

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

BY WITNESS LEE

In Galatians 2:5 and 14 Paul speaks of the truth of the gospel. The word *truth* in these verses does not mean the doctrine or teaching of the gospel; it denotes the reality of the gospel. Although Galatians is a short book, it affords us a complete revelation of the reality of the gospel. This revelation, however, is given not in detail but in certain basic principles. Therefore, we shall cover the truth of the gospel revealed in these basic principles.

Man Not Justified by Works of Law

The first aspect of the truth of the gospel is that fallen man cannot be justified by works of law. In 2:16 Paul says, "Knowing that a man is not justified out of works of law." At the end of this verse Paul declares, "Out of the works of law no flesh will be justified." The word *flesh* in 2:16 means fallen man who has become flesh (Gen. 6:3). No such man will be justified out of works of law. Furthermore, in Galatians 3:11 Paul goes on to say, "That by law no one is justified before God is evident." In these verses Paul tells us clearly that no one is justified by works of law.

The Seventh-day Adventists insist on strict observance of the Sabbath. However, they seem to forget that by endeavoring to keep the law with respect to the Sabbath, they make themselves debtors to keep all the commandments. The New Testament says that if we keep all the commandments except one, we transgress the whole law (James 2:10). Romans 7 proves that we cannot keep all the commandments. In verse 7 Paul refers to the commandment about coveting: "Neither did I know coveting, except the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" Then in verse 8 he goes on to say, "But sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, worked out in me coveting of every kind." The more Paul tried to keep this commandment, the more he failed. This indicates that it is impossible for fallen man to keep all of God's commandments. How ridiculous it is to go back to the law and try to keep it! We simply do not have the ability to keep the law. As Paul says in Romans 7:14, the law is spiritual, but we are fleshy, sold under sin. Therefore, by works of law will no flesh be justified.

Law Being the Custodian to Keep God's Chosen People until Christ Came

Since it is not possible for fallen man to keep the law, we may ask why the law was given. It was not God's intention in giving the law that man should keep it. When God gave the law, He knew that man would not be able to keep it. God's purpose in giving the law was to use it as a custodian to keep His people until Christ came (Gal. 3:23-24; 4:2). God's intention was to use the law as a fold in which to keep His sheep.

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Perhaps you are wondering why Christ did not come earlier than He did. Why did He not come at the time of Moses? If Christ had come sixteen hundred years earlier, there would have been no need for the law. Why did He not come before the law was given? The best way to answer this question is to turn to the Scriptures. Romans 3:19 and 20 say, "Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may fall under the judgment of God; because out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him; for through the law is the clear knowledge of sin."

In Galatians 3:19 Paul asks, "Why then the law?" In the same verse he answers his own question: "It was added because of the transgressions." The law was given to expose what man is and where man is. The best way for man to be exposed is to cause his situation to be seen in the light of God's attributes. The Ten Commandments are composed mainly of four divine attributes: holiness, righteousness, light, and love. God is holy and righteous; He is also light and love. If you look into the Ten Commandments, you will see that they embody the divine holiness, righteousness, light, and love. For this reason the law became God's testimony. In other words, the Ten Commandments testify that God is holy and righteous and that God is light and love. God used this testimony to expose man. As man stands before this testimony, his sinfulness is exposed.

When the law was given, the children of Israel promised to obey God's commandments (Exo. 19:8). Before the children of Israel responded in this way, the atmosphere around Mount Sinai was not threatening. But when the people declared that they would keep God's commandments, the atmosphere changed and became terrifying. God exercised His holiness, and the people were not allowed to approach further. Frightened by the manifestation of God's holiness, the people asked Moses to go to God on their behalf. This indicates that the function of the law is to expose fallen mankind.

As the law functions to expose people, it keeps them. Thus, the law was used by God as a custodian to keep His people, just as a fold keeps a flock of sheep during the winter or during a storm. The time before the coming of Christ can be compared to a winter season. Hence, God used the law as a fold in which to guard the people. In their blindness the Judaizers thought that the law had been given for them to keep. They did not realize that the law was given to guard God's people in custody. Paul makes this basic principle clear in Galatians 3:23: "Before faith came we were guarded under law, being shut up unto the faith which was to be revealed." In verse 24 he goes on to say, "So then the law has become our child-conductor unto Christ that we might be justified out of faith." These verses reveal clearly that the law functions as a custodian. As it exposed man's transgression, it guarded God's people until Christ came.

Now that Christ has come, the law is over. But the foolish Judaizers wanted to go back to the law and try to keep it. They did not realize that the law has a dispensational function. When this function has been fulfilled, the law should not remain any longer. The stubborn Judaizers did not know God's purpose in giving the law. Therefore, even after Christ came, they held to the law. This is against the basic principle of God's economy.

