

PERFECTION





PERFECTION

THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBILITY

By: HERBERT E. DOUGLASS
EDWARD HEPPENSTALL
HANS K. LA RONDELLE
C. MERVYN MAXWELL

Four Seventh-day Adventist theologians—men who love their church and their Lord—have combined the results of their study in *Perfection: the Impossible Possibility*. Anyone who knows Edward Heppenstall, Hans LaRondelle, Mervyn Maxwell, and Herbert Douglass recognizes that these men are not amateurs. They did not thoughtlessly concoct the ideas they offer in this book. The concepts they share here have matured from the discipline of theological and Biblical study.

PERFECTION



The purpose of the Anvil Series is to push back the frontiers of Adventist thought, to stimulate reevaluation of traditional thought patterns, and to catalyze fresh ideas. The concepts presented in the Anvil Series are not necessarily official pronouncements of the Seventh-day Adventist Church or reflections of the editorial opinion of Southern Publishing Association.

PERFECTION

THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBILITY

By: HERBERT E. DOUGLASS
EDWARD HEPPENSTALL
HANS K. LA RONDELLE
C. MERVYN MAXWELL

Southern Publishing Association, Nashville, Tennessee

Copyright © 1975 by Southern Publishing Association
Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 75-10350. SBN 8127-0097-X
This book was edited by Don Short and designed by Dean Tucker
Printed on Wausau Hibulk. Cover stock: Hampden Satin Gold
Printed in U.S.A.

CONTENTS

7 / Preface

Men of Faith—The Showcase of God's Grace

9 / Herbert E. Douglass

“Let Us Go On to Perfection”

57 / Edward Heppenstall

The Biblical Idea of Perfection

89 / Hans K. LaRondelle

Ready for His Appearing

137 / C. Mervyn Maxwell

PREFACE

Theological debate has flourished in the Christian church from its inception. Frequently it has been part of the secret for Christianity's renewing vitality.

“Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. . . . This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion.

“The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God's people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are

started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, pp. 706, 707).

Judaizers with credentials from Jerusalem constantly badgered the apostle Paul and his converts, and his epistles reflect the ensuing heat.

A few centuries later what began as a theological quibble over the nature of Christ—was He *homoiousian* or *homoousian*?—evolved into a raging controversy with far-reaching implications.

Similar situations arose during the formative years of Adventism as earnest Bible students, with a King James Version at one hand and a *Cruden's Complete Concordance* at the other, forged Adventist doctrine. Once again, the

freedom of research and discussion that marked those early years was the very genius of Seventh-day Adventism.

Unfortunately, at times the controversy over minutiae grew so intense that Ellen White told the church leaders to forget the discussions—at least for the time being.

More recently the Seventh-day Adventist Church has struggled through a similar experience once again. The subject of perfection became so touchy that many Adventists preferred to sweep the topic under the rug. Only a few doughty souls of unquestionable orthodoxy ventured to broach the doctrine.

However, the church cannot ignore indefinitely such an important topic as perfection. Now that Adventists can look at perfection more objectively, they can avoid discussing it only at their own eternal peril, for perfection deals with the *raison d'être* of redemption: to what end has God determined to salvage sinners? Surely Adventists must look soberly, calmly at their theology of salvation.

What kind of spiritual experience does God have in mind for His people? As soon as we ask that question, problems of hamartiology, soteriology, Christology, anthropology, and eschatology spring up spontaneously.

In addition, Adventists must ask themselves just how intensive and extensive perfection really is. Our denomination's theologians still grapple with that question, but is that any reason to bury our heads in the sand in the belief

that if we do not see the problem, it therefore ceases to exist? We cannot ignore the doctrine of Christian perfection without endangering the spiritual progress of the church.

Four Seventh-day Adventist theologians—men who love their church and their Lord—have combined the results of their study in *Perfection: the Impossible Possibility*. Anyone who knows Edward Heppenstall, Hans LaRondelle, Mervyn Maxwell, and Herbert Douglass recognizes that these men are not amateurs. They did not thoughtlessly concoct the ideas they offer in this book. The concepts they share here have matured from the discipline of theological and Biblical study.

Southern Publishing Association submits *Perfection: the Impossible Possibility* to the continually maturing readership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We look forward to an ongoing dialogue that will help hone our concepts of perfection. The publisher trusts that the Spirit's gifts of the "word of wisdom" and the "word of knowledge" as blended in this book will work "for the perfecting of the saints." While the perspectives presented may vary—and this is the way serious theology thrives—the authors believe they are "speaking the truth in love," for they have only one aim in mind: that we all "may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."

Men of Faith – Showcase of God's

By Herbert E. Douglass

Dr. Herbert E. Douglass, associate editor of the *Review* since 1970, began his ministry in 1947 as a pastor in Illinois. Since then he has served as a college religion teacher at Pacific Union College and as head of the religion department at Atlantic Union College, where he also became dean and president of the college. He holds degrees from Andrews University and a ThD from Pacific School of Religion.

In his spare time Dr. Douglass enjoys gardening and tennis. He has edited several books, including *If I Had One Sermon to Preach* and *What Ellen White Has Meant to Me*.



Contents

Introduction	13
The Return of Jesus Has Been Delayed	15
Jesus Waits for a Quality People	18
Fruit Bearing—Reproducing the Character of Christ / 19	
The State of the Church Rather Than the State of the World / 22	
Only a Living Demonstration Can Be Credible / 24	
Principle of the Delayed Advent / 25	
The Christian’s First Duty Is Self-Development / 27	
Moral Perfection Required / 27	
Jesus Has Proved It Can Be Done	35
What Jesus Achieved Will Be Reproduced in the Last Generation ...	46
The Integrity of God’s Government Vindicated	52

One way to minimize theological confusion is to determine that all doctrinal thought will begin and end with what Jesus has said or done. To deal with a subject, such as tithing, righteousness by faith, or perfection, as if it had its own boundaries and reason for existence invites unreality and theological sterility.

In all theological thinking first ask, What does this subject have to do with Jesus and my salvation?—*and always in that order!* Jesus is primarily concerned about making the mind and heart of God clear to man—His chief goal is to convince every rebel heart that the happiest, safest, and healthiest way to live is still God's way. Any theological subject worth considering should be some aspect of what Jesus is trying to make clear so that man can quickly grasp the enormity of the sin problem and the glory of God's solution.

Over the centuries great Biblical themes have become isolated from their connection with Jesus. *The major reason for this unreality is that Christian thinkers became confused about Jesus.* Misunderstanding who Jesus is, where He came from, what His mission was on earth, and how He has related to all men since His ascension seems to automatically warp and distort every other Biblical topic. No Biblical topic can be safely developed merely by consulting a Bible concordance, adding up the occasions where the subject is mentioned, and making a conclusion if it is not properly related to truth as it is in Jesus and to the great controversy between God and Satan.

The subject of Christian maturity (or perfection)¹ has suffered as much as any other Biblical concept because of twin misunderstandings: men have misunderstood both the nature and work of Jesus and the interrelationship of character perfection with His ultimate goal of exposing the awfulness of evil, once and for all.

In order to avoid such misunderstanding, the experience of perfection² as set forth in this section

¹The terms "Christian maturity" and "perfection" will be used interchangeably.

²Perfection, as used in this chapter, refers to the dynamic life pattern of a person who reflects the life of Jesus; such a person is a trustworthy example of genuine love to God and man. He no longer yields to rebel, sinful desires. The same life pattern is described in Biblical terms such as "maturity," "the stature of the fullness of Christ," and "righteousness."

Perfection, as we use the term, does not refer to a state in which a person is beyond temptation or the possibility of sin, any more than Jesus, man's Example of perfection, was immune to temptation and self-indulgence. Neither do we mean that the perfection set before Christians suggests a state of physical and mental perfection in which no illnesses arise or no mental mistakes, such as in mathematics, are made.

Perfection is here used in the same context as the following statement: "Moral perfection is required of all. Never should we lower the standard of righteousness in order to accommodate inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrongdoing. We need to understand that imperfection of character is sin. . . .

The heavenly intelligences will work with the human agent who seeks with determined faith that perfection of character which will reach out to perfection in action" (Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 330-332).

The urgency involved in this term rests on such passages as:

"When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (*ibid.*, p. 69).

"The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people" (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671).

In real and important theological and practical differences, perfection, as understood in the above quotations, is in contrast to the concept of perfectionism. The latter term, emphasizing an absolute point beyond which there can be no further development, grows out of Grecian philosophy and not the Bible. Perfection in the Biblical sense is simply Christlikeness—combining a relationship with God such as Jesus had, with the qualities of character that Jesus manifested.

Although perfection is a word not frequently found in the Bible, the concept of moral perfection (that is, living a mature life in the Spirit, full of the fruits of the Spirit and thus without sin) is the only goal held up to all in both the Old and New Testament and by Ellen White. To doubt that the goal is realistic is to doubt the power to sustain that which God has promised.

In determining what the Bible writers and Ellen White meant by the concept of perfection (whether the actual word is used or not), it seems safer to submit to a basic hermeneutic: Let the commentary be found in the context.

is seen as the logical and necessary goal of all those who turn from their rebellion to become sons and daughters of their heavenly Father. Errors enter when, on one hand, the sinfulness and helplessness of man tend to overshadow what God promised to do for repentant sinners through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit; and, on the other, when Jesus is not understood as man's complete substitute and example, who demonstrated, with all of man's liabilities besetting Him, that God's law of love could be kept—that man could be indeed an overcomer, here and now.

In developing these thoughts we will review the reasons for the delay in our Lord's return, study the characteristics of the quality people He is waiting for in the last generation, examine the wonderful story of how Jesus proved in His own earthly life that faith can make any man perfect, and explain how the demonstration of faith, worked out by both Jesus and the last generation, vindicates the government of God forever and ever.

Through it all, it is a story of how God can be trusted. All that He has said about life and death will have been demonstrated to be true: He will have living witnesses to the fact that love is the answer to genuine self-fulfillment and all interpersonal relationships; He will also, for a time, have living witnesses to His warning that the principle of self-gratification leads to self-destruction.

The Return of Jesus Has Been Delayed

For Seventh-day Adventists, that the Second Advent has been delayed is not a new thought. In 1883 Ellen White pleaded with fellow church members to understand why Jesus was delaying His return: "It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional. . . .

"Had Adventists [all Adventists in the 1844 movement], after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith, and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and *Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward*" (*Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 67, 68, italics supplied).

Unequivocally, as clearly as words can convey thought, Ellen White declared the sad yet challenging truth that the return of Jesus was already delayed in the 1880's, that He would continue to wait until His church on earth had vindicated truth—His character—in their lives.³

Furthermore, Ellen White warned that Adventists must not, no matter how plausible the reasoning, blame God for the delay in the Second Advent. "It was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be thus delayed. God did not design that His people, Israel, should wander forty years in the wilderness. . . . For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Ca-

³ For a listing of forty-five comments made by Ellen G. White, in chronological order, regarding the delay in the Advent and how the church on earth could hasten our Lord's return, see Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Movement of Destiny*, pages 561-588.

The concept of the delayed Advent, including the thought that God waits for a quality people, rests on the principle of conditional prophecy. Such a concept in no way limits God's sovereignty. Much to the contrary, it only adds to His majesty as One who is patient and forbearing for the sake of His universe. He doesn't need anything proved to Him! But He is concerned that the principles of both His government and Satan's should develop fully so that there would never be a doubt in any created being's mind ever again as to whether God's way is just and merciful. God remains in control.

But that time, when the full harvest of these contrasting principles is on full display, is not predetermined by

any celestial clock. The well-attested fact that Jesus could have come and would have come during the lifetime of those who preached His immediate return in the 1840's is evidence enough that there is no arbitrary moment when He is to return, although in His foreknowledge He knows when the church will have fulfilled its task.

Adventists have believed that Jesus could have returned within the lifetime of any generation living since 1844—long before a population explosion, ecological imbalances, nuclear weapons, an energy crisis, Adolf Hitler, World War II, the modern state of Israel, to mention only a few of the events and conditions in the world that others have pointed to as evidence that they were now in the last days.

The tragedy is that Ellen White's fear is surely being fulfilled: "We may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years, as did the children of Israel; but for Christ's sake, His people should not add sin to sin by charging God with the consequence of their own wrong course of action" (*Evangelism*, p. 696).

To be confused about why Jesus delays His return, to consider the timing of the Advent to be an arbitrary decision unrelated to the character readiness of God's followers on earth, tends to foster a climate of apathy, bewilderment, and eventual disillusionment.

True it is that "there is a limit beyond which the judgments of Jehovah can no longer be delayed" (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 417). But that limit is reached when "the final test has been brought upon the world, and all who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received 'the seal of the living

naan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord's professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years" (*ibid.*, pp. 68, 69).

In 1901 she counseled, referring to the delayed Advent, that "for Christ's sake, His people should not add sin to sin by charging God with the consequence of their own wrong course of action" (*Evangelism*, p. 696).

How would Seventh-day Adventists charge God with the consequences of "their own wrong course of action"? Surely not directly. Yet, could it be possible that by forgetting that Jesus is waiting for something glorious to happen in His people who purport to "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus," we have come up with reasons that indeed transfer the responsibility for the delay from God's professed people to God Himself!⁴

God.' Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above. He lifts His hands and with a loud voice says, 'It is done.' . . . The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. God's long-suffering has ended" (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 613, 614).

God will not wait a moment longer than necessary to fulfill His purpose. "Like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 32). When the gospel seed has ripened—one of the primary purposes of the plan of salvation—there will be no delay in giving the order: "Put in your sickle, and reap" (Revelation 14:15*).

⁴ For example, explanations such as the following tend to lift the responsibility for the delay from the church and place the responsibility elsewhere: (a) angels have been judging the dead and the living since 1844, turning each person's page inexorably, tirelessly, day and night, and when the last page is turned, regardless of the church's readiness, probation will close; (b) God has His own celestial clock for all the world's major events, the hands move relentlessly, and when the hand strikes midnight, probation will close, regardless of the state of the church; (c) probation can't close until Turkey comes to her end with none to help her. However, if Jesus could have come long before 1883, as Ellen White notes often, none of these human explanations have validity.

*All texts in this section are quoted from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Jesus Waits for a Quality People

Clearly God has waited and will continue to wait long after the generation that could have been the last has died. A solemn thought it is to remember that any one of the several generations that preached the fullness of the last-day message to the world after 1844 could have been the last. What does God wait for?

Ellen White is forthright about the cause for the delay in the Advent—and its solution: “When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.” Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 69).

Here Ellen White emphasizes the harvest principle—the basic New Testament concept that is fundamental to an understanding of when we can expect the return of Jesus. The harvest principle explains why the day and hour of Christ’s return cannot be predicted and what it is for which our Lord waits.

Jesus chose to compare the end of this world to a farmer’s harvest, because He knew that men everywhere understand, to some degree, the hopes and problems connected with harvesting a field of wheat or backyard tomatoes. In His masterful way He compared the focal point of the plan of salvation to an earthly harvest.

In Mark 4 Jesus explained an important aspect of the kingdom of God: “So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he

putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come" (verses 26-29, KJV).

When Jesus was describing to John on Patmos the nature and timing of His second advent, He reemphasized the harvest principle as the key to an understanding of why all heaven would wait for a delayed harvest down in the twentieth century: "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped" (Revelation 14:14-16, KJV).

In a special sense the goals of the kingdom of God and of the field of grain are the same: neither is ready to harvest unless the seed has matured. Even as the farmer waits for his seed to mature, so Jesus waits until the gospel seed has produced a sizable and significant group of mature Christians in the last generation.

Fruit Bearing—Reproducing the Character of Christ

Developing this Biblical concept of the harvest principle, Ellen White wrote: "The object of the husbandman in the sowing of the seed and the culture of the growing plant is the production of grain. . . . So the divine Husbandman looks for a harvest as the reward of His labor and sacrifice. Christ is seeking to reproduce Himself in the hearts of men; and He does this through those who believe in Him. The object of the Christian life is fruit bearing—the reproduction of Christ's character in the believer, that it may be reproduced in others" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 67).

