

Did Ellen White Reverse Waggoner and Jones's 1888 Message?

A sincere questionnaire writes:

Sister Ellen G. White wrote that *the conditions of salvation are ever the same. Life, eternal life, is for all who will obey God's law, and also did that under the new covenant, the conditions by which eternal life may be gained are the same as under the old--perfect obedience. Under the old covenant, there were many offenses of a daring, presumptuous character, for which there was no atonement specified by law.*

Did Ellen White reverse Waggoner and Jones's 1888 Message? How can I understand these passages? Thank you so much!

(Reply by Sabbath School Today)

One group (I) denies that salvation is totally by grace through faith, for they say there is merit in “sanctified” works of obedience (“works” that Christ does in us).

They cite Ellen White statements that *appear* to say that salvation is by faith *plus* by obedience. They say, “Religious activity produced by conversion [is] indeed the means by which God saves us. The Bible is exceedingly clear that what the Spirit does within us is part of the *means* (not merely the fruits) of our salvation” (their emphasis).

Another group (II), sees the Bible saying, “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” (Eph. 2:8, 9). To them, even the faith “through” which we are “saved” is the gift of God, so that our salvation is not “of works,” even “sanctified.”

Ellen White predicted that “mind will be arrayed against mind” (TM 407). Shades of Minneapolis! We are back where “we” were over a century ago! The contention then was so confusing that many didn’t know which way to go. Some fear that Ellen White is divided against herself, supporting salvation by grace through faith and not of works, but other times *apparently* supporting the opposite—that salvation is not by grace alone but by our own obedience.

GROUP I has what appears on the surface as impressive Bible and Ellen White support.

(a) The Bible: “The doers of the law shall be justified” (Rom. 2:13; sounds like justification by works). Again: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12, 13; they interpret this to mean that we must work *for* our salvation). And: “By works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:21-

24).

But there is more: “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13; “sanctification” is understood as our obedience to the law, and God’s “choice” is seen to depend on it). Again: “According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5; “the washing” is understood as character transformation as the “means” of our salvation, not “merely” its “fruit”). Again: “[Christ] became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9, apparently not those who *believe* Him).

(b) *On the surface*, Ellen White snippet quotes seem to give support for the faith-plus-works-salvation idea:

“The effort that man makes in his own strength to obtain salvation is represented by the offering of Cain But that which is wrought through faith is acceptable to God” (1SM 364; “acceptable” is understood as justification, so this is taken to mean that man’s sanctified “work” (“is wrought”) precedes and achieves his justification).

“The unconditional pardon of sin never has been, and never will be” (PP 522; in other words, there is no pardon without our works; we will look at this later).

“Let none say there are no conditions to salvation” (13MR 22; the “conditions” are understood to be our “sanctified” works).

“He attends us every step of the way through, if we are willing to be saved in Christ’s appointed way, through obedience to His requirements” (TDG 72; it seems that salvation is by obedience, not by faith alone).

“We are saved by climbing round after round of the ladder . . .” (6T 147; again, the “climbing” is presumably by works).

“Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us” (SC 63; Group I emphasize the second clause as meritorious “works”).

“Obedience is the condition of obtaining eternal life” (7BC 972).

“Eternal life is given to us on the condition that we obey the commandments of God” (R&H, June 26, 1900).

“Implicit obedience is the condition of eternal life” (R&H, Nov 15, 1899; same thing).

“You are accepted in the Beloved on condition of obedience to the commandments of your Creator” (ST, Dec. 15, 1887; but DA 113 says “we were accepted in the

Beloved” at Christ’s baptism when the Father accepted Him!).

“Through Jesus there is divine sympathy between God and the human beings who, through obedience, are accepted in the Beloved” (R&H, May 5, 1898; apparently even His “sympathy” depends on our success in doing good works).

Before we jump to a conclusion we must let Ellen White explain herself in her context, and also let Scripture explain itself likewise.

GROUP II understands that salvation is by grace through faith alone; they see impressive evidence for that view.