Law Being Over after Christ Came

In 3:25 Paul says, "But since faith has come, we are no longer under a child-conductor." Since Christ has come, the law is over. The Seventh-day Adventists need to learn this basic truth. Now that Christ has come, God's purpose in giving the law has been fulfilled. The law has handed God's people over to Christ. It is rebellion against God's economy to snatch the people away from Christ and lead them back to the law. We must be bold to tell the Seventh-day Adventists that, as Christians, we must not go back to the law. The law has fulfilled its purpose.

Under God's New Testament Economy Man Justified out of Faith in Christ

Under God's New Testament economy, we are not to keep the law. On the contrary, we are justified out of faith in Christ (2:16). We may be so familiar with the expression *justified out of faith in Christ* that we take it for granted. But what actually is faith in Christ, and what does it mean to be justified out of faith in Christ? Faith in Christ denotes an organic union through believing. The proper preaching of the gospel is not the preaching of a doctrine; it is the preaching of the person of the Son of God. The Son of God is the embodiment of the Father and is realized as the Spirit. To preach the gospel is to preach this person. Whenever we preach the gospel, we must impress those who hear us with the living person of the Son of God. No matter what the subject of our gospel message may be, the focal point of our preaching must be this living person.

The faith in Christ out of which believers are justified is related to their appreciation of the person of the Son of God. For example, in Hong Kong there are salesmen who are skillful in presenting jade and its values to people. The more they talk about jade, the more the listeners spontaneously appreciate jade. This appreciation can be compared to what we mean by faith. In our preaching of the gospel, we must present Christ as the real jade. We need to present Christ as the most precious One to people. The more we describe Him and speak of His preciousness, the more something will be infused into the being of the listeners. This infusion will become their faith, and this faith will cause them to respond to our preaching. In this way they will appreciate the person we present to them. This appreciation is their faith in Christ. Out of their appreciation for the Lord Jesus, they will want to possess Him. The Christ who has been preached to them will become in them the faith by which they believe. Faith is Christ preached into us to become our capacity to believe through our appreciation of Him.

When I was young, I heard a very precious gospel message. Although I had been in Christianity for years, I had never heard such a message. After hearing that message, my heart was captured, for some precious element had been infused into my being. I did not try to believe, but I had a spontaneous appreciation for the Lord Jesus. I was willing to give up the world in order to have Him. This is faith.

We may quote Hebrews 11:1 but still have only a doctrinal definition of faith. The genuine experiential definition of faith is that faith is the preciousness of Jesus infused into us. Through such an infusion, we spontaneously have faith in the Lord Jesus. This definition of faith matches our experience. The teaching of doctrine did not impress us with the preciousness of the person of the Son of God. But one day we heard a living message filled with the preciousness of Christ. When this preciousness was infused into us through the preaching of the gospel, we spontaneously began to appreciate the Lord Jesus and to believe in Him. We said, "Lord Jesus, I love You. I treasure You." This is what it means to have faith in Christ.

This faith creates an organic union in which we and Christ are one. Therefore, the expression *out of faith in Christ* actually denotes an organic union accomplished by believing in Christ. The term *in Christ* refers to this organic union. Before we believed in Christ, there was a great separation between us and Christ. We were we, and Christ was Christ. But through believing we were joined to Christ and became one with Him. Now we are in Christ, and Christ is in us. This is an organic union, a union in life.

This union is illustrated by the grafting of a branch of one tree into another tree. Through faith in Christ, we are grafted into Christ. Through this process of spiritual grafting, two lives are grafted and become one.

Many Christians have a shallow understanding of justification by faith. How could Christ be our righteousness if we were not organically united to Him? It is by means of our

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organic union with Christ that God can reckon Christ as our righteousness. Because we and Christ are one, whatever belongs to Him is ours. This is the basis upon which God counts Christ as our righteousness.

Marriage is a helpful illustration of this, although it is inadequate. Suppose a poor woman is united in marriage to a wealthy man. Through this union she participates in the wealth of her husband. In like manner, through our organic union with Christ, we share whatever Christ is and has. As soon as this union takes place, in the eyes of God, Christ becomes us, and we become one with Him. Only in this way can we be justified before God.

