

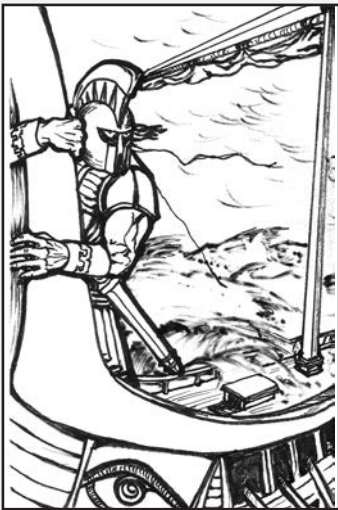
Faith and the New Agreement



SABBATH—JUNE 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 6:14; Romans 6:23; 1 John 5:11, 13; Romans 4:1-7; Leviticus 7:18; Romans 5:1.

MEMORY VERSE: “No man is called [judged to be] a good man by God because he obeys the law. The holy writings say, ‘Those who are right [accepted] with God shall live by faith’ ” (Galatians 3:11, WE).



Many awful things happen to Odysseus on the way back home.

HOMER was a Greek poet. He lived about 700 years before Jesus. Homer wrote a famous story named *The Odyssey*. *The Odyssey* is about a fighter named Odysseus. Odysseus fights in the Trojan war. Odysseus beats the Trojans and robs their city, Troy. Then Odysseus sails home to Ithaca. The trip home takes ten years. Many awful things happen to Odysseus on the way back home: Sailors fight for control of the ship. His ship breaks apart. There are storms, sea monsters, and other hard times. All these troubles keep Odysseus from getting home fast. Finally, the Greek gods decide that Odysseus suffered enough pain. So, the gods let the tired soldier go back to his home and family. The gods agree that the troubles Odysseus suffered were enough punishment for the mistakes Odysseus made.

We are the same as Odysseus in a way. We are trying to get home. Our home is heaven. But there is one way we are not the same as Odysseus. We cannot suffer enough to earn our way home. Heaven is too far from earth for us to think we can get there by our good behavior. We will make it to heaven only because God shows us His loving-favor.

THE CROSS ON CALVARY (Galatians 6:14)

God saved His people under the old agreement in the same way He saves us under the new agreement: by His loving-favor and our faith in His mercy. What if our good behavior or anything else saves us? Then God will owe us everlasting life. But God does not owe us anything. Only people who do not understand sin and how bad it is think God owes us everlasting life. If anyone owes anything, we do. We broke the law of God. So, we must pay the price for breaking it. Of course, we never can pay. But praise God, Jesus paid the price for us.

“Men and women must try to understand more fully the death of Jesus for them. When they do, the saving plan of God will become more important in their lives. Then people will think more about Calvary. These thoughts will fill the heart of the Christian with love for God. Their lips and hearts will be filled with praise to God and to the Lamb, Jesus. Pride cannot live in our hearts when we think about what happened at Calvary. . . . Who can measure the love Jesus felt for sinners as He hung on the cross and suffered for our sins? No one can measure this love.

“Jesus showed that His love was more powerful than death. Jesus saved humans as He hung on the cross. There, He fought an awful war against Satan and his evil angels. But the love of Jesus grew stronger for humans. Then the Father hid His face from Jesus. Jesus cried, ‘My God, My God, why have You left Me alone?’ . . . Finally, Jesus cried out at the end of His fight with evil, ‘It is done.’ Everything that Jesus made heard and felt these words. . . .

“Our hearts should be touched deeply by what happened at Calvary. You have good reason to get excited about this topic. Jesus was excellent in every way. He was innocent in every way, too. He suffered a painful death. He accepted the punishment for the sins of everyone on earth. Our minds never will understand fully His experience on the cross. We should do our best to fill our minds with thoughts about His love anyway. His love will touch the spirit. His love will make our feelings holy. His love will change us fully in every way.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 2, pages 212, 213, adapted.

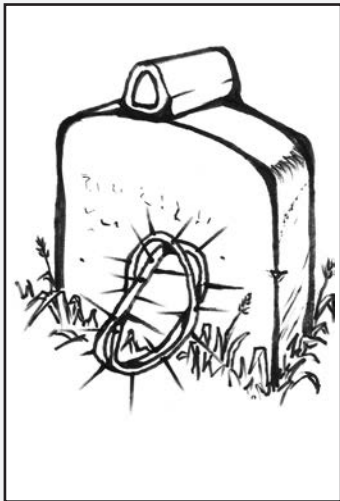
Think about the quotation above from Ellen G. White. Now read Galatians 6:14. Then ask yourself, How can I “brag about . . . the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (NirV)?