(a) The Bible. They understand Galatians contradicts the ideas of Group I: “A man is not justified by works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. . . . I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (2:16, 21). The apostle James *appears on the surface* to contradict this directly, but if we believe in inspiration of the Bible that seems difficult.

“We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. . . . Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law. . . . To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness It is of faith, that it might be by grace” (Rom. 3:28, 31; 4:5, 16).

“Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost [completely] that come unto God by him” (Heb. 7:25). To say that Christ does not save *completely*, but that we add to His saving work by our own “sanctified” good works, is the essence of the Council of Trent teaching of Romanism.

(b) The Ellen White evidence. “The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations, almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. . . . Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. . . . Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by

any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus; it is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this conflict is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him” (FW 18-20; MS. 36, 1890).

“Let no one take the limited, narrow position that any of the works of man can help in the least possible way to liquidate the debt of his transgression. This is a fatal deception. . . . This matter is so dimly comprehended that thousands upon thousands claiming to be sons of God are children of the wicked one, because they will depend on their own works. God always demanded good works, the law demands it, but because man placed himself in sin where his good works were valueless, Jesus’ righteousness alone can avail” (MS. 50, 1900; 6BC 1071).

Group I disparage these statements as irrelevant because they condemn *our* good works, not the good works the Holy Spirit motivates us to do. But what is Ellen White truly saying?

Can the contrasting views of Groups I and II be reconciled?

If not, the church must be permanently divided over this vital issue. Since justification is the very heart and soul of Christian teaching, what message do we as a church have for the world? Are the views of Group II “the omega of apostasy”?

If “we have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history” (LS 196), the 1888 message and history alone can provide the key to resolve this problem.

Like Group I, prominent leaders in 1888 sincerely believed that salvation was by faith plus by good works. The “most precious message” God sent us unequivocally declared that salvation is *totally* by grace through faith, and that even an eternity of “sanctified” works could never in the least “iota” be the “means” of our salvation. Jesus alone is “the Savior of the world.” There are no assistant saviors, and there are no do-it-yourself salvation kits.

When the 1888 messengers taught that justification is by faith alone they did not mean the shallow definition of faith held by the Sunday-keeping Evangelicals. To Jones and Waggoner, true faith is more than a self-centered, fear-induced “trust.” It is a heart-appreciation of the *agape*-love that Jesus demonstrated in His sacrifice, something almost unknown in “Babylon.” Such faith “works” and motivates to full obedience to all the commandments of God and to total dedication to Christ. In this light, faith and works are like two sides of a single pane of window glass; if there is faith as a response to Calvary, the other side of the pane of glass is a natural

outpouring of obedience in a life totally changed by grace. But never does our obedience add to Christ as the complete Savior or become a “means” of salvation.

Obedience is much-needed evidence to prove both now and in the final judgment that the repentant sinner’s faith is genuine. But the evidence is not *the means* of the salvation that produced it!

Let’s examine the Bible texts cited by Group I.

(a) James and Paul do not oppose each other. James says that a dead faith doesn’t “work;” it’s no good. He does not oppose genuine justification by living faith *alone*. If someone claims at the judgment, “I have faith!” but he has no “works” to prove it, his claim is “vain” and “profits” him nothing. With this insight understood, *all the other texts cited by Group I as supporting a faith-plus-works justification dissolve in total harmony with the teaching of justification-by-faith-alone*.

It’s pathetic that any Seventh-day Adventists a century after Minneapolis should use James to try to counteract Paul or John, or even to weaken Paul’s clear teaching of *agape* and grace. (Waggoner clearly harmonized James and Paul; see “*Lightened With His Glory*,” pp. 36, 37).

(b) To “work out your own salvation” is specifically not work for it. The context of Philippians 2:5-13 is Christ’s amazing condescension in stepping down “even [to] the death of the cross,” the second death for “every man” thus redeeming and saving *the world* by His sacrifice (MLT 323). “Therefore” in view of this great salvation *given you* as a gift in Christ, let it flow out from you in blessing others. Don’t dam up the stream! Far from teaching that we are to *work for* our own salvation, Paul says *work for somebody else’s salvation*, profoundly thankful for your own given you freely “in Christ.”