Many Christians have a mere doctrinal understanding of justification by faith. According to their concept, Christ is the just One, the righteous One on the throne in the presence of God. When we believe in Christ, God reckons Christ to be our righteousness. This understanding of justification is very shallow. As we have pointed out, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, we need to believe in the Lord Jesus out of an appreciation of His preciousness. As Christ's preciousness is infused into us through the preaching of the gospel, we spontaneously appreciate the Lord and call on Him. This is genuine believing. Through such a believing we and Christ become one. Therefore, God must reckon Him as our righteousness.

When we believed in the Lord Jesus, we had this kind of experience, although we did not have the terminology to explain it. When we heard the gospel, we began to sense the Lord's preciousness. This gave rise to the living faith that joined us to Christ organically. From that time onward, Christ and we became one in life and in reality. Therefore, justification by faith is not merely a matter of position. It is also an organic matter, a matter in life. The organic union with Christ is accomplished spontaneously through the living faith produced by our appreciation of Him. This is to be justified by faith in Christ.

Under God's New Testament Economy Man Having Life and Living by Faith

In God's New Testament economy, man also has life by faith and lives by faith. In Galatians 3:11 Paul says, "The righteous one shall...live by faith." The word *live* here implies to have life. As a result of the organic union, we have life in us. Furthermore, we live by the faith which is our appreciation of the precious Lord Jesus. We not only have life, but we also live by this life.

Under God's New Testament Economy Man Being Dead to Law That He Might Live to God

In 2:19 Paul says, "I through law have died to law that I might live to God." It is very difficult to explain in doctrine what it means to die to the law so that we might live to God. It is most helpful to consider this matter in the light of our experience. Our Christian experience proves that as soon as our organic union with Christ took place, we had the sense that we were dead to the world, to sin, to the self, and to all the obligations of the law. At the same time, we were conscious of the fact that we were alive to God. Probably when we first realized this, we had neither the knowledge nor the terminology to explain it. Perhaps you said, "Lord Jesus, from now on I don't care for anything other than You. I don't care for my education, my work, or my future. I don't even care for my family or my own life. Lord Jesus, I care only for You." This is to be dead to everything in order to live to God.

Under God's New Testament Economy Man Having Christ Living in Him

As those who are dead to law and alive to God, we have Christ living in us. In 2:20 Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." This also is a basic aspect of the truth of the gospel.

Under God's New Testament Economy Man Being a New Creation

Another aspect of the truth of the gospel is that in Christ man is to be a new creation. Galatians 6:15 says, "Neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation is what matters." The new creation is the mingling of God with man. The new creation takes place when the Triune God in Christ through the Spirit is wrought into our being. This is the mingling of divinity with humanity. Living in this new creation far surpasses trying to keep the law. How foolish the Galatian believers were in going back to the law! They should have remained in Christ by faith. In this union with Christ, Christ lives in us, and we become a new creation. Although we remain God's creature, we are nonetheless mingled with God the Creator. Having become one with the Creator, His life becomes our life, and our living becomes His living. This mingling produces a new creation. This is accomplished not by works of law but by faith in Christ.

Organic Union

How can we die to law in order to live to God? Galatians 2:19 indicates that we have already died to law. According to your experience, have you actually died to law, or is this simply a matter of doctrine to you? Furthermore, how can we live to God? If we would answer these questions, we must know the truth, the reality, of the gospel. If we are not actually organically united with Christ but are in ourselves, we are neither dead to law nor are we living to God. Apart from the organic union with Christ, we cannot live to God. On the contrary, we shall be alive to many things other than God.

The concept of organic union is implied in Romans 7. In this chapter Paul uses the illustration of married life. Marriage is a union of life. In this union the wife is one with the husband, and the husband is one with the wife. In Romans 7:4 Paul speaks of our being married to Christ: "So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead." According to this verse, we have been joined, married, to the resurrected Christ. Between Him as the Bridegroom and us as the bride, there is a wonderful union. We are one with Him in person, name, life, and existence. This shows that our Christian life is a life of organic oneness with Christ.

In Romans 11 Paul goes on to use another illustration—the grafting of a branch from one tree into another tree. In Romans 11:17-24 Paul uses the illustration of branches from a wild olive tree being grafted into a cultivated olive tree. As a result of grafting, the branches from the wild olive tree and the cultivated olive tree grow together organically. We, branches of the wild olive tree, have been grafted into Christ, the cultivated olive tree.

Some may say that the cultivated olive tree in Romans 11 refers to Israel. Although this is correct, it is also true that in the Bible the real Israel is always identified with Christ, and Christ with the real Israel. In the eyes of God, there are not two trees on earth. There is just one tree, the olive tree, which includes Christ and God's chosen people. Once we were wild olive branches, but now we have been grafted into Christ. This illustration indicates that the Christian life is not an exchanged life, the exchange of a lower life for a higher one, but a grafted life, the grafting of the human life into the life of Christ. After a branch has been grafted into another tree, it no longer lives by itself. On the contrary, it lives by the tree into which it has been grafted.