“Men and women must try to understand more fully the death of Jesus for them.”

THE NEW AGREEMENT AND THE BLOOD OF JESUS (1 Peter 1:18, 19)

Read 1 Peter 1:18, 19. What does Peter mean when he says Jesus bought us?



Because of the blood of Jesus, God can promise us everlasting life. He also can buy us from sin and death.

Peter says we were bought with the blood of Jesus. The idea of “buying” helps us remember the way slaves were made free in Bible times. Slaves were made free in Bible times when someone paid a price for them. Often, the person paying the price was a family member. In the same way, Jesus bought us from the slavery of sin and death. Jesus paid the price for our freedom with His precious blood. All the Bible agreements are built on this Bible truth. We must have the blood of Jesus. Without the blood of Jesus, God cannot keep the deal He made with His children: to give everlasting life to everyone who believes.

Look up these verses: Romans 6:23 and 1 John 5:11, 13. What same message do all these verses show?

We have the promise of everlasting life because of Jesus. Only Jesus can fix the problem that caused us to lose everlasting life in the first place. How did Jesus fix the problem? He lived and died for us. His holy life is the only thing that can pay the price we owe to God for breaking His law. This price shows us that the separation sin caused between us and God is very big. What if an angel or a human can pay the price for our breaking the law of God? Then the law of God is cheap, right? Only Someone who is the same as God Himself can pay the price. Only God Himself can make us free from the punishment we earned when we broke the law. Blood makes the promises of the agreement legal. God needs blood to keep His promises to us. Because of blood, God can promise us everlasting life. He also can buy us from sin and death.

Make a picture of this story in your mind: a child in an art museum throws a balloon filled with ink at a famous painting. The ink spoils the painting. The painting is worth millions of dollars. The parents of the child are too poor. They cannot hope to pay the price that they owe to the museum. How does this story help us understand the sin problem and why we cannot hope to fix it ourselves? Why is the Lord Himself the only One who can pay the price we owe?

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM: PART 1 (Genesis 15:6)

“Abram believed the LORD. The LORD was pleased with Abram because he believed. So Abram’s faith made him right [accepted] with the LORD” (Genesis 15:6, NlrV).

Genesis 15:6 is one of the most powerful verses in the Bible. This verse shows us the most important Bible truth: that we are saved by the mercy of God. God accepts us because of our faith in Jesus, His Son. Moses wrote this Bible truth many thousands of years before Paul wrote about it in Romans. Genesis 15:6 proves that God saves us in the same way, from Eden to this day.

Genesis 15:6 helps us understand that the faith of Abram is very big. He believes in the promise of God. God will give Abram a son, even if Abram is too old to have one. The faith of Abram shows us he understands that he is helpless in every way. His faith also shows us we must give ourselves fully to God. We must not trust ourselves. This faith leads us to fully obey God in everything. Abram had this faith. God accepted Abram because of it.

Why does the Bible say that “Abram’s faith made him right [accepted] with the LORD”? Was Abram himself holy or right with God before God accepted him? What does Abram do soon after God announces that Abram is accepted with the Lord?

Abram lives a life of faith and obedience. But Abram does not always live a life of perfect faith and perfect obedience. At times, Abram shows he is weak in both things. (Is that the same as anyone you know?) So, we see that God accepts us because of our faith and not because of our own good behavior. God forgives our past sins. More than that, God replaces the record of our past sins with the holy life of Jesus. So, now the obedience and faith of Jesus replace our old life of law breaking. Then God looks at us and sees Jesus and His perfect life. That is why God can announce that we are holy in His eyes. God does this with Abram. God will do the same thing for everyone who comes to Him with “the faith of Abraham” (Romans 4:16, KJV).

Read Romans 4:1–7. Look at what Paul says in Romans 4:1–7 about Genesis 15:6. Pray over these verses. Write in your own words what these verses say to you.



God looks at us and sees Jesus and His perfect life.

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM: PART 2 (Leviticus 7:18)

Let us look at Genesis 15:6 in different Bibles. The NLV says, “Then Abram believed in the Lord, and that made him right [accepted] with God.” The NLT writes it this way: “And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted [announced; accepted] him as righteous [holy] because of his faith.” These verses show us how God makes us right with Him. We believe the Lord. Then God replaces the past record of our life of sin with the perfect life of Jesus.

Moses writes “made right” in other verses in his books. In these verses, Moses shows us examples of people or things that are “accepted” or “thought of” as something they are not. In one example, Rachel and Leah say their father “ ‘think[s] of us as strangers’ ” (Genesis 31:15, NLV). Of course, Rachel and Leah are really his daughters. In another example, Moses talks about the offering that the Levite must bring to God. Moses tells the Levite, “ ‘Your offering will be considered [accepted by God] as if you gave grain [corn]’ ” (Numbers 18:27, NIV). Of course, the offering is really not corn.