Farmers and prophets have several things in common, the chief of which is that both engage in conditional prophecies. Farmers know, for example, on the basis of the promises in the seed catalog that early corn should be ready in sixty-eight days,

Douglass

if . . . ! The “if”—such things as the varying amounts of rainfall, how hot the days will be, or how cool the nights—is often beyond the farmer’s control.

Similarly, our Lord is saying to us that the delay in the harvest of this world has not been due to a change of mind on the part of the Divine Husbandman. As far as God is concerned, the harvest could have and should have ripened decades ago. We live now in the time of the delayed harvest. The fruit—the personal witness that reproduces the character of Jesus—has not yet matured.

The harvest principle as an explanation for the delayed Second Advent is not something new that the Adventist Church has thought up to explain why Jesus has not come within the lifetime of several generations who waited and hoped.

Jesus emphasized the concept of a conditional harvest in Matthew 24 and 25 when He answered the question “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Before giving His answer, which is not complete without the three parables in Matthew 25, Jesus laid down an oft-overlooked caution: “Take heed that no one leads you astray” (Matthew 24:4).

What would be those areas that could confuse people into thinking them to be specific and unique signs of the end of the world? In addition to the perennial Jesus-impersonators, He said, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, . . . famines and earthquakes” (verses 6, 7). In other words, down through the centuries it would appear, periodically, that civilization was collapsing, that nothing greater could possibly happen. But Jesus said, concerning these signs of ever-present sin, “See that you are not alarmed; . . . the end is not yet. . . . All this is but the beginning of the sufferings” (verses 6-8).

In other words, Jesus was saying, “Don’t be led astray into thinking these inevitable results of universal sin are special signs that My return is near; each generation will experience them—some worse than others—until observers would believe that nothing worse could possibly happen. All

these calamities are merely continuing signs that sinful, greedy men will never make a paradise out of this planet."

Referring to our Lord's counsel, Ellen G. White wrote in 1900: "The signs which He Himself gave of His coming have been fulfilled, and by the teaching of God's word we may know that the Lord is at the door" (*ibid.*, p. 227).

Years ago James White, a longtime *Review* editor, emphasized these points: "Wars, pestilences, famines, and earthquakes are not the surest signs of the end. These have ever existed. We may have war, then peace, pestilence, then health, famine, then plenty, earthquakes, then the bowels of the earth may be quiet; but the message of the third angel is given but once. The progress of this work in fulfillment of prophecy is the highest and brightest light now shining in the religious heavens. Those looking at the Eastern question will probably be disappointed; but we may bear our whole weight upon the last message without fear of disappointment. As we now see our world-wide message extending to the nations, we see the fulfillment of prophecy, and the clearest sign of the close of the work, and the consummation of the hope of the church" (*Review and Herald*, November 29, 1877, p. 172).

James White correctly understood the emphasis of Matthew 24. The key to the return of Jesus depends upon how soon " 'this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come' " (verse 14).

"This gospel of the kingdom" is the Good News, not only that Jesus is man's Saviour, Substitute, and Example, but also that He can change men and women into His likeness if they will make Him Lord of their lives. Their lives become the demonstration that God's kingdom is real, that what these Christlike men and women say about God's way of life is truth. The import of Ellen White's statement becomes a majestic challenge when coupled with Matthew 24:14—"When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (*Christ's*

The State of the Church Rather Than the State of the World

In His glorious answer to the question regarding the time of His second advent, as recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus emphasized the state of the church more than the state of the world. His church primarily—and not conditions in the world—determines when the landlord returns to his faithful servants, when the bridegroom comes to his bride, when the businessman returns to his employees to whom he has given various responsibilities.

Jesus knew that to place undue emphasis on world conditions, which would always be in distress (as anyone who casually reviews the past two thousand years readily recognizes), as the chief signs of the end of the world would be similar to a farmer saying, "It looks like there will be a bad thunderstorm; it must be time to pick my corn." There is as much relationship between a thunderstorm and picking ripe corn as there is between distress in the world and the readiness of the church for the Second Advent.

Throughout Matthew 24 and 25 Jesus emphasized the quality of life that separates not only the church from the world but also the faithful from the unprepared within the church. The faithful and wise servant, the wise bridesmaids, the responsible employee, and those represented by the sheep "on the right hand"—all reflected a life-style that God could use in preaching the truth about life. These quality people are the instruments through whom "the gospel of the kingdom" will be heard and seen; their dramatic, distinctive life witness will indeed be the Good News that Jesus reigns in the lives of men. This message in living color will be "preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come."

The development of the kingdom of God is likened to a harvest, but not all that matures will be fruit of good seed. In addition to those who never

accepted the Holy Spirit's invitation, there will be others who accepted the gospel seed but never continued to nurture it; the full-grown characteristics of both groups are compared to the growth of tares.

Whether wheat or tares, a harvest there will ultimately be. The universe as well as mankind everywhere will see on an unprecedented scale the ripening of the gospel seed exhibited in mature Christlike persons living during the stress of the last days. Also on display will be the full-grown products of evil thoughts and rebel actions exhibited in those persons symbolized by the tares. This harvest principle explains why it is impossible for men to determine, on the basis of world conditions, when Jesus is to return.

In those character sketches in Matthew 24 and 25 of last-day Christians who are prepared for the Second Advent, what do we learn about the kind of people Jesus is waiting for?

" 'Who then,' " in the words of Jesus, " 'is the faithful and wise servant' " (Matthew 24:45) whom He will find ready when He returns? In other words, for whom is He now waiting in the late twentieth century? In addition to His brief answer to this question in Matthew 24, our Lord gave the three parables in Matthew 25 describing the kind of people who will compose the living saints in the last generation (Matthew 24 and 25 must be studied as a unit; they constitute our Lord's answer to the disciples' question).

The common thread running through our Lord's answer in these two chapters is that readiness for the Second Advent is not a matter of crash preparation, as if one were preparing for an approaching hurricane. Although urgency is indispensable in the life of a committed advent-oriented Christian, readiness for the Second Advent is more a matter of life-style than emergency activity. The "faithful and wise servant" has responded to the appeal of his master and has provided, day after day, food for the household "at the proper time."

What kind of responsibility has the Lord of all people everywhere especially given to His church in those days just preceding His return? What kind

⁵ Think about the church members who are classed by Jesus as “wicked servants.” What a frightful end to those who had once committed themselves publicly to the Lord of the Second Advent! What happened? The wicked servant says in his heart, “I still have time to get ready. I’ll have my fling now, and by and by I’ll work on some of those things in my life I must take care of. The end is not yet. After all, the Sunday law hasn’t been passed. Besides, Turkey is still a nation, and its collapse doesn’t appear likely soon. There are still countries in the world without the Second Advent message, and there are more than two thousand groups yet without a Bible in their language. Furthermore, we have been hearing about the imminency of Christ’s return ever since the first sermon I heard forty years ago.”

Either in spirit or word, the wicked servant explains away the delay in the return of his Lord by saying, “My lord delayeth his coming” (Matthew 24:48). Could it be that unprepared church members have lulled themselves into a false security by thinking that the delay in the Advent is caused by some yet unfulfilled prophecy or by some arbitrary decision on God’s part and not the reluctance on the part of a significant number of the several generations since 1844 to receive into their lives the truths of the messages of the three angels of Revelation 13? “For Christ’s sake, His people should not add sin to sin by charging God with the consequence of their own wrong course of action” (*Evangelism*, p. 696).

⁶ The conditions of the world prior to the close of probation will probably give worldlings in the last generation no more direct, unequivocal warning than the conditions of the world prior to the Flood encouraged Noah’s neighbors to join him in the ark (Matthew 24:37-39). Ellen White noted that the

of nourishment are they faithfully and wisely to share during the time their Lord is away?

Jesus clearly stated that the time of His return will depend upon when the church (His faithful servants) will have effectively proclaimed “the gospel of the kingdom,” for when a generation has had a fair opportunity to accept His last message of mercy, “ ‘then the end will come’ ” (verse 14).

Only a Living Demonstration Can Be Credible

The “gospel of the kingdom” proclaims the fact of God’s reign in the lives of men. This is not to be merely *said*; only a living demonstration could ever convey properly and convincingly that more than human power is available, enabling men to forsake self-serving, destructive habits and to live like Jesus. The “faithful and wise servant” not only proclaims this Good News but encourages his fellowmen with his example.⁵

Wherever his daily duties lead him, the “faithful and wise servant” is feeding the needs of those around him. When probation closes, local conditions permitting, he will be in the field or at the mill fulfilling his earthly responsibilities.⁶ The X-ray technician will be in his lab, the teacher in his classroom, the plumber with his pipes, the physician at the bedside, the student with his books, the mother changing diapers. Discharging earthly duties in a way that reflects the glory of the character of God is the “faithful and wise” servant’s primary task. This is the sense of sanctification: “True . . . sanctification consists in the cheerful performance of daily duties in perfect obedience to the will of God” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 360).

Reproducing the character of Jesus in our daily tasks, revealing the power of God that enables a person to perfectly do His will, is the only way that the honest in heart will ever know what the truth is that they seek. “Character is power. The silent witness of a true, unselfish, godly life carries an almost irresistible influence. By revealing in our own life the character of Christ we cooperate with Him in the work of saving souls. *It is only by revealing in our life His character that we can cooperate with Him.*

And the wider the sphere of our influence, the more good we may do. When those who profess to serve God follow Christ's example, practicing the principles of the law in their daily life; when every act bears witness that they love God supremely and their neighbor as themselves, *then will the church have power to move the world*" (*ibid.*, p. 340, italics supplied).

Principle of the Delayed Advent

In amplifying the characteristics of the "faithful and wise servant," our Lord gave us the parable of the bridegroom, in which He employed the principle of the delayed advent. The experience of the ten bridesmaids as they related to their responsibilities while the bridegroom was delayed illustrates "the experience of the church that shall live just before His second coming" (*ibid.*, p. 406).

The two groups of bridesmaids are two groups within Christianity generally and within advent-oriented churches specifically. Both groups "profess to be waiting for their Lord" (*ibid.*). Both groups possess and bear publicly their doctrinal lamps, and all are church members in "good and regular standing."⁷ The difference between the two groups lies not in the doctrine they believe but in what the doctrine has done for them as persons.

However, an oil lamp is not worth very much on a dark night without oil; a flashlight is not worth very much without batteries. The lamp is made to be an instrument, not an object primarily to be admired for its beauty or ingenuity; the purpose of a lamp is to assist in the producing of light.

But in this parable the light is neither the lamp nor the oil. The light is not Biblical doctrine, no matter how pure or how much is known; nor is the Holy Spirit the light. The light is the witness of the Christlike life, transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, molded by Biblical principles. "Through the Holy Spirit, God's word is a light *as it becomes* a transforming power in the life of the receiver. By implanting in their hearts the principles of His word, the Holy Spirit develops in men the attributes of God. The light of His glory—His

world conditions at the time probation closes and just prior to the unprecedented time of trouble may not seem, to the uncommitted worldlings, sufficiently dreadful, or even anything out of the ordinary, to cause them to hasten their repentance. (After living through decades of unprecedented global horror, teetering for years on the brink of nuclear disaster, numb with statistics describing millions who live on a starvation level or the specter of pollution disasters, more of the same merely anesthetizes further the sensibilities of most people.)

Ellen White wrote: "Come when it may, the day of God will come unawares to the ungodly. When life is going on in its unvarying round; when men are absorbed in pleasure, in business, in traffic, in money-making; when religious leaders are *magnifying the world's progress and enlightenment, and the people are lulled in a false security*—then, as the midnight thief steals within the unguarded dwelling, so shall sudden destruction come upon the careless and ungodly, 'and they shall not escape.'"

"When the professed people of God are uniting with the world, living as they live, and joining with them in forbidden pleasures; when the luxury of the world becomes the luxury of the church; when the marriage bells are chiming, and *all are looking forward to many years of worldly prosperity*—then, suddenly as the lightning flashes from the heavens, will come the end of their bright visions and delusive hopes" (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 38, 338, 339, italics supplied).

⁷"By the lamps is represented the word of God." "All had lamps. . . . All have a knowledge of the Scriptures" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 406, 408).

Douglass

character—is to shine *forth in His followers*" (*ibid.*, p. 414, italics supplied).

In other words, the five foolish bridesmaids were not shut out because their lamps were not as pretty, nor as big, as those of the five wise. They were unfit to be members of the wedding party, they could not participate in the work of preparing the way for the coming bridegroom, because their lamps were not producing any light.

For serious Christians the meaning is clear: The Bible-quoting church member (and we need more) who has not been transformed by the Holy Spirit is an unsuitable representation of Christ's way of life when the gospel of the kingdom is to be preached in all the world. With all their doctrine, they are yet unfitted to be a witness to the Good News that Jesus reigns in the hearts of men. A witness is more than a lawyer who has the facts—a witness testifies of what he has seen and heard; no one is truly converted by merely an intellectual argument.

But the five wise bridesmaids are advent-oriented Christians whose behavior and doctrine will have brought light to the honest in heart all over this planet; the light of their life-style brings sense and urgency to those on the verge of the kingdom, compelling such to want this life-style for their own. How does the advent-oriented Christian mature into this kind of person? To answer this question, Jesus told the story of the talents.

The parable of the talents states the principle that motivates every sincere church member to be a wise bridesmaid during the time of the delayed Second Advent. In fact, the whole parable is to teach Christians "what it means to watch for His coming" (*ibid.*, p. 325).

The talents were specific amounts of money, not any natural ability to do anything in particular. The greater amount of money was entrusted to those who had been endowed with great ability, by either heredity or environment, or both—"to each according to his ability" (Matthew 25:15). "The talents are not apportioned capriciously. He who has ability to use five talents receives five" (*ibid.*, p. 328).

In other words, those who have a rich supply of ability are given larger opportunities to be useful. From those with greater ability much more is required. But everybody has some responsibility because everybody can do something with what he is and has, and he can improve upon it.

The Christian's First Duty Is Self-Development

The fundamental theme of this parable is that the faithful and wise servant, the wise bridesmaid, the serious Christian, has understood that his first duty to God and man is self-development (*ibid.*, p. 329). He makes a life habit out of improving himself mentally, physically, socially, spiritually. Such commitment is done with one purpose in mind—to serve his Lord and to build up His kingdom by the strength his Lord provides.⁸

In this parable picture of prepared Christians in the last days we learn that God is waiting for the character preparation of a significant number of mature Christians to rightly represent the character of Jesus. Throughout Ellen White's interpretation of this remarkable story is the call to perfection, a word that she uses interchangeably with the fundamental Biblical concept that God seeks and waits for the reproduction of Christ's character in Christians of the last generation on earth. The goal of self-development is the stature of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:13). It does not seem that an understanding of perfection would accept anything less.

Moral Perfection Required

In developing this concept in her analysis of this parable Ellen White is forthright: "*Moral perfection is required of all.* Never should we lower the standard of righteousness in order to accommodate inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrongdoing. We need to understand that imperfection of character is sin. All righteous attributes of character dwell in God as a perfect, harmonious whole, and every one who receives Christ as a personal Saviour is privileged to possess these attributes" (*ibid.*, p. 330, italics supplied).

⁸Self-development is a Christian's first act of gratitude to his Lord who has redeemed him. Helping the Lord of the universe to demonstrate what His power can do for sin-spoiled persons is one aspect of the Christian's self-development. Another is that increasing one's ability to be ready for all emergencies and opportunities in life makes the Christian a modern representative of Jesus Christ, an exhibit of love and concern.

