Source: Gospel Issues in Adventism; Chapter 2

Objective and Subjective Salvation

Ephesians 2:4–10: ***But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.***

As I travel around and proclaim the gospel, certain areas come under conflict. In this chapter, we are going to consider a quite controversial problem – the issue of objective and subjective salvation.

Let me start with the Reformation. Two main, distinct views of salvation which dominate Protestant Christian churches today came out of the 16thcentury Reformation:

- **Calvinism**: The most popular view is from the teaching of John Calvin. According to this view, God actually redeemed mankind on the cross. However, since the Bible clearly teaches that there are some who will be lost, Calvinists concluded Christ did not die for the entire universe. He died only for those who God predetermined He would save. They call it the limited atonement.

- **Arminianism**: In the other camp you have a view based on the teaching of Jacob Arminius who was a contemporary of and locked horns with John Calvin. Arminius taught that Christ died for the entire human race. However, they also take into consideration that some will be lost. So they conclude Christ did not save anybody on the cross. No actual salvation took place on the cross, but Christ simply made provisions for our salvation. For this salvation to become a reality in our lives, we have to meet certain requirements: we have to believe in Jesus Christ, we have to repent and turn away from our sins, and we have to confess all our prior sins. Only then will God put you in Christ and save you.

Both views of salvation defend their position from scripture. Both camps have met in a verbal battle for the last 400 years with no sign of reconciliation. Both are representing certain aspects of truth while both have ignored certain texts. For example, the Calvinists have great difficulty explaining the universal texts of the New Testament, i.e.,

- John 3:16, “For God so loved the world… ” – not the elect.

- John 3:17: God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

- John 12:47, "And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.”

- I Timothy 2:5-6, For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time…”

- Titus 2:11, For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men…

There are clear texts in the Bible that the Calvinists have difficulty with – that is, Jesus came to save the entire human race.

The Arminius, on the other hand, also has difficulty with those texts that clearly state what the Calvinists believe: God actually saved, He actually redeemed, He actually reconciled the human race to Himself on the cross. It was not just a provision; He actually did it. - Romans 5:10, For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

- Romans 5:18, Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

- II Corinthians 5:18-19, Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

- I John 2:2, And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

In first chapter we came to realize, unfortunately, that the Adventist church today is full of at least five different camps concerning the gospel. Today we are a confused people when it comes to the gospel. Historically speaking, as a people, we belong to the Arminius camp. As a result, most Adventists, if not all, have been raised up to believe that Christ did not actually save you on the cross, but simply made a provision for your salvation. For this salvation of all mankind to be personally yours, you have to take the initiative and repent, confess your sins and believe in Jesus Christ. Only then will God take you and put you into Christ as Savior. There are two practical problems that this theology has brought to our church. Since repentance is turning away from sin and since Christians are struggling with the sin problem, then many Adventists begin to question their repentance. They question whether it is genuine. "If I'm really repentant, if I've really turned my back to sin, why am I still struggling, why am I still falling? " Then they begin to think: "If I fail to do my part, then God surely will not do His part." This, in turn, has robbed people of the assurance of salvation, the prerequisite for genuine Christian living. Hence, more Adventists are insecure about their salvation. All you have to ask is, "If you were to die today, would you make it to heaven?" They will say, "I hope so" or "I'm not sure." How can you witness the good news of the gospel if you are not sure of your own salvation?

My family and I were traveling from the capital of Ethiopia to Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. There is a huge section of the country that is a desert where the Masi (ph) live. They drink cow's blood and milk as their staple food. During a drought, the cows stop giving milk. They are so skinny you can hardly draw any blood. A Masi with five kids stopped us. They were starving and had no water – the water holes were dry. He asked, "Can you give me some water?" We had just drunk our last drop of water. The only water we had was in the radiator with antifreeze in it that would have killed his family. My son had a bottle of orange soda. I handed the bottle to the Masi. He knows what blood and

water look like, but he's never seen a bottle of orange soda. He looked at it for the longest time and asked, "Is this drinkable?" That's a valid question. I said, "I don't know if it's drinkable. I hope so." He looked at the bottle for a long time trying to make up his mind. He handed the bottle back to me and said, "If you are not sure, I'm not willing to take the risk to drink it." I was a poor witness to him. So I took the bottle back, opened it up, took a swig and said, "Brother, you have no idea how wonderful this drink is. Not only does it quench your thirst; it is sweet." I didn't have to offer it; he grabbed it.

If Christianity is not contagious, you are wasting your time. There are too many Adventists with long faces because they are not sure of their salvation.

