

Christ Saved the Human Race

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In what sense can we speak of Christ's saving the world? Does it mean His death actually redeems all persons, regardless of faith or its absence? Does it mean all are redeemed but only an elect group receives the benefit?

There are a couple of places in the writings of Ellen G. White where she states that Christ saved the world. Those statements have been used to argue that she believed that at the cross Jesus legally saved the whole human race. Let us look at them:

“Christ was tempted by Satan in a hundredfold severer manner than was Adam, and under circumstances in every way more trying. The deceiver presented himself as an angel of light, but Christ withstood his temptations. He redeemed Adam’s disgraceful fall, and saved the world. There is hope for all who will come to Christ, and receive Him as their personal Saviour.”[1]

That was written in 1898, and seems to be the first time she used the expression “saved the world.” The sentence that follows that statement is very important in order to properly understand what she meant. Since Christ saved the world, “there is hope for all who will come to Christ, and receive Him as their personal Saviour.” It is clear that when she says that Christ “saved the world” she does not mean that the whole human race was saved. What then does she mean? Look at the quotation again. It describes Satan’s attack against Christ and affirms that “Christ withstood his temptations.” He defeated Satan! The result of that victory was that “he redeemed Adam’s disgraceful fall, and saved the world.” He paid the ransom required as the result of Adam’s fall, and saved the world in the sense that now there is hope for all who come to Christ, and receive him as their personal Savior.

In the next couple of paragraphs she proceeds to explain in more detail what she means. She discusses the incarnation of Christ, how he became acquainted with temptations and trials, placing himself among the poor in order to understand their afflictions. Then she says,

“Before the heavenly universe, He unfolded the great salvation that His righteousness would bring to men, if they would accept it,—an inheritance among the saints and angels, in the presence of God.”[2]

She is now placing the emphasis on the results of the salvation he “would bring to men, if they would accept it.” He brings salvation but humans have to accept it or it is not theirs at all. How did he bring that salvation to us? She immediately explains it:

“With His human arm Christ encircled the race, while with His divine arm He grasped the throne of the Infinite, uniting finite man with the infinite God. By transgression the world had been divorced from heaven. Christ bridged the gulf, and connected earth with heaven. In human nature He maintained the purity of His divine character. . . . He came to impart His own divine nature, His own image, to the repentant, believing soul.”[3]

The alienation of humans from God, which was the result of the fall, came to an end through Christ. He became a living bridge between God and humans because he was both, human and divine. This was Christ’s objective act of salvation. He made it possible for human beings to be united with God; he “connected earth with heaven.” But only repentant sinners can benefit from that salvation. That is what she meant when she said that Christ “saved the world.”

In June 2, 1898, she addressed again the same subject and developed it a little more. However, the basic message continued to be the same. Here is what she wrote.

“Christ was tempted by Satan in a hundredfold severer manner than was Adam, and under circumstances in every way more trying. The deceiver presented himself as an angel of light, but Christ withstood his temptations. He redeemed Adam’s disgraceful fall, and saved the world.

With his human arm, Christ encircled the race, while with his divine arm, he grasped the throne of the Infinite, uniting finite man with the infinite God. He bridged the gulf that sin had made, and connected earth with heaven. In his human nature he maintained the purity of his divine character. He lived the law of God, and honored it in a world of transgression, revealing to the heavenly universe, to Satan, and to all the fallen sons and daughters of Adam, that through his grace, humanity can keep the law of God. He came to impart his own divine nature, his own image, to the repentant, believing soul.

There is hope for all who will come to Christ and receive him as their personal Saviour. The faith that lays hold upon Christ will work by love and purify the soul.”[4]

The same ideas found in the previous article are found in this one. First, Christ was tempted but he overcame Satan. Second, by overcoming Satan he “redeemed Adam’s disgraceful fall, and saved the world.” The connection between the act of redemption and salvation is the same as in the previous article. Third, she immediately proceeds to explain what she meant when she said that Christ “saved the world.” It meant that Christ’s objective work of salvation consisted in bringing humans and God together. “He bridged the gulf that sin had made, and connected earth with heaven.” Humans could now have access and fellowship with God by making it possible for repentant sinners to be united to God and empowered to obey His law. Because of that objective act of salvation on behalf of the world, “there is hope for all who will come to Christ and receive him as their personal Saviour.”