The parable teaches that the "true object of life is ministry" (*ibid.*, p. 326). "The law of service" is the only route to healthy personality fulfillment as well as the way to fulfill God's will. Not only are we to be willing to be useful, we are to do something definite about improving ourselves so that we indeed can be useful when the occasion arises. What a pity that so many are sympathetic with another's need, whether it be physical distress, spiritual depression, or moral weakness, and yet are not able to do something substantial in relief! The "faithful and wise servant" is not the friend who wrings his hands in the face of another's need; he is the prepared servant who can shine light along the way, who can relieve human distress when assistance is humanly possible.

The Holy Spirit assists the "faithful and wise servant" and the five "wise" bridesmaids in two ways: He empowers them daily to improve and to persevere in the work of self-development; and when men, at times, meet opportunities beyond their natural abilities, the Spirit is ready and pleased to supplement man's capacities with the "gifts of the Spirit."

The goal of excellence and perfection covers all aspects of life.⁹ We "must strive for perfection of every organ of the body and quality of the mind" (*ibid.*). The committed Christian will keep his body "in the best condition physically and under the most spiritual influences in order that our talents may be put to the highest use. Anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind and makes it less capable of discriminating between right and wrong" (*ibid.*, p. 346).

Upon the committed church member the Lord lays "the obligation of developing the intellect to its fullest capacity, that with all the mind we may know and love our Creator." "He designs that His servants shall possess more intelligence and clearer discernment than the worldling, and He is displeased with those who are too careless or too indolent to become efficient, well-informed workers" (*ibid.*, p. 333).

All this may sound impossible to any honest man, aware of the human weaknesses that beset him. But God does not ask for the impossible. Although He has given us "no assurance that to attain perfection of character is an easy matter," He makes clear that no one should say, "I cannot remedy my defects of character. If you come to this decision, you will certainly fail of obtaining everlasting life. The impossibility lies in your own will. If you will not, then you can not overcome. The real difficulty arises from the corruption of an unsanctified heart, and an unwillingness to submit to the control of God" (*ibid.*, p. 331).

Although we must strive for mental and physical excellence, using every opportunity to grow and thereby increasing our opportunities to be useful, we will not reach the perfection in these areas that Adam knew in Eden. Such perfection is never called for in the Bible or in the writings of Ellen White.

But in the moral area of character development, perfection is possible and expected. Many times Ellen White supported this Biblical teaching in such statements as, "Everyone who by faith obeys God's commandments will reach the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his trans-

⁹Biblical texts abound exhorting Christians to wholeness of thought and action in loving, perfect obedience to God (Matthew 22:37-39; 1 Corinthians 10:31, *et al.*).

gression. When we submit ourselves to Christ we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with garments of His righteousness" (*Signs of the Times*, July 29, 1902).¹⁰

Would not the growing, self-developing, faithful, and wise advent-oriented Christian be the happiest, friendliest, healthiest (relatively speaking), most helpful person in his neighborhood? That is exactly what the process, righteousness by faith, is all about—to produce the kind of person that all men everywhere will recognize as someone distinctive, someone challenging, someone who doesn't blend into his age, someone just like Jesus, someone about whom every man will have to ask and answer this question: Do I want his kind of life or not?

But Jesus did not finish His portrait of the "faithful and wise servant" with the parable of the talents. He knew better! If He had stopped with this, the thought could linger that the best Christian is the great achiever, the genius, he who is the most brilliant and the most physically fit.

In His last story of the sheep and goats, Jesus reminds us that fulfilling the goal of genuine Christianity (call it maturity, perfection, or righteousness) is primarily in the world of being, far beyond the world of only knowing or doing even "good" works. This the five foolish advent-oriented bridesmaids learned too late. The conditions for righteousness, for belonging to the group on "his right hand" who are fit to live forever, we learn in this story, are not beyond the reach of anyone. Here we see that righteousness is not granted as a diploma after years of hard study or as a certificate for baptizing one hundred persons annually, necessary and commendable as these achievements are. Entrance into the kingdom of God is not for those who only kept the rules, maintained the standards, and answered all the questions with the right answers—but a wide and glorious welcome is extended to those who know *how to love*, freely and spontaneously.

"Love in action" is the phrase that sums up the behavior of the faithful and wise servant who is ready, day and night, with whatever his fellowmen

¹⁰Compare the expectation that "moral perfection is required of all" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 330) with the promised historical fulfillment—"Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us as the early rain fell upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 214). See also *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 123, 311, 671, et al.

Douglass

need. Christlike love, the absence of self-gratification and moral rebellion, sums up the life-style of the wise bridesmaids who day in and day out had developed a character pattern that could be relied on in all emergencies. Love is the motivating principle behind the total effort of the wise men who increased their ability to serve—they did it always for the sake of others. They didn't want to be caught empty-handed in the face of someone else's need.

The fully committed Christian is a living demonstration of the fact that "when self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously. The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within—when the sunshine of heaven fills the heart and is revealed in the countenance" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384).

Nothing more can be expected from anyone than "the completeness of Christian character"! This is one more way that Ellen White stated unequivocally that God does expect perfection of character in His people—a demonstration that some generation of latter-day Christians will reveal before Jesus returns.

This kind of life pattern finally gives Jesus something for which to return. This kind of people can be trusted to live forever because they have demonstrated an uncontrived and spontaneous life-style, as consistent and predictable as Jesus' life. They would be safe to save—before whom all other worlds could be safely exposed.

Although we have emphasized our Lord's own portrait of the committed church member in the last generation, there are numerous Biblical references that supplement Matthew 24 and 25. Without any attempt to be exhaustive, only to be illustrative, we ask Paul what he knows about the goals that Christians are expected to reach with God's help in this life.

Each of Paul's letters breathes the hope and challenge that all Christians would accept the power of the Holy Spirit and become like Jesus, in word and deed. The Ephesian letter, for example, is one beautiful appeal for all Christians to remember

that the point of the plan of salvation is “that we should be holy and blameless before him[,] . . . to be his sons . . . to the praise of his glorious grace” (1:4-6); that God gave His gifts so that the church, long after He ascended to heaven, could develop into a demonstration of what the human Jesus was like, each committed church member growing up “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (4:13).

In commenting on Paul’s appeal, Ellen White said, “Are we striving with all our power to attain to the stature of men and women in Christ? Are we seeking for His fullness, ever pressing toward the mark set before us—the perfection of His character? When the Lord’s people reach this mark, they will be sealed in their foreheads. Filled with the Spirit, they will be complete in Christ, and the recording angel will declare, ‘It is finished’ ” (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 1118).¹¹

These fully mature, Christlike Christians fulfill what God has purposed for man in the plan of redemption, that “we should be holy and blameless before him” (Ephesians 1:4). The Christian’s life was not to be merely cloaked in a forensic righteousness but destined to be an actual, living exhibit of right living, “after the likeness of God” (Ephesians 4:24).

The concept of fruit-bearing, Christlike maturity (the equivalent of human perfection) as the reachable goal for men of faith permeates Paul’s letters. A full exposition of Paul’s thought on this subject falls outside the purpose of this book. But, for example, in briefly sketching Paul’s message in Colossians, we find that in the first chapter Paul describes in simple terms what happens when men experience righteousness by faith.

The metaphor of the harvest and maturing fruit (Colossians 1:6, 10) seems to have been an especially effective illustrative teaching device for Paul as it was for Jesus (Mark 4; Matthew 13). The Christian’s first concern is “to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

A soaring paean of praise pours out as Paul

¹¹A study of the scores of occasions when Ellen White commented on Ephesians 4:13 will be rewarding to every serious student concerned with the study of moral perfection. See the Scriptural index included in *Index to the Writings of E. G. White*, Vol. 1.

Douglass

thinks about the “glorious might” of the Father, “who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints” (verses 11, 12), and Jesus, who has reconciled mankind “in his body of flesh by his death” (verse 22). To what end? In order that men one day could be presented “holy and blameless and irreproachable before him” (verse 22).

But is this holiness only a matter of divine declaration, a forensic feat of what many call justification? Paul expects more. The character that qualifies as an example of the triumph of the gospel is a product of a divine-human cooperation; the holiness Jesus promises is certain, “provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel” (verse 23).

The uniqueness and open mystery of the gospel is that men can, in fact, not only in theory, change from the “dominion of darkness” to the “kingdom of his beloved Son” (verse 13). The happy task of the church is “to make known how great . . . are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (verse 27). What then is the grand objective of this unique union? To “present every man mature in Christ” (verse 28).

Throughout his letter to the Colossians Paul blends theology and ethics in his usual masterful manner, but never more forcefully than in his final words when he challenges the Colossians to “stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God” (4:12).

When we ask Peter what he expected the last generation of committed Christians to be like, he would refer us to the central theme of his two letters: “As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15).

Full of conviction born of personal experience, Peter never tired of recounting the power available to change lives: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, . . . by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

Peter spoke directly concerning the kind of

Douglass

thinks about the "glorious might" of the Father, "who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints" (verses 11, 12), and Jesus, who has reconciled mankind "in his body of flesh by his death" (verse 22). To what end? In order that men one day could be presented "holy and blameless and irreproachable before him" (verse 22).

But is this holiness only a matter of divine declaration, a forensic feat of what many call justification? Paul expects more. The character that qualifies as an example of the triumph of the gospel is a product of a divine-human cooperation; the holiness Jesus promises is certain, "provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel" (verse 23).

The uniqueness and open mystery of the gospel is that men can, in fact, not only in theory, change from the "dominion of darkness" to the "kingdom of his beloved Son" (verse 13). The happy task of the church is "to make known how great . . . are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (verse 27). What then is the grand objective of this unique union? To "present every man mature in Christ" (verse 28).

Throughout his letter to the Colossians Paul blends theology and ethics in his usual masterful manner, but never more forcefully than in his final words when he challenges the Colossians to "stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God" (4:12).

When we ask Peter what he expected the last generation of committed Christians to be like, he would refer us to the central theme of his two letters: "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15).

Full of conviction born of personal experience, Peter never tired of recounting the power available to change lives: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, . . . by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

Peter spoke directly concerning the kind of

people who would hasten Christ's advent: "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God. . . . Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace" (2 Peter 3:11-14).¹²

Peter's epistles develop naturally what is seen elsewhere in the Bible—the indissoluble link between Christlikeness, perfection, and the hastening of the Second Advent by committed Christians who reflect the character of their Lord.

When John is asked about what his Lord expected from Christians awaiting the Second Advent, he replies: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2, 3).

John, in both his Gospel and the three letters, speaks to those who are fully committed to being ready for the return of Jesus. He sums up the primary goal of the plan of salvation—the restoration of the divine image in man through victory over sin in every respect. Jesus became the pattern and example of what every man may become through faith—His victory over temptation has demonstrated that any man may also overcome as He overcame. His victory is to be reproduced in the lives of the faithful Christians who live in the last generation.

For John the twin hopes of victory over sin and the return of his Lord overshadowed every earthly trial and disappointment. Such will be the experience of every genuine Christian. The expectation of seeing his Lord again is no less motivating than his expectation that sin can be overcome in this life, "even as he is pure" (verse 3, KJV).¹³

Many more similar New Testament examples await the Bible student. Their consistency burns its way throughout these holy pages: Jesus expects His followers to follow in His steps. A clearer understanding of this truth, as time goes on, will

¹²In commenting on these verses Ellen White wrote: "By giving the gospel to the world it is in our power to hasten our Lord's return. We are not only to look for but to hasten the coming of the day of God. 2 Peter 3:12, margin [RSV]. Had the church of Christ done her appointed work as the Lord ordained, the whole world would before this have been warned, and the Lord Jesus would have come to our earth in power and great glory" (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 633, 634).

¹³Ellen White commented on John's penetrating analysis of the faithful in the last generation: "It is through faith in Jesus Christ that the truth is accepted in the heart, and the human agent is purified and cleansed. . . . He has an abiding principle in the soul, that enables him to overcome temptation. . . . Unless the mind of God becomes the mind of man, every effort to purify himself will be useless; for it is impossible to elevate man except through a knowledge of God. . . . Cleansing the outside of the cup will never make the vessel pure within. A nominal acceptance of truth is good as far as it goes, and the ability to give a reason for our faith is a good accomplishment, but if the truth does not go deeper than this, the soul will never be saved. The heart must be purified from all moral defilement" (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 951).

¹⁴Ellen White often refers to Enoch; who was taken to heaven without seeing death (Genesis 5:24), as a model and representative of those from the last generation who will be alive when Jesus returns. "In the midst of a world by its iniquity doomed to destruction, Enoch lived a life of such close communion with God that he was not permitted to fall under the power of death. The godly character of this prophet *represents the state of holiness which must be attained* by those who shall be 'redeemed from the earth' (Revelation 14:3) at the time of Christ's second advent" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 88, italics supplied).

"Enoch's case is before us.

Hundreds of years he walked with God. He lived in a corrupt age, when moral pollution was teeming all around him; yet he trained his mind to devotion, to love purity. His conversation was upon heavenly things. He educated his mind to run in this channel, and he bore the impress of the divine. His countenance was lighted up with the light which shineth in the face of Jesus. Enoch had temptations as well as we. He was surrounded with society no more friendly to righteousness than is that which surrounds us. The atmosphere he breathed was tainted with sin and corruption, the same as ours; yet he lived a life of holiness. He was unsullied with the prevailing sins of the age in which he lived. *So may we remain pure and uncorrupted.* He was a representative of the saints who live amid the perils and corruptions of the last days. For his faithful obedience to God he was translated. So, also, the faithful, who are alive and remain, will be translated" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 2, p. 122, italics supplied).

"Enoch and Elijah are the correct

result in a more evident reproduction of His experience of victory over temptation. When His people finally realize that there is complete victory in Jesus, that all heaven is waiting for His followers, not only to recognize their possibilities, but to achieve what Jesus has already demonstrated was possible—that awakened generation of Christians will be the last. There will be nothing more that could be said to the world as a witness of God's way of life—besides the physical appearance of the incarnate Lord—no greater evidence of the power and love of God could be revealed.¹⁴ After this global focus on the life of faith and obedience, there will be no necessity for time to be extended further—then the end shall come.

John's description of the faithful advent-oriented Christians in the last days leads us logically and unavoidably into the basic truth that explains what God is waiting for in these last days and why. We are face to face with Jesus and why He came to earth.

Jesus Has Proved It Can Be Done

If Jesus did not indeed carry the liabilities that all men have had to bear, and face temptation and sin on the same basis as all other children of humanity, then there is no real comfort to struggling mankind in being told that Jesus is man's example or in holding up before hopeful Christians waiting for the Second Advent the requirement that God is waiting for the "character of Christ" to be "perfectly reproduced in His people" before He will "claim them as His own" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69). Such exhortation would be irrelevant indeed, if not cruel.

If words mean anything at all, the Biblical statements and Ellen White's comments referring to the unsullied purity and sinless perfection of character to be revealed by faithful Christians in the last generation are to be taken for exactly what they say. Moreover, all that has been said about the harvest principle, the maturing sinlessness of God's people, the reproduction of the character of Jesus, rests on the correct understanding of the fundamental bedrock of all Christian faith—the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Without understanding why Jesus became man, all such concepts fade into a dreamy world of pious ideals and poetry. Worse than that, they become the grist in the mill of theological double-talk.

Without a clear understanding of why God became man, we will never have a true answer to several crucial questions, such as: (1) Why does Jesus delay His return? (2) What is meant by such Biblical expressions as "without spot or wrinkle" (Ephesians 5:27), "mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13), "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4, KJV), "that we may share his

representatives of what the race might be through faith in Jesus Christ if they chose to be. . . . These noble, holy men stood *untainted*, . . . *perfected righteous* characters, and were accounted worthy for translation to heaven" (*Review and Herald*, March 3, 1874, italics supplied).

uglass

holiness" (Hebrews 12:10), "purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:3)? (3) What does the phrase "the seal of God" signify and recognize?

All such questions ultimately raise two final, unavoidable questions: Why did Jesus come to earth? How did He live His sinless life?

"God became man in order to silence forever Satan's charges that He, God, has been unfair with rebels whether they were fallen angels or fallen inhabitants of earth."