Cutting and Joining

In the matter of grafting, there are two main aspects: cutting and joining, or uniting. Without the cutting, there cannot be any grafting. If the branch from one tree is to be grafted into another tree, the branch must first be cut. After the cutting occurs, the

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joining, or union, takes place. This union is organic. Therefore, in grafting we have the cutting, the joining, and the organic union. The cutting corresponds to the death of Christ, and the uniting, to the resurrection of Christ. In the death of Christ, our old life was cut off, and in Christ's resurrection we were united to Him for further growth. The experience of the death of Christ causes us to die to law, whereas resurrection enables us to live to God. Hence, to be dead to law and alive to God implies the death and resurrection of Christ. Only by being grafted into Christ can we be one with Him in His death and resurrection.

In ourselves it is not possible for us to die to law or live to God. However, when the preciousness of the Lord Jesus was infused into us and we began to appreciate Him, we were grafted into Him. On the one hand, we were cut; on the other hand, we were joined to Christ in His resurrection life. After this union took place, we were organically united with Christ. Now we should simply live in this organic union. On the negative side, we have been cut in Christ's death; on the positive side, we have been united to Christ in His resurrection. In this cutting we died not only to the law but to everything other than God. According to Galatians 6, we are dead to the world, particularly to the religious world, through the crucifixion of Christ (vv. 13-14). By the all-inclusive cutting of Christ's all-inclusive death on the cross, we are dead to everything other than God. Because we have been grafted into Christ, His experience has become our history. When He died on the cross, we died in Him. When He was crucified, we were cut off from the wild olive tree. This means that we were cut off from the self, the flesh, the world, religion, and the law with its ordinances. Furthermore, because we have been grafted into Christ, His resurrection has also become our history. Therefore, we can strongly declare that with Christ we have been crucified, buried, and resurrected. What a wonderful history we have!

Having been cut off from everything other than God, we are dead to religion, including Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. One aspect of our history includes the crucifixion by which we have been cut off from everything other than God. But the other aspect of this history includes the resurrection in which we have been united to the Triune God. In this union we are absolutely one with the Triune God.

It is crucial that we all see this vision. However, few Christians have seen it. If we see the vision of this organic union, our living will be changed. We shall realize that we have been cut off from the old source and united to the living One.

Out of Faith in Christ

It is out of faith in Christ that we enter into such an organic union with Him. We have pointed out that faith is the appreciation of Jesus. This appreciation is implied even in Galatians 2:20. In this verse we see that we have been crucified with Christ. This refers to one aspect of our history. We also see that it is Christ who lives in us and that the life that we now live in the flesh we live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself up for us. It is significant that in this verse Paul specifically refers to the Son of God as the One "who loved me." If we do not have any consciousness of Christ's love for us, we shall not be able to have faith in Him. Living faith comes from our sense of His love. This indicates that the faith by which we believe in Him is related to our appreciation of His loveliness. As we sense His preciousness, spontaneously an appreciation for Him wells up within us. This appreciation is our faith. When Paul referred to the Son of God as the One who "loved me and gave Himself up for me," he was filled with appreciation for the Lord Jesus. This appreciation is the very faith about which he speaks in this verse. The life that he lived in the flesh he lived in this faith, the faith of the Son of God.

Whenever we say from the depths of our heart, "Lord Jesus, I love You," our faith is strengthened. Our organic union with Christ is strengthened also. Furthermore, we sense

that we have been cut away from sin, the world, the flesh, and religion. Some who have seen the light concerning the church have not been willing to give up the denominations. But one day they told the Lord how much they loved Him. Spontaneously they had the sense within that they should give up their association with the denominations. Because their organic union with Christ was strengthened, they experienced more cutting. The more we say, "Lord Jesus, I love You," the more we sense that we have been cut off from everything other than Christ.

As we tell the Lord Jesus that we love Him, we experience the operation of genuine faith that is implied in our appreciation of Him. By this faith we realize our union with Christ. In this union we realize that His history is our history; with Christ we have been crucified, buried, and resurrected. We are dead to everything other than God, and we are living to God.

How foolish the Galatians were in turning from the Lord to the law! Did they not realize that they had been cut off from the law and joined to the living God? Through the organic union we are released from slavery under law. In this union we enjoy the freedom that is ours in Christ.

