel’s message is “Justification by faith in verity.” And what is justification? It is pardon and the new birth experience, that’s what we need to begin with and what we need to retain through the process of sanctification; and the rest will follow as we grow in grace and in a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I’d like to bring this to a conclusion by reading a couple more quotes. The first is from the **1888 Materials, page 898**, “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 loyal 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—eternal life—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.”

Friends, this is what the third angel’s message is all about, and I hope we all understand and experience this most important message and are able to clearly explain it to others, and we will be able to if it’s doing a work in our own hearts. This is the message we’re to make prominent and not allow anything else to so absorb our attention by permitting other things to crowd it out.

And this last statement is from ***Selected Messages, Book 3, page 172***, “‘The faith of Jesus.’ It is talked of, but not understood. What constitutes the faith of Jesus, that belongs to the third angel’s message? Jesus becoming our sin-bearer that He might become our sin-pardoning Saviour. He was treated as we deserve to be treated. He came to our world and took our sins that we might take His righteousness. And faith in the ability of Christ to save us amply and fully and entirely is the faith of Jesus.”