In vindicating His character He demonstrated that self-denial and sacrifice were not characteristics to be manifested only by created beings but were aspects of genuine love, the foundation of God's character and judgment: "The plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to *vindicate the character of God before the universe*. . . .

"Satan had sought to prove that God was unjust, that his law was faulty. . . .

"His [Christ's] death had answered the question whether the Father and the Son had sufficient love for man to exercise self-denial and a spirit of sacrifice" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 68-70, italics supplied).

Although Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed by either sinless or sinning beings, Jesus proved that man, even in his fallen human nature, could keep God's law.

"Satan represents God's law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts. The fall of our first parents, with all the woe that has resulted, he charges upon the Creator, leading men to look upon God as the author of sin, and suffering, and death. Jesus was to unveil this deception. As one of us He was to give an example of obedience. For this He took upon Himself our nature, and passed through our experiences. . . . His life testifies that it is possible for us also to obey the law of God" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 24).

The humanity of Jesus became the demonstration that settles forever God's fairness in dealing with sinners and man's unfailing hope that sin need not reign over a Christian's life. "After the fall of man, Satan declared that human beings were proved to be incapable of keeping the law of God. . . . Satan's words appeared to be true, and Christ came to unmask the deceiver. The Majesty of heaven undertook the cause of man, and with the same facilities that man may obtain, withstood the temptations of Satan as man must withstand them. This was the only way in which fallen man could become a partaker of the divine nature. . . . *Christ's humanity would demonstrate for eternal ages the question which settled the controversy*" (*Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 252-255, italics supplied).

"The work of Christ was to confirm the beings of other worlds in their innocence and loyalty, as well as to save the lost and perishing of this world" (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, January 11, 1881).

By confirming the trust of the unfallen, by silencing the doubters and accusers, and by giving a genuine basis for hope to those who were struggling with sin, God demonstrated that He asked nothing more *from* His creation than what He Himself was willing to do *for* His creation. As a genuine participant in the controversy, He entered the human race as every other child of humanity has come; he came when humanity's genetic stream had been weakened for more than forty centuries.¹⁵

All other steps in the plan of salvation depended upon the success Jesus would have as a fellow participant in the arena of temptation. If Jesus, before the watching universe, did not conquer under the same conditions that beset all men, then no man could hope or be expected to conquer. But if He did, with all the liabilities resting on Him that every man carries, then no man has an excuse—and Satan is proved a liar! This has been recognized as the unanswerable logic of the Incarnation.

Let us study how He did it, for His way is our way—and the only way that any generation of

¹⁵The fact that Jesus took man's fallen, sinful nature (but not man's sins), beset by the liabilities of heredity after four thousand years of human history, will be discussed on pages 40-45.

¹⁶Some are troubled by the phrase "in the likeness of," thinking that Paul here suggests that Jesus only appeared to be similar to men of "sinful flesh." If Paul meant that Jesus took some other form of humanity than what any other man has had to live with, he probably would have said, "in the likeness of sinless flesh." Phillips' translation of Romans 8:3 seems to catch Paul's meaning clearly: "The Law never succeeded in producing righteousness—the failure was always the weakness of human nature. But God has met this by sending his own Son Jesus Christ to live in that human nature which causes the trouble. And, while Christ was actually taking upon himself the sins of men, God condemned that sinful nature."

H. C. G. Moule's *Epistle to the Romans*, pages 211, 212, amplified Romans 8:3: "God, when He sent His own son in likeness of flesh of sin, Incarnate, in our identical nature, under all those conditions of earthly life which for us are sin's vehicles and occasions, and as sin-offering, expiatory and reconciling, sentenced sin in the flesh; not pardoned it, observed it, but sentenced it. He ordered it to be executed; He killed its claim and its power for all who are in Christ. And this, "in the flesh," making man's earthly conditions the scene of sin's defeat, for our everlasting encouragement in our "life in the flesh."

For Paul to doubt the reality of Jesus' full humanity would have made of no sense his general argument in Romans 8—that God sent His Son to defeat and destroy sin in sin's own arena—"in the flesh" of fallen man.

Ellen White emphasized Paul's dramatic point often. For example:

Christians will ever become the last generation that completes the gospel commission.

Admittedly whenever man attempts to study the marvelous fact of how God became man, he soon realizes that he must proceed on his knees, with his eyes looking straight ahead, focused on that which has been revealed. Every Christian is bidden to take up this study; indeed there is no subject more important. But philosophical speculation to the right and the left has plagued and confused Christian thought for centuries; it seems that such confusion has bequeathed an apperceptive mass that unconsciously beclouds many sincere students today.

The Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White have provided us with sufficient information regarding the Incarnation whereby we may understand its purpose in the plan of salvation. We may know with some clarity *why* God became man and what this means to the hopeful Christian who is thrilled with the prospects of overcoming sin in his life. We know, but with less clarity, *how* God became man—the mystery seems to be ultimately beyond human words.

We all do well to heed the counsel, "Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ" (Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 1128). Mrs. White was concerned about two errors. Some, in their enthusiasm to identify Jesus as man's Example, overstated their position by attributing evil propensities to Him such as are experienced by men who have sinned, although no such spokesmen ever said that Jesus had Himself sinned. Others seemed to set forth the concept that Jesus met temptation in some manner not common to other fellow beings, thus destroying the completeness of His humanity and His effectiveness as man's understanding High Priest and realistic example.

To the writer it seems relatively unimportant that we should understand fully how Jesus was born, how much like or unlike Adam He was, if only we understand that Jesus lived His sinless life without any secret or special or inherent powers that are not available to every other human being;

that He proved that any other man of faith, open to the empowering Holy Spirit, may live a Christlike (that is, sinless) life also.

Even though our knowledge is limited, we have been given much information to study so that we, in these last days, are without excuse in regard to the distinctive responsibilities resting on advent-oriented Christians. God expects much, not only mentally but morally, from those to whom much has been given. One of the central issues in the relationship of the Incarnation to the moral perfection expected of Christians is that God's role as a fellow participant in the struggle with the sin problem could not be playacting if credibility and an honorable vindication were to be achieved. But, on this basic point where all seems to stand or fall, Christian thinkers have been strangely mute or evasive. The Adventist Church, along with many others in Christendom, has made every effort to exalt our Lord's dignity as God by refuting Arianism (the belief that Jesus was the first created being and not really God); but a strange silence persists when efforts are equally in order to refute various forms of Docetism (an ancient heresy which denies His full humanity).

The majesty of Jesus is demeaned when we lessen His real victory as the Sinless One by making it appear that He did not descend to the level of our sinful, fallen nature and face temptation as all other men have.

On this point the Biblical position is forthright: Some of the texts that support the reality and totality (short of sin) of our Lord's humanity are: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature. . . . Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect" (Hebrews 2:14-17). "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Hebrews 4:15). "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).¹⁶

Ellen White as usual reveals remarkable percep-

"Jesus was in all things made like unto His brethren. He became flesh, even as we are. . . . But Christ reaches us where we are. He took our nature and overcame, that we through taking His nature might overcome. Made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Romans 8:3, KJV), He lived a sinless life" (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 311, 312).

However, truths about God are not confined to key words, whether used in English or any other language. Theological truth rests on the thought conveyed in any given passage and in its support found in other sources of written revelation. Truth is consistent and coherent and does not indulge in mutually exclusive terms.

Paul seems to mean in Romans 8:3 that Jesus took man's fallen nature—a nature that had suffered the consequence of sinful choices, a nature able to sin—and demonstrated to the universe that for a Christian, sin is not inevitable or necessary. In the same flesh that all other men have sinned in, Jesus condemned Satan's lie that no man could obey God perfectly, thus becoming man's perfect Substitute and Example.

¹⁷Ellen White referred many times to the level of sinful, fallen nature that Jesus assumed—the full listing would require more space than is available for the purpose of this chapter. The serious student will make a careful study of *The Desire of Ages*, including pages 24, 49, 117, 296, 311, and 329.

¹⁸In 1905 W. W. Prescott, editor of the *Review and Herald*, wrote three editorials (November 9, December 7, 21) on the humanity of Jesus, emphasizing Ellen White's position that the Bible makes clear that "the flesh which Jesus took and in which He was tempted, was the same as the flesh of the other members of the family, sinful flesh." After the first editorial, response from the readers was immediate, revolving around two questions: (1) If Jesus was God, He would have known that He would not fall—where was the risk of failure such as faces every other man? (2) How could anyone with sinful flesh live a perfect, sinless life? Prescott answered these questions with Bible texts and keen logic. Some of his thoughts were: "If the Son of God did not dwell in sinful flesh when He was born into the world, then the ladder has not been let down from heaven to earth, and the gulf between a holy God and fallen humanity has not been bridged. It would then be necessary that some further means should be provided in order to complete the connection between the Son of God and sinful flesh. And this is exactly what the Roman Catholic Church has done. . . . [Prescott here described the Catholic doctrine of human intermediaries, ending with the doctrine of the immaculate conception.]

"These are the consequences which naturally follow the doctrine that Jesus

tion in sensitive theological areas, especially on the crucial subject of the nature of Jesus. She does not avoid this subject even though it has been muddled by Christian thinkers for two thousand years; neither does she advise others to avoid or ignore the subject of the humanity of Jesus. "The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. . . . This is to be our study. Christ was a real man" (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 244).

Why is the humanity of Jesus "everything to us"? Because, as a "real man," He proved Satan a liar on one hand and gave His human brethren reason for hope on the other; God could never have been just and yet able to justify a repentant sinner if Jesus in His humanity had not proved that sin could be conquered, that His law could be obeyed in human flesh.

When Jesus became man, was He only playacting, only sharing man's physical likeness and problems? Not for a moment! Ellen White is emphatic: "Christ did not make believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature. 'As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same' (Hebrews 2:14, KJV)" (*ibid.*, p. 247).

If Jesus took human nature in a form different from His contemporaries, why would Ellen White be so emphatic against those attempts to minimize His complete identity with fallen human nature? She seemed unequivocal when she wrote:

"It was not a make-believe humanity that Christ took upon Himself. He took human nature and lived human nature. . . . Christ's life represents a perfect manhood. Just that which you may be, He was in human nature. He took our infirmities. He was not only made flesh, but He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Ellen G. White *Comments*, *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 1124).

He took man's sinful nature—a nature weakened by millennia of sinful choices, although He in no way allowed His inherited human nature to cause Him to sin. Ellen White is unequivocal in supporting the Biblical position regarding Christ's complete humanity apart from sinning:

"He took upon His sinless nature *our sinful na-*

ture, that He might know how to succor them that are tempted" (*Medical Ministry*, p. 181, italics supplied).

"Clad in the vestments of humanity, the Son of God came down to the level of those He wished to save. In Him was no guile or sinfulness; He was ever pure and undefiled; yet He took upon Him *our sinful nature*" (*Review and Herald*, December 15, 1896).

"He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin" (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4, p. 1147).

"In taking upon Himself man's nature *in its fallen condition*, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin" (*ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 1131).

"Though He had no taint of sin upon His character, yet He condescended to connect *our fallen human nature* with His divinity" (*Special Instruction Relating to the Review & Herald Office and the Work of Battle Creek*, p. 13, May 31, 1896).¹⁷

Ellen White never tired of exalting our Lord's earthly triumph. When small-minded people were troubled by the mind-stretching thought that Jesus really did live victoriously in spite of the weight of human liabilities, she had this to say:

"Letters have been coming in to me, affirming that Christ could not have had the same nature as man, for if He had, He would have fallen under similar temptations. If He did not have man's nature, He could not be our example. If He was not a partaker of our nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for Him to yield to temptation, He could not be our helper. It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battles as man, in man's behalf. His temptation and victory tell us that humanity must copy the Pattern; man must become a partaker of the divine nature" (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 408; for further study: *ibid.*, pp. 267, 268).¹⁸

We must be very clear as to what Jesus did when He became man. At what point in the history of sin did He come—to take the place of sinless Adam or the place of fallen man as beset with all the liabilities of forty centuries? Ellen White states frequently that He entered the human family after the

did not take sinful flesh, and we avoid these consequences by denying the doctrine, and holding to the plain teaching of the Scriptures. . . .

"This question touches the very heart of our Christianity. The teaching of Jesus is, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' And through the apostle Peter comes the instruction, 'Be ye holy; for I am holy.' No one will deny that we have sinful flesh, and we therefore ask how it will be possible to meet the requirements of the Scripture if it is not possible for one to be perfect or holy in sinful flesh. The very hope of our attaining perfection and holiness is based upon the wonderful truth that the perfection and holiness of divinity were revealed in sinful flesh in the person of Jesus. We are not able to explain how this could be, but our salvation is found in believing the fact. . . . It is the crowning glory of our religion that even flesh of sin may become a temple for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit."

W. W. Prescott was one of the molding scholars of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Froom wrote: "Prescott was a recognized scholar. He was a profound student of the Bible—and of theology and history—in his own right. He was keenly conscious of certain inherent weaknesses and deficiencies in our traditional method of Bible-teaching emphasis up to that time, both as to content and method" (*Movement of Destiny*, p. 378).

¹⁹"Christ was not in as favorable a position in the desolate wilderness to endure the temptations of Satan as was Adam when he was tempted in Eden. The Son of God humbled Himself and took man's nature *after the race had*

wandered four thousand years from Eden, and from their original state of purity and uprightness. Sin had been making its terrible marks upon the race for ages; and physical, mental, and moral degeneracy prevailed throughout the human family. . . .

"Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man. In behalf of the race, with the *weaknesses of fallen man upon Him*, He was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed. . . .

"In what contrast is the second Adam as He entered the gloomy wilderness to cope with Satan singlehanded! Since the Fall the race had been decreasing in size and physical strength, and sinking lower in the scale of moral worth, up to the period of Christ's advent to the earth. And in order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him *where he was*. He took human nature, and bore the infirmities and degeneracy of the race" (*Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 267, 268, italics supplied).

"In taking upon Himself man's nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin" (*ibid.*, p. 256).

²⁰That Jesus took man's fallen, sinful nature is not merely a Christological point, it is a soteriological truth of great magnitude. Karl Barth, as well as others, has seen this clearly. In his *Church Dogmatics*, under the section entitled "Very God and Very Man," Barth, after emphasizing Christ's deity, discusses how God became human flesh: "He is a man as we are, . . . equal to us in the state and condition into which our disobedience has brought us." Barth defines flesh (*sarx*) as "the concrete form of human

race had been weakened by four thousand years; in no way did He vicariously or in any other way make-believe take sinful, fallen flesh.

"It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. *But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin*. Like every child of Adam *He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity*. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 49, italics supplied).

"The great work of redemption could be carried out *only by the Redeemer taking the place of fallen Adam*. . . . The King of glory proposed to humble Himself to *fallen humanity!* He would place His feet in Adam's steps. He would take *man's fallen nature* and engage to cope with the strong foe who triumphed over Adam" (*Review and Herald*, February 24, 1874, italics supplied).¹⁹

In no way would Ellen White play down the triumph of Jesus and lend any support to the great Christian heresy that our Lord's human nature was as Adam's before his fall—unencumbered with the liabilities and degeneracy of sin. Amplifying the thoughts already quoted above, she explained, as clearly as language would allow, the difference between Jesus and Adam.

"Satan had pointed to Adam's sin as proof that God's law was unjust, and could not be obeyed. In our humanity Christ was to redeem Adam's failure. But when Adam was assailed by the tempter, none of the effects of sin were upon him. He stood in the strength of perfect manhood, possessing the full vigor of mind and body. He was surrounded with the glories of Eden, and was in daily communion with heavenly beings. *It was not thus with Jesus* when He entered the wilderness to cope with Satan. For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the *infirmities of degenerate humanity*. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his deg-

radation" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 117, italics supplied).

The glory of Christ's victorious life was that He could resist such tremendous temptations, greater temptations than any other man has had to face, because He never yielded when they were less intense, as every other person has. After allowing Himself to descend low into humanity's weakness, He "like every child of Adam" has "accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity" (*ibid.*, p. 49). He took everything that Satan could throw at Him, yet, without sinning. As His life record developed, faith, obedience, loyalty, purity, love, were never more clearly manifested.