We are not born holy.

We are not born holy. But God accepts us as holy because of our faith in His Son. Write in your own words what this wonderful Bible truth means to you.

The important truth of the Bible is that God accepts us as holy. We are accepted as holy because of our faith in the things Jesus does for us. We are not accepted as holy because of anything we ourselves do. This is what being made holy by our faith in Jesus really means. But does our faith itself make us holy? Of course not! Our faith allows God to give us the perfect life of Jesus. This Bible truth is the most beautiful teaching in all of Christianity. This teaching is a beautiful mystery that we cannot fully understand. So, we must accept this teaching in faith. All we believe as Christians comes from this wonderful teaching. God accepts us as holy in His eyes by our faith in His Son, Jesus. Everything else in the Christian life comes from this beautiful Bible truth: our obedience, living a holy life, becoming the same as Jesus in our hearts, and showing other people His love.

What if someone says to you, “I want to be a Christian so much. But I do not feel holy.” How do you answer him or her?

TRUSTING IN THE PROMISES (Psalm 34:8)

There is a story about the famous Cardinal Bellarmine. A cardinal is an important religious leader in the Roman Catholic Church. All his life, Cardinal Bellarmine fought against the Bible truth that God saves us only because of our faith in Jesus. God does not save us because of our own good behavior. As Cardinal Bellarmine lay dying, someone brought him a crucifix. A crucifix is a cross with a carving of Jesus on it. Cardinal Bellarmine also was offered the good works of dead Catholics to help him feel safe before he died. But Bellarmine said, “Take those things away. I think it is better to trust in Jesus and His death for me on the cross.”

Many people are the same as Cardinal Bellarmine. At the end of their lives, they look back over their pasts. They see how foolish and useless their own good behavior and actions were. These things cannot save them or earn them everlasting life with a holy God. These people see how much they need the holy life of Jesus to save them.

The good news is that we do not need to wait for death to come for us before we feel sure that Jesus saves us.

Look at the verses below. Then answer the question asked with each verse about how we keep our friendship with God strong:

1. Psalm 34:8 (How can you “taste” that God is good?)
2. Matthew 11:30 (What has Jesus done for us that makes accepting His teachings easy and serving Him easy, too?)
3. Romans 5:1 (Jesus brings us back to God. Jesus makes it possible for us to be friends with God again. How does this work that Jesus does for us bring us peace?)
4. Philippians 2:7, 8 (What has the life and death of Jesus given you?)

Ask yourself: What am I doing now to make my friendship with God stronger? What am I doing to hurt my friendship with God? What changes do I need to make?



“Take those things away. I think it is better to trust in Jesus and His death for me on the cross.”



“God accepts us as if we did not sin.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The sinner can be accepted by God only by faith. The sinner brings to God the perfect obedience of Jesus. The Lord accepts the perfect obedience of Jesus in place of the disobedient life of the sinner. God accepts the holy life of Jesus in place of our mistakes. God accepts and pardons us. Then God announces that we are holy. God accepts us as if we did not sin. God loves us as He loves His own Son. This is how God accepts us by our faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 367, adapted.

“We must turn from sin and by faith accept Jesus as our Savior. Then the Lord will pardon our sins. He also will not punish us for breaking the law. . . . Then God does another work in our lives. He makes us holy. He makes us in our hearts the same as Jesus. This work happens over a lifetime. We must be made holy by Bible truth. This work also happens by our faith. Only the loving-favor of Jesus can change our lives and make us holy.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, page 191, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How is living faith different from a faith that is dead? (Read James 2:17, 18 for the answer.) James shows us that our having a living faith comes from our doing good things or obeying God. Now read Romans 16:26. Look at what Paul says in this verse about obeying God. What connection is there between believing or trusting God and obeying Him? Why is obedience so important to our having the living faith James talks about?
- ② We are saved only by the perfect life of Jesus. We are not saved by anything we do. So, some people think that we can behave any way we want. Why does what we do matter? How can you answer the person who thinks we can do whatever we want because our good behavior cannot save us?
- ③ “God does not reward us with everlasting life because of any good thing we do. . . . The Christian cannot bring his behavior as an offering to God and ask God to save him.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, page 199, adapted. Think about this quotation from Ellen G. White as you answer this question: Why is our good behavior so important to our Christian experience?

Summary: Old agreement, new agreement: Jesus paid the price we owed to God for breaking His holy law. So, now we can stand holy in the eyes of God.