Let’s examine the Ellen White statements used by Group I.

We must not take snippets out of her context to force her to teach the essence of Roman Catholicism.

(a) By those statements about “obedience” Ellen White is not refuting the 1888 message. She supports that message by some 370 statements of endorsement. Her MS. 36, 1890 (see above) clarifies the issue with strong language (“salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone;” “faith and works [can’t] purchase the gift of salvation for anyone;” “if any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic”). But if her statements about “obedience” were not intended to refute the 1888 message of Jones and Waggoner, then why did she make them?

(b) She was seeking to refute the claims of antinomian opponents of the Sabbath.

They taught that salvation by faith alone does away with the law of God. She also wanted to refute any subtle antinomianism that might arise within the remnant church. The 1888 message does not lessen the importance of obedience to the law, but places it in its true light and defines obedience as *agape* (Rom. 13:10). She saw in the 1888 message a fresh approach that Adventists had not employed before 1888 (“we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa” R&H, March 11, 1890). By uplifting the cross in its true light, showing that Christ died the second death of every man and how only *agape* is “the fulfilling of the law,” sincere Sunday-keepers would see obedience to the law in a new light. The motivation of fear would be replaced by the motivation imposed by grace. Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists would become foremost in uplifting Christ on His cross. The result, as sure as day follows night? He would “draw all unto” Himself (cf. John 8:32). “Then a multitude not of their faith . . . will unite with them in serving the Redeemer” (R&H, Feb.25, 1902).

(c) In every instance where the “obedience” statements are cited above, in close context she pleads for righteousness by faith in Christ. We do her a great disservice to wrest those statements from their context to force her to teach Roman Catholic “justification by faith” plus by “sanctified” works. Consistently her idea is that justification is by a faith *which works*. The “works” is a verb and not a noun. This is the reason why eight years after Minneapolis she declared of the 1888 message that its fruit “is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God” (TM 92). In every instance where she speaks of “obedience” her basic idea is that faith alone *produces* it; it proves that the faith is genuine and *in that sense* she says that salvation is by obedience.

She sensed that if we can be humbled and hungry enough to learn to proclaim justification by faith in its proper light, *people will begin to keep the Sabbath!* Thus the message will go “as fire in the stubble!” “A large number [will] take their stand” (GC 612).

(d) The “unconditional pardon of sin [which] never has been and never can be” is not the idea that man’s “sanctified” works or merit can effect pardon for his sin. *The supreme “condition” for the “pardon of sin” is the shedding of the blood of the Son of God.* “Without shedding of blood is no remission” of sin” (Heb. 9:22). Nothing less can secure the pardon that remits the sin itself, because nothing else can arouse the sinful human heart to realize the heinous character of sin. Can anyone sing at last, “Yes, worthy is the Lamb that was slain but worthy also am I because I did my part—I kept the commandments”? Says Ellen White: “If you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, the proposition would be rejected as

treason. . . . The idea of doing anything to merit the grace of pardon is fallacy from beginning to end” (FW 24).

A heart appreciation for the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the *agape* of Christ” displayed at His cross will motivate the honest heart to no end of obedience, good works, exertions, sacrifices, struggles, endurances, hardships, deprivations, poverty, reproach, sufferings, pain, and even martyrdom, for Christ’s sake. And in it all the believer will “take pleasure” as did Paul (2 Cor. 12:10). The reason why Jesus said, in Matthew 11:30, it’s easy to be saved and hard to be lost is the “constraint” of *agape*. In fact, *agape* is the key idea that distinguishes the 1888 concepts from Romanism, and also distinguishes between Groups I and II within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Why the Old Covenant Paralyzes the Church

What impresses many people with the beauty of the 1888 message is its unique view of the new covenant. It’s “most precious Good News.”