Since Jesus proved His point—that is, through faith man *can* live without sinning—Satan's only defense has been to play down or make obscure what Jesus really did. To nullify the plan of salvation, some have pointed out that all Satan has to do is to confuse the truth of the Incarnation by separating two indivisible elements: (1) Jesus' complete victory over sin in (2) man's sinful, fallen nature.²⁰

But, to be fuzzy at this point, not to understand clearly why Jesus came and what He did, will only guarantee haziness and confusion when other questions are asked, such as: Why has Jesus delayed His coming? On whom does the latter rain fall? What does the seal of God signify? What does "mature man" mean? When does the church reproduce the character of Jesus?

The relevance of this brief survey regarding the humanity of Jesus is this: The example of Jesus, the God-man, stands before us all as the viable goal that will be achieved in a remarkable demonstration by the last generation of advent-oriented Christians. The basic spiritual equipment that guaranteed the triumph of Jesus has always been available to mankind, but it will be the last generation which will one day prove its power and effectiveness. "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

What do we learn from the New Testament truth that Jesus lived His sinless life in sinful flesh?

1. Jesus proved that man in sinful flesh could

nature marked by Adam's fall."

There was no question in Barth's mind regarding the sinlessness of Jesus: "He was not a sinful man. But inwardly and outwardly His situation was that of a sinful man. . . . Freely He entered into solidarity and necessary association with our lost existence. Only in this way 'could' God's revelation to us, our reconciliation with Him, manifestly become an event in Him and by Him."

After Barth marshals the Biblical texts to substantiate his conclusion, he states categorically: "*But there must be no weakening or obscuring of the saving truth that the nature which God assumed in Christ is identical with our nature as we see it in the light of the Fall.* If it were otherwise, how could Christ be really like us? What concern would we have with Him?" (italics supplied).

Barth recognizes that this position has been underemphasized through the years, chiefly to avoid the thought of sinful taint on our Lord's character. But such precaution was not necessary. In fact, his victory is enhanced when His full struggle with man's fiercest temptations is properly viewed: "Jesus did not run away from the state and situation of fallen man, but took it upon Himself, lived it and bore it Himself as the eternal Son of God. How could He have done so, if in His human existence He had not been exposed to real inward temptation and trial, if like other men He had not trodden an inner path, if He had not cried to God and wrestled with God in real inward need? It was in this wrestling, in which He was in solidarity with us to the uttermost, that there was done that which is not done by us, the will of God" (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 151-158).

²¹“Christ, by His own example, made it evident that man may stand in integrity. Men may have a power to resist evil—a power that neither earth, nor death, nor hell can master; a power that will place them where they may overcome as Christ overcame. Divinity and humanity may be combined in them” (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 409).

“Christ came in human form to show the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds and of the fallen world that ample provision has been made to enable human beings to live in loyalty to their Creator” (*ibid.*, p. 227).

“[Christ came] testifying to the fallen angels and to the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds that through the divine help which has been provided, every one may walk in the path of obedience to God’s commands” (*ibid.*, p. 309).

“This power to overcome He would give to every son and daughter of Adam who would accept by faith the righteous attributes of His character.

“God loved the world so dearly that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever would accept Him might have power to live His righteous life. Christ proved that it is possible for man to lay hold by faith on the power of God” (*ibid.*, p. 223).

²²For further study: *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 130, 131, 181; *Messages to Young People*, p. 165; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 531; *Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 408.

²³Many other Ellen White statements develop the thought that Jesus possessed no advantage in the flesh over other men when He threw off the liabilities of human heredity and lived a sinless life in flesh able to sin, such as: “But the Son of God was

live without sinning. Some samplings from a wide array of Ellen White comments include:

“Satan had asserted that man could not keep the commandments of God. To prove that they could Christ became a man, and lived the life of perfect obedience . . . through divine power” (*Signs of the Times*, May 10, 1899).

“Everyone who by faith obeys God’s commandments will reach the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression. When we submit ourselves to Christ, we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness” (*ibid.*, July 29, 1902).

“By His life and His death, Christ proved that God’s justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 762).²¹

2. Jesus demonstrated the characteristics of a person who would live without sinning: We “must copy the Pattern” (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 408).

“He became like one of us, except in sin, that His life and character should be a pattern for all to copy” (Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, October 20, 1886).

“As one of us He was to give an example of obedience. For this He took upon Himself our nature, and passed through our experiences. ‘In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.’ Heb. 2:17. If we had to bear anything which Jesus did not endure, then upon this point Satan would represent the power of God as insufficient for us. Therefore Jesus was ‘in all points tempted like as we are.’ Heb. 4:15. He endured every trial to which we are subject. And He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us. . . . His life testifies that it is possible for us also to obey the law of God” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 24).

“Although tempted in all points like as we are, He stood before the world untainted by the evil that surrounded Him. Thus we also are to overcome as Christ overcame” (*ibid.*, p. 389).²²

3. Jesus employed no advantages that are not

available to every human being. His faith in His heavenly Father alone constituted the secret of His triumph over sin (1 John 5:4).

"Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 664).

"He endured every trial to which we are subject. And He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us" (*ibid.*, p. 24).

"We need not place the obedience of Christ by itself, as something for which He was particularly adapted, by His particular divine nature, for He stood before God as man's representative and was tempted as man's substitute and surety. If Christ had a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have, *Satan would have made capital of this matter*. The work of Christ was to take from the claims of Satan his control of man, and He could do this only in the way that He came—a man, tempted as a man, rendering the obedience of a man" (Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 930, italics supplied).

The obedience of Christ to His Father was the same obedience that is required of man. Man cannot overcome Satan's temptations without divine power to combine with his instrumentality. So with Jesus Christ; because He chose to lay aside His divine powers while He was man, He too had to trust completely on the power of God through faith. He came not to our world to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater, but as a man to obey God's holy law, and *in this way He is our example*. The Lord Jesus came to our world, not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could do through faith in God's power to help in every emergency.²³ Man is, through faith, to be a partaker in the divine nature, and to overcome every temptation wherewith he is beset.

surrendered to the Father's will, and dependent upon His power. So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will." "But He rested not in the possession of almighty power." "He trusted in the Father's might. It was in faith—faith in God's love and care—that Jesus rested, and the power of that word which stilled the storm was the power of God. As Jesus rested by faith in the Father's care, so we are to rest in the care of our Saviour" (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 208, 336).

"Since He gained knowledge as we may do, His intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures shows how diligently His early years were given to the study of God's word. . . . Every child may gain knowledge as Jesus did" (*ibid.*, p. 70).

"Christ's overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity. His imputed grace and power He gives to all who receive Him by faith. . . .

"The Lord now demands that every son and daughter of Adam, through faith in Jesus Christ, serve Him in human nature which we now have. The Lord Jesus has bridged the gulf that sin has made. He has connected earth with heaven, and finite man with the infinite God. Jesus, the world's Redeemer, could only keep the commandments of God in the same way that humanity can keep them" (Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 929).

What Jesus Achieved Will Be Reproduced in the Last Generation

²⁴The English word *faith* is a translation of *pistis*, a familiar Greek word used often in the New Testament. Its verb form, *pisteuo*, is frequently translated in English Bibles as "to believe." Faith, the personal act of decision, is simultaneously perception and obedience: (1) God in Christ is recognized as the Lord of life, and man's sense of alienation and anxiety is perceived as the result of his irresponsible rebellion as a sinner; (2) in this awareness there is the joyful response of obedient love to the Lord God, who not only defines man's state as sinner but also declares man forgiven and reinstated as His son. The man of faith thus trusts God implicitly and is willing to do whatever God says now and forever. The result of the life of faith is complete conformity to the will of God, a reproduction of the character of Jesus.

²⁵The classic locus for Biblical perfection has been Matthew 5:48—"You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Ellen White comments frequently on this amazing text. For example: "He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning. . . . As the Son of man was perfect in His life, so His followers are to be perfect in their life. . . . He bids us by faith in Him attain to the glory of the character of God. Therefore are we to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect" (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 311, 312).

The advent-oriented Christian, the faithful and wise servants of Matthew 24, and the wise bridesmaids of Matthew 25, who make up the faithful in the last generation, will have developed a clear understanding of the meaning of faith.²⁴

The open secret that explains the triumphant, obedient life of Jesus is that He lived by faith in His heavenly Father. The explanation of how the last generation will "perfectly" reproduce the character of Christ and thus hasten His coming (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69) will be that they learned to live by faith in the God who has said that He is able to keep His children from falling (Jude 24).

Faith is that total human response that distinguishes God's quality people in the last generation. There have been individuals throughout time who have responded to God completely and unreservedly. Their conduct gave evidence of their settled habits of obedience. However, in the last days a significant group of people will demonstrate the social power that breaks forth when people live the truth as it is in Jesus. For the first time in this world's history God will be able to point to His church and say without embarrassment: "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12, KJV).

Someday, a generation of advent-oriented Christians will recognize that God means what He says—that He will wait for a people about whom He can proudly say, "Here they are; everybody take a good look! Do you want what they have? Do you want your children to grow up like theirs? Do you want their happiness and hope? If you do, then you must know their secret: they keep My commandments, and they have a faith like Jesus had."

Only when Christians finally realize that God *will wait* for a quality people, generation after gen-

eration if need be, will they become serious about the standard of maturation (or perfection) that they must reach. Theology precedes ethics; whenever men or churches have tried to reverse this order, religious chaos and confusion have developed. When the simple New Testament expectations are seen clearly as goals to be reached and not merely as the North Star—a good guide but never to be reached—then serious Christians will quickly arouse themselves into a new attitude of relating to all the commandments of God. God does expect sinlessness in this life!

Ellen White never tires of emphasizing this point: "Every living Christian will advance daily in the divine life. As he advances toward perfection, he experiences a conversion to God every day; and this conversion is not completed until he attains to perfection of Christian character, a full preparation for the finishing touch of immortality" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 2, p. 505).

"Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church. . . . The Saviour came to glorify the Father by the demonstration of His love; so the Spirit was to glorify Christ by revealing His grace to the world. The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671).²⁵

The subject of righteousness by faith, if it means anything at all, is concerned with the removal of sin from the universe. Righteousness by faith²⁶ is the process by which man becomes right with God—in such a way that angels and devils, saints and sinners, are finally convinced that religion is more than words, that God and man both mean what they have said. Responding to God's way of doing things by faith—by trusting obedience—will result in a person who will be safe to save, in whom sin will not arise again. It is the process of proving our fitness to live forever, as Ellen White often expressed it. The experience of righteousness by faith will result in that grand demonstration of how faith truly works as de-

²⁶An excellent treatment of the process by which God helps man to overcome sin (often described as "righteousness by faith") is found in the chapter "Without a Wedding Garment," in *Christ's Object Lessons*. Here Ellen White talks plainly about what God expects of man. "By the wedding garment in the parable is represented the pure, spotless character which Christ's true followers will possess. . . . It is the righteousness of Christ, His own unblemished character, that through faith is imparted to all who receive Him as their personal Saviour. . . . When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. . . . He who becomes a partaker of the divine nature will be in harmony with God's great standard of righteousness, His holy law. This is the rule by which God measures the actions of men. This will be the test of character in the judgment. . . . Satan had claimed that it was impossible for man to obey God's commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God's precepts. . . . God requires perfection of His children. . . . This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom. The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be

children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. . . . There will be no future probation in which to prepare for eternity. It is in this life that we are to put on the robe of Christ's righteousness. This is our only opportunity to form characters for the home which Christ has made ready for those who obey His commandments" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 310-319).

²⁷Throughout *Christ's Object Lessons* the harvest principle underlies the Biblical statements that Ellen White amplifies, especially when relating to subjects such as the reception of the Holy Spirit's work in the latter rain, the quality people in the last generation, and the final work of completing the gospel commission. "It is the privilege of every soul to be a living channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is nothing that Christ desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour's love. All heaven is waiting for channels through which can be poured the holy oil to be a joy and blessing to human hearts" (page 419).

²⁸*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 506.

scribed in Revelation 14:12—"Here they are!"

The many practical implications of the Biblical teaching of "righteousness by faith" coupled with the harvest principle (that God will wait for His quality people) are obvious. For example, the "final events" for which Seventh-day Adventists have looked for many years will be delayed until the harvest is ready to be garnered in. In fact, the activity of a church living Christlike lives will trigger many of these "events."

The "latter rain" experience is dependent upon and will wait for the church's readiness of character to receive such Heavenly approval. The latter rain is not an event that happens arbitrarily or one that is precipitated by any particular secular event. Ellen White put it often: "Those who come up to every point, and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation. God proves His people in this world. This is the fitting up place to appear in His presence. Here, in this world, in these last days, persons will show what power affects their hearts and controls their actions" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, pp. 187, 188).

"Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us" (*ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 214).²⁷

"May the Lord help His people to cleanse the soul temple from every defilement, and to maintain such a close connection with Him that they may be partakers of the latter rain when it shall be poured out" (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 1055).

We may not know with precision exactly what will happen during the latter-rain experience, but we do know that it "ripens" the character development of the Christian,²⁸ dramatically increasing the Christian's effectiveness in completing the gospel.

Although it seems to be clear in the New Testament and in the writings of Ellen White, the thought lingers with some that surely God does not

expect sinlessness in His people this side of translation. This misinterpretation of what God has been trying to say to His people is not deliberate, perhaps not even conscious. The error begins when Christ's role as man's Substitute is misunderstood, and it is perpetuated over the years in the tragic misunderstanding of righteousness by faith. If Jesus is only man's Saviour and not truly his Substitute or Example, thus proving that all men can do what He did if they too would live a life of faith, then the challenge to do what He did is immeasurably reduced.

Such reasoning tends to equate righteousness by faith with justification by faith, emphasizing forgiveness and reinstatement, often at the expense of a keen understanding of the obedient life that flows from a genuine faith experience. Such thought often limits righteousness by faith to the cloak that is thrown around the sinner. True as this relationship may be, it is only a partial understanding. The end effect is a stunted growth, a sad manifestation of what the power and grace of God can really do, and a basically defeatist spirit.²⁹ The larger picture of a restored, Christlike person remains blurred. Against such halfway concepts Ellen White wrote: "The religion of Christ means more than the forgiveness of sin; it means taking away our sins, and filling the vacuum with the graces of the Holy Spirit" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 419, 420).

However, the Biblical truth about the reality of Christ's humanity and Ellen White's resounding confirmation of His complete identification with all of humanity's liabilities, short of sinning Himself, turns the whole story around. Rightly understood, righteousness by faith in God's power to keep men from falling is a compelling, dynamic, positive force in a person's life. Knowing well his own weaknesses when separated from the power of God, the man of faith now sees what truly can be accomplished in his life and finds his greatest joy in achieving it.

The message of the Bible becomes more precious as well as exceedingly simple. "Jesus did it—I can too. I can live sinlessly even as He did, through

²⁹It should be expected that Satan will keep up his steady attack against the truth about the incarnation of Jesus and the quality level God expects from His followers in the last generation: "But the enemy is determined that this gift [of Christ becoming man] shall be so mystified that it will become as nothingness" (Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 1113). "He is constantly seeking to deceive the followers of Christ with his fatal sophistry that it is impossible for them to overcome" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 489).

faith in my heavenly Father.”