Therefore the phrase “saved the world” does not mean that the whole human race was legally saved at the cross. It means that Christ through his life of obedience and his sacrificial death paid the price for our redemption and bridged the separation caused by the sin of Adam making it possible for repentant sinners to have access to and be accepted by God.

Note on Redemption:

I would like to provide several statements from E. G. White in which she explains what she meant when she said that Christ redeemed us at the cross. At issue here is the question of whether or not when Christ redeemed us at the cross the whole human race was legally justified, and if saved in what sense was it saved.

1. All Belong to Christ Through Creation and Redemption:

“We are to instruct and guide souls to look to Christ’s example, to realize their obligation to Him, whose they are by creation and by redemption. He is the owner of every man and woman and child who comes into the world. This He became by paying the redemption price. If fallen human beings will consent to become sons and daughters of God in willing obedience, they will become one with Christ. The Saviour has bought them by giving His life to pay the penalty of sin. . . . Those who are truly converted will reveal the saving grace of Christ by laboring for these souls blinded by Satan.”[5]

There are several important details in this particular quote that deserve to be emphasized. First, every human being that comes into this world belongs to Christ because he paid the price of redemption. Second, humans have to consent to become children of God, demonstrating it through a life of obedience to God. Third, it is after consenting to be children of God that they become one with Christ. The fact that Christ redeemed all at the cross does not automatically make them one with him.

2. Christ Has the Deed of Possession

“The world does not acknowledge that, at an infinite cost, Christ has purchased the human race. They do not acknowledge that by creation and by redemption He holds a just claim to every human being. But as the Redeemer of the fallen race, He has been given the deed of possession, which entitles Him to claim them as His property.”[6]

We all belong to Christ through creation and redemption. Because of sin, his claim of ownership would lead to eternal death. But we also belong to him through redemption and that means that he has the right to claim us as his property in order to save us. According to E. G. White the human race is unwilling to acknowledge that we all have been purchased by Christ, that we belong to him, and that he has the legal right, the deed of possession, to claim us as his. The implication is that what he did objectively on the cross for us does not automatically result in our liberation. There is an unwillingness to accept Christ’s ownership and as long as that is the case we are not liberated or saved in any way or form.[7]

3. Christ Paid the Price as a Gift to Us

“Christ has paid the price of your redemption. There is only one thing that you can do, and that is to take the gift of God. You can come in all your need, and plead the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour; but you cannot come expecting that Christ will cover your wickedness, your daily indulgence in sin, with his robe of righteousness.”[8]

The gift of a redemption already obtained by Christ for us is not forced upon us. The redemption Christ purchased is “for all who would receive it;”[9] if all receive it all will be saved. God, through Christ, preserved our freedom and He expects us to use it in choosing Him. We must accept the gift in a spirit of repentance and a willingness to separate ourselves from our sins. Notice how emphatic she is in denying that Christ’s “robe of righteousness” does not cover our wickedness and daily indulgence in sin. Yet, the theory of a universal legal justification teaches precisely that Christ’s justice covers the wickedness and indulgence of sin of individuals who are still living in their sins and wickedness, in rebellion against God!

4. Through Redemption Christ Gained the Right to Rescue Us

“On the cross of Calvary He paid the redemption price of the race. And thus He gained the right to rescue the captives from the grasp of the great deceiver, who by a lie framed against the government of God, caused the fall of man, and who thus forfeited all claim to be called a loyal subject of God’s kingdom.

Satan refused to let his captives go. He held them as his subjects because of their belief of his lie. He had thus become their jailor. But he had no right to demand that a price be paid for them; because he had not obtained possession of them by lawful conquest, but under false pretense.