The special message that “the Lord in His great mercy sent” to us created much opposition because of that presentation of the two covenants. It was Good News better than it seemed the brethren at the time wanted to grasp. The opposition became most intense during meetings held in 1890, but continued on through to the 20th century. Even today confusion is widely prevalent.

The Lord Jesus promised that He would “pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, . . . even the Spirit of truth. . . . I will not leave you comfortless [orphans, Greek]; I will come to you” (John 14:16-18). This promise has been fulfilled in the gift of the Holy Spirit, whose work is to “guide [us] into all truth” (16:13).

Seventh-day Adventists believe that this “gift” has been partially manifested in the gift of prophecy in the work of Ellen G. White. The Lord revealed to her which side she should stand on in this conflict over the two covenants. In a vision given her in 1890 she was shown:

“Since I made the statement last Sabbath that the view of the covenants as it had been taught by Brother Waggoner was truth, it seems that great relief has come to many minds” (Letter 30, 1890). Writing soon to Uriah Smith and others, she said, “Night before last I was shown that evidences in regard to the covenants were clear and convincing. Yourself, Dan Jones [General Conference Secretary, not A. T. Jones], Brother Porter and others are spending your investigative powers for naught to produce a position on the covenants to vary from the position that Brother Waggoner has presented” (Letter 59, 1890).

Ellen White’s testimony is vital, but she has always wanted us to rely primarily on

Bible evidence on this important subject. Waggoner and Jones had been enabled by the Holy Spirit to break through the fog that had enclosed this subject for many centuries. The Bible became clear to them once they grasped the import of the theme of the great controversy between Christ and Satan and saw justification by faith in this light. Simply and briefly stated, the 1888 view is this:

- (a) The New Covenant is the promises of God.
- (b) The Old Covenant is the promises of the people.

Then why this massive confusion?

Inherited from centuries of controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism, the general Christian view of the two covenants was that they are two “dispensations.” Thus it was assumed that God had invented the old covenant to be in force up until the time of Christ, when a new “dispensation” should begin as the first manifestation of the new covenant.

All kinds of perplexities and self-contradictions develop as the result of this “dispensational” view. Among us, at the time of the 1888 General Conference Session, it was difficult to find any two of our ministerial leaders who could agree on the details.

Into this situation stepped the “special messengers” whom the Lord had “sent” in 1888. They forthwith declared that the “dispensational” idea is not taught in the Bible. The two covenants are not matters of time, or dispensation; they run side by side all through history since the fall of man at the Garden of Eden. They are matters of heart-conviction. It was possible for people living in Old Testament times to be living under the new covenant if they had true faith in Christ; it is possible for us living today to be under the old covenant if we don’t understand how good God’s Good News is.

Waggoner’s clearest presentations of this subject are found in his two books, *The Glad Tidings* (Pacific Press, 1900), and *The Everlasting Covenant* (a series of *Present Truth* articles published in the 1890s).

The salient points are these:

- (a) The original new covenant promise was what God promised in Genesis 3:15—a Savior who would bruise the head of our enemy, Satan. God made no mention that Adam and Eve were to promise anything in return.
- (b) God’s promise to Noah to save him and his family from the flood was a renewal of the new covenant. Noah preached “righteousness by faith” (Heb. 11:7). Again, there is no mention of any promise that God exacted from Noah.
- (c) Paul cites God’s promises to Abraham as the clearest statement of the new

covenant (Gal.3:8-18). There are seven fantastic promises in Genesis 12:2, 3, all for Abraham and his descendants by faith:

- [1] “I will make of thee a great nation;
- [2] and I will bless thee,
- [3] and I will make thy name great;
- [4] and thou shalt be a blessing:
- [5] And I will bless them that bless thee,
- [6] and curse him that curseth thee:
- [7] and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

Later (13:14-17; 15:5) God promised to give Abraham not only the land of Canaan, but the whole earth for his “everlasting possession,” which Waggoner wryly remarked must include also everlasting life or he couldn’t enjoy it and that meant also it must include the righteousness by faith necessary to inherit it (*The Glad Tidings*, p. 72). In other words, in Waggoner’s view (which Ellen White endorsed by vision), the new covenant is the essence of the “everlasting gospel,” the righteousness by faith, which is the “third angel’s message,” something that the popular Sunday-keeping churches (and Seventh Day Baptists) have not as yet clearly understood.