In fact, this is the only way men of earth can prove their fitness to live forever. Especially in the last generation, when the truth and the choices will be unavoidably clear, walking from earth to heaven will be done by those who already have fixed their character pattern. They will be living without rebel thoughts in any area of their life—they will have reached perfection of character in a human nature that is still able to sin. In such Christians, love to God and man no longer alternates with forays into the land of self-indulgence. Mature love now responds spontaneously to every human situation. The fully committed man of faith has developed a life pattern whereby he is at his best physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually so that he will have time, energy, and desire to be of maximum help to his fellow human beings. Such a life is developed in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, requiring maximum self-discipline and single-eyed dedication. But it was divine love that prompted such maturity and human love that motivated it. Yet, from start to finish, the man of faith who reaches out toward a condition of sinlessness knows well that temptations to relax, to indulge self-gratification, are ever with him. Human perfection is never described as a state in which the Christian is beyond the possibility of sinning. Just as Jesus in His sinless experience had to contend with monstrous temptations even into Gethsemane, so the Christians who are perfectly reproducing Jesus’ character will find weaknesses and temptations ever near until Jesus returns.

The practical aspects of how the Christian grows in grace, “constantly dying to sin and constantly living for Christ,” are outside the present assignment. It is assumed that each reader recognizes that the maturing Christian does not reach instantaneously the moral perfection and sinlessness that God has always held up before His followers and expects from those “who shall stand in the time of trouble” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 623). “It is only by long persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict, that we shall overcome” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 560).

³⁰Ellen White amplified these Biblical principles: “Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of

Furthermore, the mature Christian would be the last to announce that he had reached sinless perfection. He probably would contend strenuously that he hadn't arrived. The arrogance of the thought would be incompatible with what he has learned about his human weaknesses apart from the indwelling, empowering Spirit of God. The closer such Christians come to reproducing the character of Jesus, "the more clearly we discern the purity of His character, the more clearly shall we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the less shall we feel like exalting ourselves" (*ibid.*, p. 561).

Never does the Bible or Ellen White regard Christian maturity as a static perfectionism. Rather, Christlikeness is viewed as a dynamic relationship with God that will never cease developing its likeness to Jesus. Such a growth pattern will continue forever in the new earth.

However, there is a point in the growth pattern when the Christian has conquered every known sin; his behavior is predictably loving, unselfish, and Christlike. He is in "harmony with God, perfect conformity to the principles of His law. . . . This standard is not one to which we cannot attain. . . . God has made provision that we may become like unto Him, and He will accomplish this for all who do not interpose a perverse will and thus frustrate His grace" (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 76).

Even though the Christian has reached such a point, Satan does not give up. He will assail the Christian with his fiercest temptations within and without; the temptation to please self will always exist. "So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 560, 561).

But during this reign of Satan the Christian who has reached the moral perfection that God says can be attained in this life will be saying No, as Jesus said No to all temptations. There will be no stopping place when the Christian may relax his guard or when he may no longer need the sustaining grace of the Holy Spirit.³⁰

temptation. . . . Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept His Father's commandments, and there was *no sin in Him* that Satan could use to his advantage. *This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble*" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 623, italics supplied).

"If you would be a saint in heaven, you must first be a saint on earth. The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection. You will come up from the grave with the same disposition you manifested in your home and in society. Jesus does not change the character at His coming. The work of transformation must be done now" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 16).

Ellen White was a theological optimist when she wrote about the infinite possibilities open to a man of faith: "We must realize that through belief in Him it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, and so escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin, all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity. . . . [Ephesians 2:1-6 quoted.]

"As we partake of the divine nature, hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good. Ever learning of the divine Teacher, daily partaking of His nature, we cooperate with God in overcoming Satan's temptations. God works, and man works, that man may be one with Christ as Christ is one with God. Then we sit together with Christ in heavenly places. The mind rests with peace and assurance in Jesus" (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 943).

The Integrity of God's Government Vindicated

In a sense this section serves as a summary. We have noted earlier (p. 36) that "the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but *it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe*" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 68, italics supplied).

The plan of redemption has cosmic consequences. The indictments of Satan had to be answered in such a way that no doubt would ever linger in the minds of unfallen beings. When God became man, entering the fray as all babes are born into the human predicament and utilizing no other weapon in the warfare with evil than is available to all other human beings, the issue was focused, clear-cut, and in full view of the watching universe.

In His thirty-three years, Jesus proved to all unfallen beings that Satan was a liar on all counts. He proved that God's law was not unjust; that God too was self-denying, even as He asked His creation to be loving and self-sacrificing; that mercy and justice were not disparate qualities but the two sides of the coin called either *love* or *holy*.

But the question could still linger—if not in the unfallen worlds, among men and women on earth: "Yes, Jesus did what no man has ever done—He lived the sinless life. Granted—but He was God, wasn't He? What would anyone really expect—that He would fail? But I am not God, I was not born of the Holy Spirit, I am simply a human being with all the frailties of the human race running through my blood. Who could ever expect me to live without sinning as Jesus did?"

The tragedy is that Christian theology has frequently reflected this human frustration. So-called

orthodox theologians in their attempts to emphasize Christ's sinlessness have gone to great pains to emphasize that Jesus was a man in physical likeness only; to think of Him as a human being "in every respect . . . yet without sinning" seems to them to be an irreverent and distasteful thought.³¹

To silence that last, lingering question—that Jesus was sinless because He was God and not truly a man who faced sin on the same basis as all the rest of humanity—Jesus now waits for His church to reproduce what He achieved, thus proving again that man with fallen human nature can live without sinning.³² This demonstration will complete the vindication of God's character and government and will settle the question of His justice and mercy forever.

Although Jesus proved that God asked nothing more from His creation than what He would do for His creation; that God was fair, loving, and just; that man on earth in his fallen condition could live as God wills; He now must wait for His church to prove that all these statements are more than theological assertions, that the life of faith that He lived and the character He manifested are possible for all men to reach.

Ellen White emphasized this point frequently:

"Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church. . . . The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. *The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people*" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671, italics supplied).

Some generation of Christians will yet confirm the triumph that was our Lord's—men need not succumb to temptation, men need not remain sinners! This, too, is the Christian gospel—the Good News that honest, weary, struggling men and women truly want to know. Sincere, honest voices ask, "Is the battle worth it? In fact, is there such a thing as victory?" Although they read that the life of Jesus says Yes, the living witness of advent-

³¹Such theologians will emphasize that the chief purpose for Jesus' becoming man was to die on the cross, thus satisfying the demands of the law. In so doing, they feel that they are exalting God's boundless love for a lost world. However, such reasoning tends to limit the risk that God took when He became man, reveals a limited understanding of the plan of salvation, and misses the point of His life of faith. E.g., G. C. Berkouwer, who quotes Bavinck's statement that the possibility of Jesus' "sinning and falling is an atrocious idea. . . . For then God Himself must have been able to sin—which it is blasphemy to think" (*The Person of Christ*, p. 259).

³²The harvest theme is focused clearly in *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 69: " 'When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.' Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."

oriented Christians in the last generation will be the crowning evidence that the Bible means what it says when it expresses in so many ways that God “is able to keep . . . [them] from falling” (Jude 24).

Such Christlike lives will manifest the distinctive, qualitative difference of the commandment way of life, proving the better way that God has held up before mankind since Eden. For the first time on a grand scale the world will see the reason for God’s insistence that only commandment-keepers will be fit to live forever, that obedience to the laws of life produces the truly liberated person.³³

Freedom from anxiety, from the physical and emotional consequences of guilt, from enslaving, self-destroying habits; freedom to rejoice in the present and to hope for the future—this kind of life-style yearning hearts the world over need to see. They have heard about it from a thousand pulpits, but it will not be convincing without the life that backs up the words proclaimed. Herein resided the authority of Jesus, and so will it be in the lives of all those who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12, KJV).

This living demonstration of “faith which worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6, KJV) will silence the mouth of all depreciators of God’s mercy and justice; it will be the glory light that completes the gospel commission. In living color these faithful and wise servants, these prepared bridesmaids waiting for the advent of their Lord, prove beyond a doubt that man united with God can live above sin, that overcoming is possible.

Excitement seems to move Ellen White’s pen as she completes the last chapter of *Christ’s Object Lessons*:

“It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the

³³“The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God’s law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God’s commandments. Then *the Lord can trust them* to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. . . . *They have a right* to join the blood-washed throng.”

“Those who reject the gift of Christ’s righteousness are rejecting the attributes of character which would constitute them the sons and daughters of God. They are rejecting that which alone could give them a *fitness for a place* at the marriage feast” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 315, 317, italics supplied).

light of His goodness, mercy, and truth. . . .

“The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. *The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.*

“The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness” (pages 415, 416, italics supplied).

This demonstration will take place in the scorching scrutiny of a world aroused in its final crisis—at a time when every earthly inducement to accommodate to worldly norms will be pressed. The issue will be clearly drawn, not only over doctrinal differences, but between the life-style of a loving commandment-keeper and that of a rebel who has become the lord of his own life, a victim of his self-imposed life of sinful habits.

With individuals—well-known by neighbors and longtime acquaintances in cities and towns everywhere—proclaiming and manifesting the Good News of God’s power and grace, there will be no question then about superior advantages such as “born of the Holy Spirit.” The birth, schooling, and past earthly record of these last-day sons and daughters of humanity will be well known to their relatives and friends. And their changed life and witness will silence forever the haunting doubt, “Yes, Jesus may have done it, but after all, He was God!”

More than an individual effort here and there, this last-day demonstration will be a significant social impact of a worldwide movement. It will be a revelation of what happens when truth settles deeply³⁴ and comfortably into the lives of men and women and will vindicate the wisdom of God in waiting for this generation to mature.

Here at last are the people for whom God has been waiting, for at least a century—people who not only say Yes to everything He says, but who demonstrate the distinctive quality of what happens to people who say Yes to God. There is not a rebel among them. They are comfortable with God’s way of life. They have made His will a life

³⁴“Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come” (Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4, p. 1161).

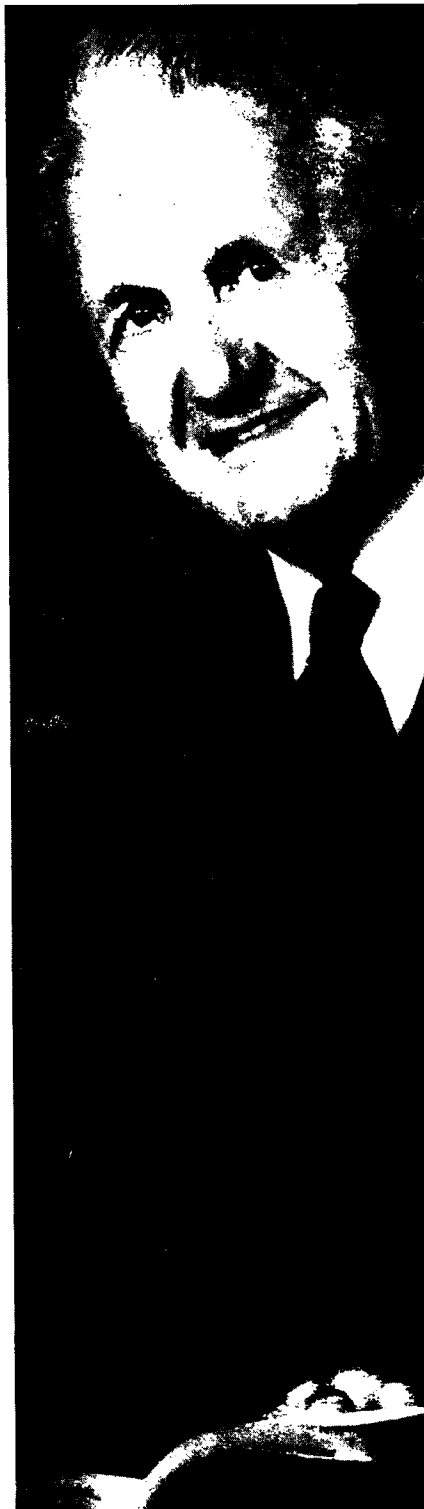
habit. Their life pattern has been set forever.

God's plan to settle the sin problem is now complete, the words of Jesus have become a fact of history: " 'As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world' " (John 17:18). The Teacher sees His reward in the perfect response of His disciples; the Example sees Himself reproduced faithfully by those who truly call Him Lord. Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth!

“let us go on to erfection”

By Edward Heppenstall

Dr. Edward Heppenstall has spent most of his working life in the classroom. A native of England, he received his education at Stanborough Park College and Andrews University. He holds graduate degrees from the University of Michigan (MA) and the University of Southern California (PhD). He has taught at Stanborough Park College in England, at La Sierra College in California, where he was head of the religion department, and at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at both Washington, D.C., and Berrien Springs, Michigan, as chairman of the department of theology. Since retiring, Dr. Heppenstall has taught in the Division of Religion at Loma Linda University and also authored *Our High Priest* and *Salvation Unlimited*.



Text set 9 / 13 Helvetica

contents

61 / "Let Us Go On to Perfection"

62 / The Meaning of Perfection

70 / Man's Ability and Inability

76 / Relative Perfection

81 / Saved by Grace

83 / Love, the More Excellent Way

“let us go on to perfection”

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

This statement by our Lord sets before Christians an exceedingly high standard indeed, nothing short of perfection as God is perfect. It must be admitted that the ideal of sinless perfection has produced and inspired many beautiful and wonderful Christian characters. At the same time, where the veriest flaw and the slightest fault are regarded with distress, where the insistence of a rigid, stern morality almost makes one shudder, many sincere people have laid upon themselves the most galling yoke, that of an obsession with oneself in the effort to achieve sinlessness. They have turned themselves into a moral machine, without peace and without security before God.

The controversy over Christian perfection has frequently been the occasion of much that is undesirable in Christian theology. Various theological and pietistic interpretations of the Biblical uses of the word *perfect* have also led to compromise with sin, with the law of God, and even with the plan of salvation itself. Much of the fog that clouds this subject is due to the failure to understand what is sinful and what is not and what God actually requires of His followers.

Perfection! Is it wrong to seek to achieve it? That depends upon what we mean by it, how and when we hope to gain it. If Christian perfection means restoration here and now to Adam's sinless state *and complete harmony with God*, so that a man need no longer be classed as a sinner, then the Bible knows nothing of it. The only sinless man who ever lived is Jesus Christ.

The truth about perfection in Christian doctrine and experience is that which does justice to the Biblical meaning and use of the word. Since the Bible exhorts the

believer in every age again and again to be perfect, then obviously the experience it advocates is not something that lies beyond the experience of those to whom the word is addressed. It must be possible within the framework of the Christian life here on earth, otherwise there would be no point to the Bible writers' urging perfection upon believers. The only valid meaning to the words *perfect* and *perfection* is that which the Bible gives to them.

the meaning of perfection

To keep in mind the Biblical use and meaning of the word *perfection* is not always easy. There happens to be nine Hebrew and six Greek words which are translated at various times in the English King James Version by the one word *perfect* or *perfection*. Obviously, the one English word cannot possibly do justice to all of these Hebrew and Greek words. However, there are two Greek words most frequently used in the New Testament and in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. These carry considerable weight in shaping any doctrine of perfection. In the next few pages I have endeavored to show entirely from the Bible how these two words have been used.

Almost all of the modern teachings on perfection are based on the English translation and use of the word. Consequently, the basic interpretation is of an ideal state where sin no longer exists and all is in complete harmony with God. Perfectionism is the teaching that it is possible for man to attain and maintain moral and spiritual perfection in this life.

However, in the course of the theological development of this idea, two qualifying terms have arisen to mark the distinction between God's perfection and that of the Christian. With God perfection is absolute; that is, what God is in His entire person and character and does in all His actions is complete in every way, morally and spiritually, wherein nothing is deficient. In Him is the presence and the ultimate of all character values, beyond which there is nothing more.

It should be noted that God created Adam and Eve perfect. It is not possible for God to create anything faulty or deficient. Adam and Eve were created in complete harmony with God, exactly what God designed them to be, physically, morally, and spiritually. They remained in this state until they fell into sin. Had they not sinned, they would have continued to develop in knowledge and in character, since they were created full grown. But this development is not to be thought of as from a state of imperfection to perfection, but as the normal development within a perfect state. This question does not concern us in this section.