The Arminius gospel has robbed our people of the joy of salvation. A recent survey of our youth has proven that the majority of them had no assurance of salvation because they were still struggling with their conduct. They were not sure if God would accept them. Added to this problem is the fact that you must confess your sins every time you sin. You can only confess your past sins. The moment you commit a brand new sin you go back from justification into condemnation until you confess. You confess, then fall again. This yo-yo type of Christianity is devastating to your Christian experience. After you have gone back and forth 70 x 7, you begin to say, "How long is God going to forgive me?" Then you look around the church and see some very saintly looking people because we are expert at putting the mask on our faces. You ask, "How are you doing?" "Fine. Everything is wonderful." Yet they are hurting inside. Because of the two-fold problem, we have produced a people who are experiencing no joy of salvation.

They are trying to live the Christian life purely out of fear of judgment or desire for reward –both egocentric concerns. They are afraid to witness because they have nothing to witness about. This Arminius mindset has become a great stumbling block to many Adventists when they hear the true good news of salvation. To them it sounds like heresy. It's too good to be true. It's beyond belief. As one man said, "Look at me, I have to work for everything that I want in this world. Why should salvation be different?" I said, "Because God's ways are not our ways. That's the difference."

As a result, many of our people have great difficulty when I speak of objective and subjective salvation. They don't know what I'm talking about. I agree they are theological terms, but what do these terms mean? When one reads the Bible, especially the New Testament and the writings of Paul, one realizes that scripture speaks of salvation as an already accomplished fact on one hand. Please note the scripture reading, Ephesians 2:4-10. We are already sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. On the other hand, the Bible also talks about salvation as something that is an ongoing process that will not be completed until the second coming of Christ. Romans 8:22, For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. This will take place at the second coming of Christ.

The Bible describes two phases of salvation – objective salvation and subjective salvation. When you realize this, you can say on the one hand, as a Christian, I am already saved. On the other hand, you have to admit that I am being and will be saved. This is a paradox. How can you be saved and not yet be saved? Let me be frank with you, the Bible is full of paradoxes. Let me give you some examples. Take Christ himself. Christ was fully God and fully man at the same time. Do you know what this means? He was immortal and mortal at the same time. That's a paradox. How can a person be

immortal and mortal at the same time? Let's take Christians. According to the truth of the gospel, the wonderful truth of righteous by faith, we are sinners and righteous at the same time. How can we handle this? Luther was absolutely correct when he said a Christian is simul justice epicata (ph). We are simultaneously justified, declared righteous and 100% sinners. The Bible says in ourselves, we are still sinners; but in Christ, we stand complete, we stand justified before God. This is a paradox. I want to explain the paradox about our salvation so you can understand what the theological terms of objective and subjective salvation are all about. The best way to do is to look at our situation in Adam. When Adam sinned, he actually objectively condemned the entire human race. The Bible is absolutely clear. Romans 5:18, By one man's disobedience, condemnation came to all men. I Corinthians 15:21-22, In Adam, all died. When Adam sinned, he actually objectively brought condemnation on the entire human race. The condemnation in Adam that objectively took place thousands of years ago does not become yours personally – it does not become yours subjectively until you were born in this world. In other words, Adam's condemnation did not affect you until you were born. I know when you were born, your parents thought you were the most beautiful child in the world, but the law says you must die. In the same way, the entire human race was placed in Christ, the second Adam (the Bible calls him the Last Adam), at the incarnation, so that by His obedience, the entire human race was objectively justified unto life on the cross. Romans 5:18 says, Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. But, like Adam, this objective salvation does not personally become yours; it does not affect you personally or subjectively until you experience the new birth. The old birth makes Adam's condemnation effective in you. The new birth makes Christ's justification effective in you. This is what Jesus said to Nicodemus who had not understood the gospel even though he was a leader in the church. John 3:3, Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

There is one major difference between our being subjectively condemned in Adam and being subjectively justified in Christ. When you were born in this world, you had no choice. You were born through procreation. That means the condemnation that came to you at your birth came to you as a result of an inheritance. It was obtained for you at the fall and became yours. You inherited it the moment you were born in this world.

In contrast, the justification unto life that Christ objectively obtained for the entire human race at the cross is experienced only to those who believe in Him and who have experienced the new birth. The salvation that God brought to the human race in Christ is God's supreme gift to mankind. It does not automatically become yours subjectively. It is a gift that has to be received.

