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Righteousness by Faith and the Third Angel's Message — 7

The just shall live by faith. Rom. 1:17



▲ George R. Knight

Of special interest in what we read [in the previous issue of the *Herald*] is the fact that Ellen White noted more than once that the truth on righteousness by faith that Waggoner had been preaching was not new light — that she herself had been proclaiming it for 44 years. That idea agreed with Waggoner, himself, who noted that the message he was teaching had been that proclaimed “by all the eminent reformers” “from the days of Paul to the days of Luther and Wesley.”

In other words, according to Waggoner, what he presented was a recapturing of the evangelical viewpoint of justification by faith.

That was also Ellen White's understanding of at least a part of the contribution of Jones and Waggoner. In August 1889, she wrote that the doctrine of “justification by faith” had been “long hidden under the rubbish of error.” That error, she pointed out, had been exhibited by “the Holiness people” who had preached faith in Christ, but had also advocated “away with the law” (*Review & Herald*, Aug. 13, 1889). From that perspective,

the teaching of justification by faith had been in the “companionship of error” (Manuscript 8a, 1888).

On the other hand were the Adventists, who had maintained the sanctity of the law but had “lost sight of” the “doctrine of justification by faith.” In that context, she notes that “God has raised up men [Jones and Waggoner] to meet the necessity of this time . . . Their work is not only to proclaim the law, but to preach the truth for this time — the Lord our righteousness.”

The Adventists, she points out, had been doing a good job on the law, while the holiness people had been preaching faith in Christ. But both parties had error. The Adventists neglected faith, while the holiness people denigrated the law. The accomplishment of Jones and Waggoner was to get rid of the errors of each group while combining their truths.

In the process, they gave Adventism an understanding of the complete Three Angels']messages which it had been lacking (ibid.).

As a result, Ellen White could state that through Jones and Waggoner's emphasis on justification by faith “God has rescued these truths from the companionship of error [antinomianism], and has placed them in their proper framework [the Third Angel's message]” (MS 8a, 1888).

What a message! God doesn't want unbalanced law-oriented Adventists or unbalanced faith-oriented Adventists. He wants a people who have put both in proper perspective. ■

George R. Knight is a retired professor of Church History at the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. This article is from his book, Lest We Forget, a daily devotional, published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, page 286.