Perfection is also regarded as a relative term used to describe the Christian's development and growth from sin to righteousness. The Christian is on the road to "sinless perfection," to the original state in which God created him. Perfection is relative to man's capacity and ability, relative to his consciousness, and his knowing, relative to the state in which he was born. To the utmost of the Christian's powers, there is to be a wholehearted allegiance and harmony with the will of God. Nowhere does the Bible equate perfection with sinlessness when speaking of the child of God.

There are not different kinds of perfection, only degrees of it, as far as man is concerned. It is the English use of the word *perfection* that has aided in the wrong interpretation, not the Greek or the Hebrew. The problem can be resolved and properly understood only by the Word of God, not by human speculation. Where reference is made to man's restoration to this original state as God made him, complete harmony with God, the fulfillment of God's design for man, "sinless perfection" is the term used in this section. The discussion will proceed from the Bible use and meaning of the word, not from man's definition.

Sin involves both a state or condition of life and acts contrary to the will of God. Man's sinful condition into which all men are born is the self-centeredness and the consequent self-will as a result of our separation from God. From this condition proceed all sinful thoughts, propensities, passions, and actions. Salvation begins when we accept Christ, instead of self, as the center of our lives, when we acknowledge Him as our Saviour and Lord. Sinless perfection is God's ideal for His children. By the power of the Holy Spirit we are to commit ourselves toward the moral and spiritual ideal in Christ, ever advancing toward it. This will be realized with the return of Christ, but not before.

Only under the condition of complete harmony with God morally and spiritually is sinlessness possible. Where man is separated from the presence and reality of God in any way and to the slightest degree, there sin exists in some form. All righteousness and sinlessness springs from harmony with God. All sin springs from separation from God.

On earth Jesus Christ lived in complete oneness with His Father. His sinless state and life was the expression of this absolute harmony. The will of Christ corresponded to the will of the Father with unvarying accuracy. There was not the slightest perversion of His will at any point. This points to a moral and spiritual harmony and elevation of character unknown in our human experience. The facts that Christ Himself was God at His incarnation and was born of the Holy Spirit deny His being was in any part out of harmony with His Father. Christ was unique in this. These conditions we do not have. All men are born in a state of separation from God. This is the original sin, a state into which all of us enter the world. Not until the new birth takes place is this condition reversed. This is the basic fundamental of the gospel.

Properly understood, we contend for the Biblical doctrine of perfection: the perfecting of a right relationship to God, full commitment, a mature and unshakable allegiance to Jesus Christ. The Bible designates such men as serving the Lord with "a perfect heart," undivided in its loyalty, single-minded in its devotion, not turning from the way of the Lord. Of King Asa the Bible records: "Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days" (1 Kings 15:14). Of King Hezekiah: "O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart" (2 Kings 20:3). Of Noah: "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9; see also Hebrews 11:7). Of Job: "Hast thou considered my servant Job, . . . a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity" (Job 2:3). Of his complete trust and allegiance the record declares: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). Job never conceived this to mean sinlessness (see Job 9:20; 42:5, 6). Neither did any of the above listed men. Therefore the word *perfect* does not envision sinlessness within the use of the word itself.

King Solomon was a man of divided allegiance. Therefore the Scripture records of him that "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of

David his father, for Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians” (1 Kings 11:4, 5).

The New Testament is equally clear on this point. To have a perfect heart is to love the Lord and one’s fellowman with the whole heart. “Above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness” (Colossians 3:14). “He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

The most important word translated “perfect” in the New Testament is the Greek word *teleios*. This word is derived from the substantive *telos*, usually rendered “goal,” “purpose,” or “end.” The word has in mind a definite stage of spiritual development for Christians and believers in all ages, for those living in Bible times as well as those living today. Almost invariably the word describes the achievement of spiritual maturity, established, unmovable in the faith.

The apostle Paul uses this word quite frequently when designating perfect or mature Christians in contrast with those who remain spiritual babes.

“Do not be childish, my friends. Be as innocent of evil as babes, but at least be grown-up [teleioi] in your thinking” (1 Corinthians 14:20, NEB *).

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God’s word. You need milk, not solid food; for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature [teleiōn], for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14, RSV).

“Let us then stop discussing the rudiments of Christianity. We ought not to be laying over again the foundations of faith in God and of repentance from the deadness of our former ways. . . . Instead, let us advance towards maturity [teleiotēta]; and so we shall, if God permits” (Hebrews 6:1-3, NEB).

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews recognizes there is a beginning to the Christian life. One must start with the ABC’s of the Christian faith. As a newborn babe he takes his spiritual food from other mature Christians. At this point, how-

* The New English Bible. Copyright, The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1961, 1970. Reprinted by permission.

ever, the author shows serious concern because many of these Christians are still wearing the spiritual garments of childhood. They are not growing up into Christ. At a time when they ought to be mature (perfect—*teleioi*) enough to instruct and lead others into the faith, they still have to be treated like children.

Paul also felt this way about some of the members of the Corinthian church. He wrote: “We speak wisdom among them that are perfect [*teleiois*, full grown]” (1 Corinthians 2:6), but later he adds:

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Paul contrasts spiritual babes in the church with those he designates as perfect or full grown. The spiritually immature referred to in the Corinthian church showed themselves, by their divisions and divided loyalties, unfitted to understand the deep things of God.

Paul states also that every Christian minister from his day to our own should aim to bring the flock to perfection, that is, to full maturity of Christian character, since God has provided these gifts to achieve this mature stage and development in life.

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [*teleiōn*—mature] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

In his Epistle to the Philippians, he classes himself among the perfect or the spiritually mature and steadfast. He speaks wisdom among the perfect.

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high

calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [teleioi] be thus minded" (Philippians 3:13-15).

The aim of his apostolic ministry is to "present every man perfect [*teleiōn*—full grown] in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). He refers to his fellow worker, Epaphras, as agonizing in prayer that the Colossian Christians may "stand perfect [*teleioi*] and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

In classical Greek this same word *teleios* is often used of persons who have reached adulthood, of animals full grown, of fruit that is fully ripe. For the Christian it means that he is to grow to spiritual maturity and develop a spiritual stature akin to that of Christ. The holiest men mentioned in the Bible declared their constant need of growth toward Christ, while affirming the sinfulness of their own natures. The perfecting and maturing process continues as long as life itself.

Nowhere in the Bible do we find believers claiming to have reached sinless perfection even though they are designated as perfect (mature), for such a claim is fraught with peril: not the least of which is a spiritual blindness that prevents one from being honest with himself.

From the Word of God we see that it is spiritual maturity and stability that is possible in this life, not sinless perfection. Furthermore, that the Biblical use of the word *teleios*, "perfect," does not mean sinless perfection, is seen where believers are declared perfect at the point of achieving some single step toward the ideal. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (James 3:2). "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:4). The perfect or mature man is described as one who has complete control of his tongue, or who endures the trial of his faith without wavering. The believer who qualifies in any one of these is designated in the Scriptures as a perfect or mature Christian. Such control and stability is proof enough that he is a mature, stable Christian. The achievement is not the same in all Christians. In some this perfection is marked by love for one's enemies (Matthew 5:43-48); in others it is manifest in complete loyalty to God under difficulties.

Toward this goal the Holy Spirit continues to direct us through the whole of our lives. But there is no finality in perfection in this life. Each upward step reveals spiritual heights to be attained. The Christian's privilege is to experience here and

now what has been the privilege of believers in all ages—the power of the Holy Spirit for continued growth and undeviating loyalty to God. Along with this continued growth, we find rest amid toil and conflict as we travail in this body of sin and death until the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever” (Hebrews 13:20, 21).

In this passage the Greek word for *perfect* (*katartisai*) is from *katartizō*. Its meaning is that of being fully equipped and fitted for service in the work of the church and in the cause of God. The concern of the writer is that God may fully equip the believers in every good thing in order to do His work and His will.

This word could very well be used of men in almost any profession with the idea that men must be well trained and fitted for the work they do, making possible a musician's perfect performance, a doctor's perfect fitting together of broken bones, a potter's skill to shape the clay into a beautiful vase. In each case the individual was fitted to do the intended job.

When a fisherman had spread his net on the beach after the day's catch, he proceeded to mend it where it had been broken. He used this same Greek word to describe what he had done. He had made the net fit to catch fish again. “And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending [*katartizontas*] their nets” (Mark 1:19).

The Bible writers used this word and its cognates in addressing their hearers relative to their fitness and responsibility as Christians in the work of the gospel and in living the Christian life.

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting [full equipping] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11, 12).

“The God of all grace, . . . after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect [equip you], stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect [fully equipped], thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

How important these words are when calling upon Christians to obey and serve the Lord, to have such a heart and mind that can stand the wear and tear of daily living for Christ, to be fitted fully to do His will in every good thing, accomplished spiritually to work as befitting God’s plan and purpose for our lives!

A mind and heart that is unfitted for serving God is a divided heart, a mind weakened and its effectiveness destroyed by prevailing sin. A heart fitted for the service of God is one delivered from the power and the slavery of sin. Sin does not reign, but it does remain. Continually we allow Christ to complete and fit our lives with those attitudes and qualities that make usefulness and service effective. The Christian is not sinless; but he is brought into that full and efficient adequacy whereby God can use him in His service to the glory of God, ready and fitted for every situation and every responsibility in living the Christian life.

In speaking, then, of Bible perfection, it is important to avoid a rigid legalistic interpretation, a slavish following of the letter or obedience to a checklist. Our supreme goal is found in the gospel of salvation, in righteousness by faith. This centers in Jesus Christ, not in a mechanical, literal conception of Christlikeness. The doctrine of perfection must not be derived from an analysis of men, but from the character of God and the Person of Jesus Christ.

Bible perfection is not to be achieved by a directed behavior that seeks conformity to external requirements. This approach deprives perfection or spiritual maturity of its Biblical meaning. The answer to the question “What is the Christian’s obligation to God?” depends on what values are supreme in the sight of God and also on what is God’s plan and purpose for saving and transforming man through the righteousness of Christ. This involves our being reconciled to God, living in tune with Him, and responding in love to God and man. The perfection which emerges from our relationship is spiritual and moral maturity.

man's ability and inability

Into what condition did the fall of Adam bring the human race? "It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death, and thus death pervaded the whole human race, inasmuch as all men have sinned" (Romans 5:12, NEB). How far sin has disabled man in all his parts we cannot tell. We do not know how sin has acted upon the nervous system and affected its responses. We cannot know how sin has darkened the mind and to what extent. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We do not know how far death reaches into man's being and is still part of man's functions.

Since the Fall, man's intellect, will, mind, and affections still function. But these are so changed and reduced in power and ability that they no longer function as God intended them to. Man is contaminated in all his ways, estranged from God. He is unable to find his way back to God or to return to his primeval state.

Death remains. The arteries do harden. The nervous system does not respond as at Creation. Nowhere does man reflect the perfection of God in whose image he was made. To assume that with conversion and sanctification the Holy Spirit restores man to sinless perfection is also to assert that all the ravages of death have been eradicated. All the evidence proves otherwise. Not until the resurrection is man fully restored and delivered from the ravages of death. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26, RSV).

"Up to the present, . . . the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth. Not only so, but even we, to whom the Spirit is given as first fruits of the harvest to come, are groaning inwardly while we wait for God to make us his sons and set our whole body free. For we have been saved, though only in hope. Now to see is no longer to hope: why

should a man endure and wait for what he already sees? But if we hope for something we do not yet see, then, in waiting for it, we show our endurance. In the same way the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness” (Romans 8:22-26, NEB).

This scripture speaks of the deep disquietude in the life of the Christian due to the present imperfections and inability to reach God's ideal. If we could arrive at sinless perfection in this life, the groanings that come from the depths of our hearts would cease. There would be nothing within us or from without that would destroy our harmony and personal fulfillment. We would be at perpetual peace with God and man, lacking neither faith, love, nor righteousness.

This yearning points to the fact that we have fallen short of God's plan for our lives. By our inner disquiet we continually confess that we fall short of the truth, the beauty, the goodness, and the righteousness that God purposed when He created us.

Furthermore, this very condition speaks of our longing for complete restoration to the image of God. The deep desire for sinless perfection and incorruption is unquenchable. We were not made to live in sin or to possess a sinful nature. Our thirst for restoration to our original state, our yearning to be free from sin and its effects, points to a knowledge of what God will ultimately do for us at the return of Christ.

“Listen! I will unfold a mystery: we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet-call. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise immortal, and we shall be changed. This perishable being must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal must be clothed with immortality. And when our mortality has been clothed with immortality, then the saying of Scripture will come true: ‘Death is swallowed up; victory is won!’ . . . God be praised, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:51-57, NEB).

So the desire for fulfillment and restoration must be understood in terms of our ultimate salvation and redemption in Christ. In giving us His Holy Spirit to live within us, God awakens and develops the desire for sinlessness, for freedom

from sin in all its forms. In this life we long for a state of being which we do not yet have. We are dissatisfied with the limitations of mind and flesh, ever looking toward the day when Christ will transform and restore us to our original sinless state.

The ideal toward which we strive is Jesus Christ. Everything about Him is perfect. The Christian continually hungers and thirsts after righteousness. There is an earnest, unashamed quest for spiritual holiness.

The fact that growth is required in the Christian life points to the continued need for development toward perfection. There is no place in this life where we can say that we have finally arrived. As steadfast Christians we bear witness to the fact that we continually wait upon the Lord and renew our strength. We do mount up with wings as eagles. We do run and not get weary. We do walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

We hold company with Paul when he says:

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.” “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:8-11, 16).

We are certain that God will continue the work of righteousness in our lives until the day when we shall stand before Him, when the disquietude of the mind and heart shall be finally resolved at His appearance.

“All I care for is to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, and to share his sufferings, in growing conformity with his death, if only I may finally arrive at the resurrection from the dead. It is not to be thought that I have already achieved all this. I have not yet reached perfection, but I press on, hoping to take hold of that for which Christ once took hold of me. My friends, I do not reckon myself to have got hold of it yet. All I can say is this: forgetting what is behind me, and reaching out for that which lies

ahead, I press towards the goal to win the prize which is God's call to the life above, in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:10-14, NEB).

When we consider man's inherent inability and disability, the Bible rejects every possibility of our reaching sinless perfection in this life. The issue is whether the Holy Spirit here and now does or can restore man to the full possession of all the powers that Adam had before the Fall. We believe in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; but we do not know the degree of the Spirit's control. Man's problem is his lack of a perfect disposition to be able to cooperate with the Spirit.

Can we discern perfectly what is right as could Adam in the Garden of Eden? If not, then we lack ability to gain the insight both of ourselves and of our sinfulness. Without this we are not able to make as perfect a response and commitment to God as could a being who had never fallen. This very lack proves that a state of sin still exists. The light of the sun may be obscured by the spots upon it or clouds before it. The sun's power to emit light still exists, even though it is prevented from performing its functions perfectly. So it is with the sinner in relation to God. The power of thought and vision is not destroyed, but the mind is disabled and blinded by self and sin.

We do not know the extent of the truth of the scripture, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). To the degree that man has a darkened understanding, be it ever so slight, a will even minutely perverted in its operation, a conscience lacking the least bit in its discernment to understand the razor's edge where right passes over into wrong, to that extent man cannot cooperate perfectly with the Holy Spirit. He cannot claim sinlessness. This means that we can exercise our faculties in cooperation with the Holy Spirit only to the point where those faculties and abilities are set free from sin and its results.

The consciousness of Adam in his perfect state prior to his fall taught him that he was free from sin—in *complete harmony with God morally and spiritually*—so that he could hold open fellowship with God. At the Fall the image of God in man was disabled, its capacity lessened. In this weakened state man cannot be in the same perfect condition as before sin entered. Thus the Holy Spirit's effectiveness is limited by the nature of man's ability to respond and the extent of man's insight and knowledge of himself.