While condemnation in Adam is inherited by procreation and therefore applies to all mankind, this is not true with salvation as a subjective experience. Only those who believe and experience a new birth will make it to heaven. That's why John 3:16 says, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Put another way, when we look at salvation from God's point of view, God looks at every human being as a redeemed child of His – not just the believers. In the judgment, Jesus will say to both the sheep and the goats, whatsoever you have done to the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me because Jesus identified Himself with the entire human race.

From God's point of view, all mankind has already been reconciled to Him through the death of His Son. Unfortunately, not everybody knows that, so God asked us to be ambassadors to tell them.

Here's an illustration. I had to speak at a college in Nairobi. They have the same problem there as we have in Washington, D.C. – it's hard to find a parking place. There were none. A section of the road said "No parking," but an embassy car was parked there. Suddenly the Lord put a wonderful text in my mind – II Corinthians 5 that Christians are ambassadors, too. I parked my car next to his. When I came back, a policeman was sitting on the hood of my car. I went up to the car. The policeman stood up and the following conversation ensued. (P = policeman; S = Sequeira)

P Is this your car?

S Yes.

P You have broken the law. I'm going to give you a ticket.

S Are you going to give the ambassador a ticket?

P No. The embassy car has diplomatic immunity.

S Officer, I want you to know that I am an ambassador, too. [He looked at my beat up car implying what are you doing with this beat up car if you are an ambassador. Then he went to the back of my car to look at the license plate that was an ordinary number plate and said to me,]

P If you're an ambassador, how come you have an ordinary number plate?

S The embassy I belong to does not belong to this world. [He looked at my hands and saw the Bible.]

P You're a reverend?

S No. I'm a sinner like you saved by grace, but I'm a pastor. [Then he came close to me and asked,]

P If you'll do me a special favor, I will forgive you and do you a special favor and not give you a ticket.

S What can I do for you?

P Can we get into your car?

S Sure.

P Pastor, I have committed a mortal sin and I'm a Roman Catholic. If I die, I will Burn in fire forever. Here's my problem. I'm afraid to tell my priest what I have done because he has great respect for me. But you don't know me, so can I confess it to you and you give me absolution?[I was tempted, but I knew better. As an ambassador of Christ, I showed him from the Word of God that there is only one human being who has the legal right to forgive him, and that's our Lord Jesus Christ. He did not have to go to any other human being. There is only one mediator between the holy God and sinful man that can forgive you. He not only forgave me for parking there, but he was in charge of that area and said,]

P Pastor, as long as I'm in charge here, you have permission to park you car here any time.

That was grace.

The world is afraid of God. They are running away from God. People today want security. The future looks bleak. They do not know that they have already been reconciled to God. Who is going to tell them? If we don't, who will? How can we tell them if we, ourselves, are not sure of our own salvation? The Bible is clear that in Jesus Christ the entire human race was reconciled to God at the death of His Son. This is objective salvation. This is a gift to be received. Romans 5:17 says only those who receive the gift of righteousness will reign in life with Christ. How can you receive a gift if you don't know it is there? We need to realize that man is not lost because he is a sinner. We are born sinners. We had no choice. The only reason any one will be lost is because they have deliberately, ultimately and finally rejected the gift of salvation in Christ. Example: When Jesus gave the great commission in Mark 16:15-16, He told His disciples to go into all the world and preach good news to every creature. Why every creature? Because Jesus redeemed them. Jesus added, he who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned. John 3:16-18. If you read verse 18, you will discover the only reason man is lost, according to the words of Jesus Christ, is because they do not believe in the only begotten Son of God. Verse 36. If you don't believe in His Son, the wrath of God still abides in you. Hebrews 2:1-4, *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast [the law given through Moses], and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?* If you deliberately, persistently and ultimately reject the gospel, there is no hope. You have the same thing in Hebrews 10:26–29. If you deliberately sin against the gospel, the cross of Christ, there is nothing else for you to look forward to but the judgment hour.

If objective salvation includes the entire human race, God can actually take to heaven those who, through no fault of their own, have never heard the gospel but have been faithful to the light that they had, whatever that light may have been. They will hear the gospel for the first time in heaven and praise Jesus Christ for saving them. Christ has the right to take them to heaven because He has objectively redeemed them. He's not blaming them for not hearing the gospel. According to the Arminius gospel, there are millions of people who have never heard the gospel through our fault and can never be saved. Ellen G. White says there will be people in heaven that will hear the name "Jesus" for the first time.