This was why in her enthusiasm she declared this message of the new covenant to be “the beginning” of the light which should lighten the earth with glory in the final Loud Cry (*Review and Herald*, Nov. 22, 1892.)

Waggoner and Jones were impressed that when the Lord made those fantastic seven promises (and others) to Abraham, He did not ask Abraham to make the same kind of promises in return. Instead, He asked Abraham to believe that His word would come to pass. They insisted that when the Lord “makes a covenant,” it’s a one-sided promise on His part (*ibid.*, p. 71). Our response to His promises to us is not one in which we stand on equal footing, eye to eye, fulfilling a contract between equals. Our faith commitment comes about as a result of and in dependence upon His promises, which are all yes and amen in Christ. This is where the problems arose. The same spirit that led the Galatians to insist that they could stand on a par with God in the plan of salvation led the brethren to insist that God’s promises must be mutually balanced by our own efforts.

Waggoner also observed that the Bible says that “after the Flood, God made a ‘covenant’ with every beast of theme earth, and with every fowl, but the beasts and the birds did not promise anything in return. (Genesis 9:9-16). They simply received the favor at the hand of God. That is all we can do—receive. God

promises us everything that we need, and more than we can ask or think, as a gift. We give Him ourselves, that is nothing. And He gives us Himself, that is, everything. That which makes all the trouble [here he refers to the opposition he has been receiving from the brethren] is that even when men are willing to recognize the Lord at all, they want to make bargains with Him. They want it to be an equal, ‘mutual’ affair—a transaction in which they can consider themselves on a par with God. But whoever deals with God must deal with Him on His own terms, that is, on a basis of fact—that we have nothing, and are nothing, and He has everything and is everything and gives everything” (*The Glad Tidings*, p. 71).

This kind of teaching aroused intense opposition, because as Ellen White later explained, “it lays the glory of man in the dust.” The believer in Christ glories in nothing except the cross of Jesus Christ by which the world is crucified to him and he unto the world (cf. Gal. 6:14). Self “is crucified with Christ;” and Ellen White explained that that was the problem why our brethren reacted against this “most precious message.” But they did not realize it at the time, because, as she said, they did not know their own hearts (see for example, MS. 2, 1890; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 64, *Review and Herald*, April 11, 1893).

But how does the old covenant fit into the picture?

The apostle Paul was the first biblical writer who clearly discerned the significance of Israel’s history in the light of the two covenants. In Romans 4 he tells us some six times that Abraham is “our father,” yes, “the father of all them that believe” (vss. 11-18). In Galatians 3 and 4 he tells the story of the old covenant:

(a) Abraham’s descendants 430 years later did not have his faith. They had come out of slavery in Egypt, on their way to the Promised Land, which God had promised they could have in a short time of travel there.

(b) On the way He gave them the same promises He had given to Abraham: “I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burden of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord” (Ex. 6:6-8). Note that the Lord did not ask for them to make any promise in return. But the next verse says, “They hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.” This unbelief set them up for the tragedy of making a vain old covenant promise.

(c) At Mount Sinai God sought to renew the same promises He had made to Abraham: “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant [My promise, according to Waggoner], then

ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people, . . . and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (19:3-6).

The Hebrew word translated “obey” is *shamea*, which means to listen attentively with faith, not with objections or unbelief. The Hebrew word translated as “keep” is *shamar*, which means to keep with the sense of ‘treasuring’ something. It is used of Adam being “put into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15).

(d) In other words, if Israel were to keep or treasure the promises made to their “father Abraham” as he believed them, then they would become the greatest nation on earth. There would be no cruel world empires to arise such as Assyria, Babylon, or Rome, no Stalin or Hitler. Again there is no mention of any promise the Lord asked Israel to make in return. What He wanted was the faith which Abraham showed. Such faith makes a choice, a commitment, a dedication.