Living to Our Own Laws

In your experience do you know that you are dead to law and alive to God? I do not have much assurance that many Christians realize this. Few Christians are actually living to God. For the most part, they are still living to something other than God, especially to their own kind of law. Instead of caring for God, we may care for our type of law. Different persons have different laws. The young people have their law, and the older ones have their law. This is the reason that the older ones unconsciously condemn the young ones. This condemnation comes from their law. Instead of living to God, we live to our kind of law. We have been cut off from the Mosaic law, but in our experience we have not been cut off from our own law. The fact that we still have our own laws indicates that our love for the Lord is not adequate. We are still short in our appreciation of Him. This lack weakens our faith. However, when our love for the Lord Jesus increases, our condemnation of others will decrease. If the older saints have a greater appreciation of the Lord, their condemnation of the young people will be swallowed up.

Just as the older saints have the tendency to condemn the young ones, the young ones may not appreciate the older ones. Suppose the young saints and the older saints come together for a prayer meeting. It will be difficult for them to work together. Either the older ones will be prevailing and dominating or the younger ones will. The reason for this problem is that the older ones have their law and the younger ones have theirs.

It is easy for us to proclaim in a doctrinal way that we have died to law and that we are now living to God. Our practical experience, however, may be quite different. We may not have died to certain things, and we may not be living to God. Therefore, we need to turn to the Lord and receive more infusion from Him. As a result, we shall have a greater love and appreciation for Him. This will strengthen our faith, which will then operate in us to strengthen our union with Christ. As our organic union with Him is strengthened, we shall experience more cutting. If we all have this experience, in the meetings we shall no longer have the consciousness of the difference between the young ones and the old ones. Instead, we all shall realize that we have been cut away from everything other than the Triune God. Then in the prayer meetings we shall function, not conscious of our age but in the organic union in which we are truly dead to law and living to God.

I am concerned with experience, not with passing on mere knowledge. If we condemn others, we are deficient in our love for the Lord. Instead of living to God, we live to our own law. Those who do not fulfill the requirements of our law we condemn. However,

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if our appreciation of the Lord is adequate, the operating faith will work to strengthen our union with Christ, and we shall experience more cutting. Then in reality we shall have no law. We shall truly be dead to law and alive to God.

Living in the Organic Union

In 2:19 Paul says, "I through law have died to law that I might live to God." The law requires me, a sinner, to die, and according to that requirement, Christ died for me and with me. Hence, I have died in Christ and with Christ through the law. Therefore, the obligation under the law, the relationship to the law, has been terminated. To live to God means to be obligated to God in the divine life. In Christ's death we are through with the law, and in His resurrection we are responsible to God in the resurrection life.

We have become dead to the law so that we may live to God. As long as we still hold to any kind of law, whether the Mosaic law or our self-made law, we cannot live to God. However, when we are cut off from the law by means of the organic union with Christ, we spontaneously live to God.

To be dead to law means that we have been discharged from the law in which we were held. Romans 7:6 says, "Now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held." Having been liberated from obligation to the law, we may now walk in newness of life (6:4). However, walking in newness of life depends upon the cutting that we experience in the organic union with Christ. The more we experience the cutting, the more we live to God and walk in newness of life.

Because we have died to law, we are no longer obligated to keep the law by the striving of the flesh (Gal. 3:3). Whenever we have a certain self-made law, we always strive to keep it by the strength of the flesh, not by the Spirit.

To be living unto God is to be obligated to God in the divine life, to be responsible to God in the resurrection life. In the organic union with Christ, we experience resurrection life. In this resurrection life we are held to God spontaneously and are obligated to Him. This also depends on the organic union.

Because we have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer we who live, but it is Christ who lives in us. We no longer live in the old man, the natural man. Rather, Christ lives in us. Then in resurrection we live in the faith of the Son of God. To live in the faith of the Son of God means to live in the organic union with the Son of God, which comes through our believing in Him.

We live to God with Christ (Rom. 6:8, 10) and through the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25). This is the enjoyment of the processed Triune God in our experience. This experience depends on our appreciation of the loveliness and preciousness of the Lord Jesus.

Presenting Christ in His Loveliness

In principle, in preaching the gospel we should be like the top salesmen, who are able to present something precious in a way that others will appreciate it. We need the proper salesmanship. The Lord Jesus is infinitely precious, but our presentation of Him is not always adequate. Since we do not know how to present the loveliness of the Lord Jesus in a proper way, it is difficult for those who listen to our gospel preaching to have faith in Him. But if we present Him adequately, others will be infused with His preciousness, and they will spontaneously appreciate Him. This appreciation will become their faith, which will operate in them to unite them with the Lord Jesus organically. Here in this organic union we are dead to law and alive to God. **AFQ**

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