This concept of salvation brings something else to us. Normally when we look at people on the street – especially in the gutters – we say, "Oh this wretched sinner." Maybe we should witness. There are two ways that we can look at human beings – what they are in themselves or what they are in Christ. When you see someone in the street, remember you are looking at somebody who has already been redeemed in Jesus Christ. That person may not know the good news. You need to tell them the good news. We as a people need to understand that salvation in Christ is already a reality; only our subjective experience is left. Our subjective experience is an ongoing process that will not be fully experienced until Christ comes the second time. Because it is a reality in Christ, we no longer need to preach good advice to the world. What the world needs is good news. Good advice is only for believers who are already resting in Christ for their salvation.

In closing, I would like to give you some distinctions between objective and subjective. Objective salvation can also be called imputed righteousness. Subjective salvation can be called imparted righteousness.

Distinction No. 1:

-- Objective salvation is complete. You can't add to it, you can't improve on it. As Colossians 2:10 says, and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. According to Ephesians 2:6, we are already sitting in heavenly places. We stand perfect in Christ. When you become a Christian, God looks at you as if you have never sinned, not as if you have been forgiven.

-- Subjective salvation is an ongoing process. We are growing in Christ, growing in knowledge and in truth. Philippians 3:12-14 says, Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. As subjective, I want to reach that goal –it's an ongoing process.

When people ask, "Are you saved," you can say "I am saved" because of the objective gospel. But because of the subjective view, you should also add, "I am being saved and I will be saved." You will have an opportunity to witness the good news when they ask, "How come you're already saved and being saved?"

Distinction No. 2:

-- Objective salvation is universal. It includes the entire human race. See Romans 5:18, IICorinthians 5:19, Titus 2:11.

-- Subjective salvation is particular. It applies only to believers who have accepted Christ, who have experienced the new birth and are walking as well as they can in the Spirit.

Distinction No. 3:

-- Objective salvation is an alien righteousness. It is a righteousness produced by God in Christ without any contribution from us. Paul's definition of the gospel in Romans 1:16 and Romans 3:21 is righteousness of God. It was planned by God from the foundation of the world. It was made known to man by God since the fall of man. It was fulfilled on the cross. It was all of God. We made no contribution. All we do is receive the blessings of that salvation. It is a righteousness that was obtained for us outside of us, but in Christ. It is entirely God's work.

-- Subjective salvation involves the believer's cooperation. We have to learn to walk in the Spirit. That is why it has no merit. We have to learn to walk in the Spirit because we are not robots. As Jesus says, "Anyone who follows Me, let him deny himself daily." Take up the cross and follow Him.

Distinction No. 4:

-- Objective salvation obtained for all men in Christ is meritorious. It is the righteousness in Christ that qualifies us for heaven now and in the judgment.

-- The subjective righteousness God produces in us is demonstrated. It reveals to the world, it witnesses to the world what is already ours: love, joy, peace, longsuffering – the fruits of the Spirit. When people see such fruits, they will say, "Where did you get it from?" Then God opens the way for you to witness the wonderful facts of salvation in Christ. Tell them it's a gift.

When the devil comes to you and says you are not good enough to be saved, he's telling you the truth, but half a truth. You should him the other half. Yes, devil, I am chief of sinners, but my salvation is not what I am in myself, but what I am in Christ. If you can show me one sin in Christ, you have won. Can he do it? No. He puts his tail between his legs and takes off.

On the one hand, we are saved; on the other hand, we are being saved. This is a paradox. But, it is a Bible truth. You can either accept it or reject it. I feel sorry for you if you reject it, because you will have no joy of salvation.

Let me relate a conversation I had with a pastor converted from the Lutheran church who opposed this message. (P = Pastor; S = Sequiera)

P What you're preaching is not Adventism

S Fine. Let me ask you a question, how do we go to heaven? When you were Lutheran, did you have joy of salvation?

P Yes

S Do you have it now?

P No, but I have the truth.

S What do you mean?

P I give up grace for the law.

S Are you keeping the law perfectly?

P No, but I'm trying.

S Have you ever asked Jesus to help you?

P Every day.

S How come He's not answering your prayer?

P I have asked myself this question many times.

S Maybe you're not praying loud enough.

P No, pastor. Sometimes I've screamed to Christ.

S Then why isn't he helping you?

P I don't know.

S I can tell you why. Because to help you to be good so you can go to heaven, He would have to contradict His own gospel, and God never contradicts Himself. I don't care how long you live, you will

never be good enough in yourself to go to heaven. Brother, I suggest you accept the gift. He did. Three months later, one of the young people in his church came to me and said “Thank you. He’s finally preaching the gospel, but now he’s even smiling.”

May you smile because you know in Whom you believe. That He is able to save you to the uttermost because you come to God in his name.