(e) But they took it upon themselves to promise: “All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do” (Ex. 19:8). Of themselves, these were good words, and some believe that there is nothing wrong with Israel saying those words. But Ellen White tells us that these words were spoken in their “self-righteousness” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372). And of course we know that all self-righteousness is sin. Thus unbelieving Israel themselves formed the old covenant.

(f) In a matter of weeks they had broken their promises and were worshipping a golden calf (32:1-6). Thus began a detour, says Paul in Galatians 3:22-24, that lasted for many centuries, that should in God's plan finally lead them back to where Abraham their father had been, to be “justified by faith.” The history of Israel was up and down, mostly down, until good King Josiah’s sons led the kingdom of Judah into total ruin in 586 B. C. Finally, the enslaving nature of the old covenant (Paul says that it “genders to bondage,” vs. 24), led Israel to reject and crucify their Messiah.

Righteousness does not come by works, or by our promising to keep God’s law.

It comes “through faith,” that is, a humble heart that appreciates God’s grace. (Humility is a vital component of faith, for we read, Hab. 2:4: “Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”) The grace of God is given freely to all men (Rom. 3:23, 24; Titus 2:11), and therefore “every man [is given] the measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). Christ died for the world; He redeemed the human race; “in Him” God has promised the gift of everlasting life to all who will receive it as a gift, not as something they think they must earn by good works or by promises to obey.

Now here’s a question. Isn’t it all right to promise to obey God’s law? Shouldn’t we lead our children to promise God that they will always be faithful? Don’t their

promises help them to remain faithful? Vows and promises to God are not inherently wrong, but we must be ever so careful that we are not making them in a spirit of self-dependence. If we think that we can make the promise and keep it, then we are no different than those self-righteous Hebrews.

As Ellen White states the matter, we humans are not good at keeping our promises. And when we break them (as we certainly will if they are made in self-righteousness) then we sink ourselves into unnecessary discouragement. God hasn't asked for us to make or keep promises; He has asked us to believe that He is the real promise Keeper. Says *Steps to Christ*: "You are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you. What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. You can choose to serve Him" (p. 47).

Most often we sing hymns carelessly, not realizing what the lyrics say. For example, take that lovely hymn of consecration, "O Jesus, I Have Promised" (Hymnal, #331). Many sing this hymn with an old covenant mind-set, not realizing that apart from God's powerful new covenant promises we are powerless to do what we are singing. We must have "grace to follow" (last line, third stanza)! To remind ourselves of this, just change one word and sing: "O Jesus, I Have Chosen."

Many are the youth who have vainly promised in Weeks of Prayer to serve the Lord faithfully. Sometimes the effects last a week or two; but then comes a fall. And so, many then say, as Dr. Roger Dudley has documented in his scientific studies of our youth, "It's too hard; I guess I'm not cut out to go to heaven" (*Why [Our] Teenagers Reject Religion*, Review and Herald, 1978, pp. 9, 17). Thus again the old covenant demonstrates its true nature in "gendering to bondage."

When we do make promises to God, when can we be sure that there is no "self-dependence" in our "promise"? We don't know ourselves that well! Abraham's response to God's promises was the simple Hebrew word AMEN, which implies a heart-felt appreciation, a heart-agreement with God, a heart-commitment to Him just as when we say "amen" to something we heartily agree with. That's what God wants from us, for He knows that it will also produce all the obedience the law requires.

When by faith we are totally reliant upon God's power and on His promise of

salvation, we may vow with Jacob “then shall the LORD be my God” (Gen. 28:21). But this is not a promise like Peter made before he denied Christ! This is a choice to believe, a choice to receive, a choice to yield the heart to God. That’s what *Steps to Christ*, page 47, enjoins upon us!

The new covenant was the central pillar in the “most precious message” of 1888. May its truth be resurrected in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.