God, being the creditor, had a right to make any provision for the redemption of human beings. Justice demanded that a certain price be paid. The Son of God was the only One who could pay this price. He volunteered to come to this earth and pass over the ground where Adam fell. He came as the redeemer of the lost race, to conquer the wily foe, and by His steadfast allegiance to right, to save all who should accept Him as their Saviour.”[10]

“What right had Christ to take the captives out of the enemy’s hands?—The right of having made a sacrifice that satisfies the principles of justice by which the kingdom of heaven is governed. He came to this earth as the Redeemer of the lost race, . . . Our ransom has been paid by our Saviour. No one need be enslaved by Satan. Christ stands before us as our all-powerful helper.”[11]

Notice, first, that by redeeming us, by paying the price for the redemption of the human race, Christ has now the right to rescue us from the enslaving power of Satan. Second, that is necessary because Satan is unwilling to let his captives go free; he does not acknowledge Christ’s legal right. He is the jailor and he is still demanding that a price be paid, possibly to him, for their liberation. But he has no right to make that claim because

they do not belong to him. Third, God is the creditor and He determined how redemption was to be accomplished. A price was to be paid but it was to be paid through the Son of God. Fourth, he came as a Redeemer for the human race and defeated Satan. Finally, the saving efficacy of the redemption that Christ accomplished is for “all who should accept Him as their Saviour.” There is no need for anyone to be “enslaved by Satan;” Christ stands before us, ready to liberate us from power of the enemy.

5. Christ Ransomed us by Taking our Sin on Him

“The divinity of Christ undertook to bear the sins of the transgressor. This ransom is on solid ground; this pledged peace is for the heart that receives Jesus Christ. And in receiving Him by faith we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”[12]

“The ransom paid by Christ—the atonement on the cross—is ever before them.”[13]

The price paid for our redemption was the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross as our substitute and sin bearer—his atonement on the cross. It is after we receive him by faith “that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” The reality of the objective work of salvation and redemption that Christ has performed on behalf of the human race has made it possible for all to return to God and to acknowledge Christ as their rightful owner who can actually deliver them from the enslaving power of Satan.

[1]. "Christ, The Second Adam," *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, p. 40.

[2]. *Ibid.*

[3]. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

[4]. "The Second Adam," *Youth Instructor*, June 2, 1898).

[5]. *This Day With God*, p. 355.

[6]. Letter 136, 1902 (*SDABC*, vol. 7a, p. 466).

[7]. Those comments bring us very close to the views of those who preach universal legal justification, but what E. G. White is saying is not exactly what they are saying. They go beyond what she stated introducing a view that is not biblical and that she never supported or was aware it existed. Let me give you an example. Jack Sequeira wrote, "I believe the Bible teaches that God actually and unconditionally saved all humanity at the cross so that we are justified and reconciled to God by that act (Romans 5:10, 18; 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19). I believe that the only reason anyone will be lost is because he or she willfully and persistently rejects God's gift of salvation in Christ" (*Beyond Belief* [Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993], p. 8). The idea that God "actually and unconditionally saved" the human race on the cross is foreign to both the Bible and E. G. White.

[8]. "The Poor in Spirit," *Bible Echo*, May 15, 1892, par. 8.

[9]. "Those who reject the mercy so freely proffered, will yet be made to know the worth of that which they have despised. They will feel the agony which Christ endured upon the cross to purchase redemption for all who would receive it. And they will then realize what they have lost—eternal life and immortal inheritance" ("Be Zealous and Repent," *Review and Herald*, September 4, 1883).

[10]. Letter 20, 1903. (*SDABC*, vol. 7a, pp. 468- 469).

[11]. *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 p. 309.

[12]. Manuscript 114, 1897 (*SDABC*, vol. 7a, p. 466).

[13]. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 190 (*SDABC*, vol. 7a, p. 468).