The Holy Spirit works with what He has as does the potter with the clay. What the Spirit can do depends on the nature and quality of the human clay. The Spirit does not miraculously remove our defective physical being and our constitution with its limitations upon the mind, the nerves, and the heart. In response to our faith He does carry out a work of continued restoration, seeking man's cooperation as long as life lasts. Every step of the way God's utmost is being accomplished with the human clay that is given into His hands. The only limitation is man's lessened capacity due to sin.

Any claim to sinless perfection is limited by man's inability to see the sinfulness of his own nature. When we have done our best to understand ourselves and the will of God, there is much that is beyond us, much in us that has never been tested to the uttermost. The Holy Spirit can only control and inspire Christlikeness to the degree that we intelligently understand ourselves and respond to Him. This insight is not a once-for-all thing. It is always a constant and increasing enlightenment from the Spirit.

It is important to bear in mind that the Christian's helplessness and inability does not consist in the willful desire and intention to go on sinning. He has settled that question.

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Romans 6:1, 2).

We can live only what we have intrinsically the power to do. The obligation to live perfectly must be commensurate with our capacity for it. No requirement is made of man in the Bible which he has not power to accomplish. The very core of the Christian faith and man's response is God's respect for man as a rational and responsible person. God can use no methods or bring no pressure to bear that violates man's personal integrity and freedom of choice. The slightest hesitation to resist temptation, the want of the least inclination to love one's neighbor and one's enemies as Christ did, immediately makes sinless perfection impossible.

How can we tell whether or not we have cherished any sin or whether we have resisted entirely the slightest temptation to sin and pride with the same instantaneousness that Christ would have done? How do we know that we have not dallied with or held on a little longer than we should have to a sinful desire due to

a disabled constitution? If we cannot know this, then we are unable to say as Christ said, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46).

How can the imperfect moral judgment decide as to what perfection is and when it has been achieved? Must not a mind that has been warped and blinded by sin be rigidly excluded from deciding what sinless behavior and sinless thinking are? Man has no way of judging when a motive or an act is perfect from within his own sinful nature, for the mind of man partakes of that depravity under which he is now held in bondage and from which he groans to be delivered.

At the same time God holds man responsible for the full possible use of his capacities. God entreats the sinner to exercise his faculties to the best of his ability. Man still has the faculty to perceive the truth necessary to an intelligent free choice of God and commitment to Him under the initiative and influence of the Holy Spirit. We as Christians are under obligation to make Christ's perfection our ideal. God does not change His perfect moral standard or His purpose for men. We are required to render to God all possible obedience to the utmost of our consecrated abilities. This requirement is proportionate to man's moral, spiritual, and constitutional capacity.

Because of our disabled condition, we are slow to learn and quick to lapse into selfishness. In the history of the great men of the Bible, it is remarkable that, while learning of Christ and experiencing His saving power, they were deeply aware of their own weakness, and they allowed no confidence in themselves to fulfill God's will.

The apostle Paul felt the same way. If there is any man in the Christian era in whom sinless perfection might be attributed to a man, it is he. If we as Christians could approximate his commitment, his dedication, the closeness of his walk with God, his burning compassion to save the lost, what more would there be to desire and to do in this life? What comes through in Paul's experience and in his epistles is his increasing sense of weakness and unworthiness and his profound sense of daily dependence on God. The great and essential fact in Paul's life was his continuous need of saving grace and the power of God.

The problem confronting even the best of men is that their receptiveness of the Spirit and surrender to divine guidance are at times hindered by self-interest and by the limitations of personal insight and the presence of a sinful bias.

“Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Man's mind is inaccurate and perverted in its wisdom and its action; often it is narrow and one-sided. Christian virtue at its best can have an evil taint in it. Professed mildness and humility can have a touch of weakness and a lack of courage to witness to the truth. Liberty can have a tinge of license. Sin works adversely in both body and mind with infirmities and passions which affect spiritual growth and maturity. There is the subtle dependence on others rather than on Christ, the unwillingness to trust ourselves wholly to God. The ideal of perfection is always ahead of us.

It is not easy to see and understand the whole truth for ourselves and follow it. The influence of heredity and environment and the past training incorporated into life—all are found in those who undergo the process of salvation and sanctification. The very process of growth develops new insights and reveals new dangers in situations we have never understood or experienced before. Sanctification is a very much greater work than we sometimes suppose.

We know of no method in the Bible whereby the Spirit so overpowers man's limitations due to sin as to enable man to arrive at a state of sinlessness. Yet the eternal God is our refuge. Every moment we live by and are saved by God's marvelous grace. The Christian will always acknowledge his sinful state before God. Our lives are not magically transformed into sinlessness above the strife and agony in the world. What does come through is that deliverance is made complete in our weakness. Victory over self and sin is the Spirit's power, not our own.

relative perfection

Relative not absolute perfection can be experienced. Absolute perfection is that all-inclusive, all-comprehending finality of righteousness which we see in Jesus Christ. We as Christians may enjoy conscious deliverance from known sin

by the power of the Holy Spirit. The ability to discern good and evil becomes clearer as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of God. We never reach the point where our spiritual discernment and personal improvement cannot be increased. By virtue of our mental and physical limitations, imperfection persists, not in the sense of committing willful sin, but in the sense of coming short of the ideal in Jesus Christ.

There will never come a time when we do not need to repeat the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." As long as we live in this sinful world, we shall never reach a place where our moral and spiritual discernment cannot be increased. It is the essence of pride to ascribe a knowledge and a power to ourselves which we do not have. We may witness to what we know about ourselves and the power of God to save us,

"We should strive to be perfect in our sphere, as He was perfect in His sphere. . . . They [church members] are to form characters that are a reflection of the divine character" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, Vol. 8, p. 86).

"With our limited powers we are to be as holy in our sphere as God is holy in His sphere" (Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 337).

We may praise God for our conscious deliverance from known sin, but this is not a witness to sinless perfection. There is much to learn about ourselves and our ability to stand the increased temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

"If you feel sure that you are standing firm, beware! You may fall. So far you have faced no trial beyond what man can bear. God keeps faith, and he will not allow you to be tested above your powers, but when the test comes he will at the same time provide a way out, by enabling you to sustain it" (1 Corinthians 10:12, 13, NEB).

In other words, there is a limit to the temptation that man can withstand in his sinful state. "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). It is good that God does remember this, for there is a breaking point for all men. The closer we come to Christ, the more clearly we see our distance from the absolute perfection of God. By virtue of the loving mercy of God there is hidden from us the full knowledge of our sinful hearts.

The increased knowledge of ourselves comes gradually as we are able to stand the truth about ourselves. Any sudden and total revelation from God of all we are in His sight would shatter us beyond our ability to recover and to function. The man is self-deceived who claims for himself what the apostle John dared not claim:

“If we claim to be sinless, we are self-deceived and strangers to the truth. If we confess our sins, he is just, and may be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every kind of wrong; but if we say we have committed no sin, we make him out to be a liar, and then his word has no place in us” (1 John 1:8-10, NEB).

In communicating to us the saving power of the gospel God reveals to us our need for overcoming sin and the depth of our sinful depravity as fast as we can bear it and as fast as we are prepared to take advantage of the leading of the Spirit. All is not revealed at the start of the Christian life. If it were, our sinfulness would overwhelm, perplex, and paralyze us. So the Spirit leads us more and more into the truth about God and about ourselves.

At conversion we made a total surrender to Him to the best of our knowledge. In the eyes of God this was a perfect beginning. But we walk increasingly in the light as it comes to us from God's Word. We are called upon to maintain daily fellowship with Christ. All along the way we remain faithful to God. In proportion to the maturity and completeness of our knowledge of ourselves and of the truth of God, our lives are increasingly molded to the likeness of our Lord. At every step our response can be “perfect” in that we are responding and cooperating with God to the extent and measure of the Spirit's leading in our lives.

Our transformation cannot progress far beyond our discernment of the truth and of ourselves in all possible situations and under all conditions. To advance into full harmony with God, we must continue to rise to better and purer motives, aspirations, purposes, and spiritual achievement. This means that our mental and spiritual apprehension must continue from one point of view to another, from one step to the next, from dependence on ourselves to dependence on Christ and His righteousness.

Increasingly we aim at the stature of Christ. At the same time we come face-to-face with moral and spiritual hindrances, physical inertia, and self-assertion, and

we see the necessity of not withholding any part of our lives from the Spirit's control and leading. In spiritual living there are attainments which are possible only when an age-long growth and development are behind us. The ideal of perfection is always before us. At the same time a higher and more mature quality of spiritual life is developed.

Even the best Christians reveal their limitations by their increased need of the appropriation of divine redemption and Christ's righteousness. Above all these facts about man, the sinner, God is continually at work as we become more and more possessed by the indwelling Christ. Spiritual progress results in our being faithful disciples of Christ, unmovable, firmly established in the faith, as we tend toward that ultimate goal of sinless perfection. Jesus does not fall short of His plan for our lives. We show the reality of an ever-growing likeness to Jesus Christ.

In experiencing the saving power of Christ our righteousness, we see the powerlessness of our resolves and the need to realize our frailty, trusting fully and depending entirely upon the power of redeeming grace. There is a perseverance in the things of God and in one's relationship to God through prayer and the study of His Word. We center our loyalty and hope in Christ regardless of what the cost may be and the weakness we have in ourselves. Through this attitude and by Christian growth the mature Christian life emerges.

We continually build our spiritual house upon Christ, the Living Rock. We surrender to God every position and practice that we find out of harmony with God's Word. Salvation by grace never turns our attention back to our own achievements, our own righteousness, our claim to increasing perfection. We continually look unto Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our faith.

“The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan's delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you. . . .

“The less we see to esteem in ourselves, the more we shall see to esteem in the infinite purity and loveliness of our Saviour. . . . The more our sense

of need drives us to Him and to the word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image” (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 64, 65).

In some ways Christian growth is a strange thing. When we first came to Christ, experienced His forgiveness and regeneration, we felt “no condemnation” anymore. Our heart was cleansed, and we glowed with new life. Our garments seemed always white because we were clothed in the garments of Christ’s righteousness. But with the passing of time, we became aware that we have not done all we meant to do. We have not been all we meant to be. We have a consciousness of imperfections more vivid than ever. With the passing of years we have grown more dissatisfied with ourselves. At the same time, this may be due to our growing sense of sin and what constitutes imperfection. It may be that we are not less pure than formerly, but the Holy Spirit has been opening our eyes, refining our taste, heightening our sensibility. Faults once hidden are now discovered. Secret sins once overlooked or not understood are now keenly felt. The clearer moral and spiritual vision detects the deformities. The finer ear senses the inner discords. The purer taste exposes that which once was unsuspected. The consciousness of sin increases in us, not because evil has been gaining upon us, but because our love of righteousness has become more intense. Moral weaknesses and deformities will never give us more anguish than when we have drawn closer to Christ. It is not the most imperfect Christian who feels imperfection most but the Christian who is daily becoming more like Christ.

So much of the insight into our own characters is superficial and quite conventional. We congratulate ourselves for having attained, until we are brought to the test and the place of refinement under God. More severe tests of our temper, courage, and patience reveal how far short we are of the ideal; yet all the time we thought that we had pretty much arrived. Yet this new exposure of our previous self-confidence and of our inability to meet temptation and trial becomes the means to correct our faults. We find growth under increased awareness of our sinfulness. We day by day part with some lesser concept of morality that we may realize the deeper, fuller, eternal righteousness. With acuter sense of limitations and failure when under stronger temptations, we learn to grow in wisdom, in refinement, in humility, and in Christlikeness.

In earlier times we were quite sure of ourselves as Christians—we kept the commandments as we understood them. As we come closer to Christ, we sense the hidden motives and self-centered intentions that have marked so much of our religious response. Yet before God we have been growing from insight to insight, from strength to strength, a day's march nearer home. It should be that the dissatisfaction with our moral and spiritual state at any point along the way to the kingdom is the result of stronger aspirations and more spiritual desires. This is the Bible position on Christian growth until Christ returns.

“All I care for is to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, and to share his sufferings, in growing conformity with his death, if only I may finally arrive at the resurrection from the dead. It is not to be thought that I have already achieved all this. I have not yet reached perfection, but I press on, hoping to take hold of that for which Christ once took hold of me. My friends, I do not reckon myself to have got hold of it yet. All I can say is this: forgetting what is behind me, and reaching out for that which lies ahead, I press towards the goal to win the prize which is God's call to the life above, in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:10-14, NEB).

SAVED BY GRACE

“ ‘My grace is all you need; power comes to its full strength in weakness.’ I shall therefore prefer to find my joy and pride in the very things that are my weakness; and then the power of Christ will come and rest upon me. Hence I am well content, for Christ's sake, with weakness, contempt, persecution, hardship, and frustration; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10, NEB).

Grace is the eternal and free favor of God, manifested toward the weak, the guilty, and the unworthy. Grace is entirely apart from every supposition of human worth and sinless perfection. Grace belongs where human sinfulness exists. It superabounds over human weakness. Sinners are the only persons with whom

grace is at all concerned. Every moment we live by and are saved by God's inexhaustible grace.

We are to live by Christ alone, while acknowledging our actual sinful state. Salvation by grace means being shaken loose from the folly of implanting our ego at the center with the belief that we must arrive at sinless perfection to be sure of salvation.

Salvation by grace is not a cure-all. The work of grace is not some magic charm where our weakness and unworthiness end in personal power and sufficiency prior to the coming of Christ. Saving grace summons us to confess our sinful state until we see Christ face to face. What is sure in salvation by grace is not that our lives are magically transformed into sinlessness. What does come through is that victory is made complete in our weakness.

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). This scripture teaches that the sinner is saved by grace alone, but there is nothing in this text which excuses sin whatsoever. However, because we are disabled by sin, we must always live by the grace of God.

One thing is clear: should the saving and transforming grace of God be withdrawn at any moment, we would sink into the depths of sin and perish forever.

"But God, rich in mercy, for the great love he bore us, brought us to life with Christ even when we were dead in our sins; it is by his grace you are saved. And in union with Christ Jesus he raised us up and enthroned us with him in the heavenly realms, so that he might display in the ages to come how immense are the resources of his grace, and how great his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by his grace you are saved, through trusting him; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift, not a reward for work done. There is nothing for anyone to boast of. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to devote ourselves to the good deeds for which God has designed us" (Ephesians 2:4-10, NEB).

How absurd it is to suppose that to be saved by grace and to acknowledge the sinfulness of the human heart means to encourage sin in the life. The ones who are most sensitive to the nature of sin within are those who seek continual de-

liverance from the power through dependence on Christ. There is a continual distrustfulness of self and an increasing dependence upon the power of God.

No sin is to have dominion over us. Sin is no longer our master; Christ is. The Christian with a "perfect heart" lives in a state of grace even unto the coming of our Lord, "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). We never mistrust the pardoning and saving love of God. With singleness of heart and mind we commit our lives daily to Him. All sinless perfection is in Christ's Person. We are perfect to the degree that we live in Him and never in ourselves.

Love, the more excellent way

The sum total of the perfect life is this:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. . . . For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? . . . Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48).

The command to be perfect in this scripture centers in our capacity to love as God loves. To be able to love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves we must be partakers of Christ's perfect love. To manifest this love means we share in the essential life and quality of God's love. We who have this love are in complete harmony and oneness with Christ.

“May they all be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that thou didst send me. The glory which thou gavest me I have given to them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, may they be perfectly one. Then the world will learn that thou didst send me, that thou didst love them as thou didst me. . . . O righteous Father, although the world does not know thee, I know thee, and these men know that thou didst send me. I made thy name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love thou hadst for me may be in them, and I may be in them” (John 17:21-26, NEB).

The Christian who has this love of Christ within and manifests it has a perfect love. The man who lives by Christ’s righteousness has a perfect righteousness in his life. The man who possesses the fruits of the Spirit has the Spirit’s perfect fruits and is a partaker of them. He who has the faith of Jesus is a partaker of this perfect faith. These qualities may not be fully expressed and realized to their complete possibility, but the love we have is a perfect love by virtue of the indwelling Christ.

We are fully committed to this ideal with unreserved devotion to Christ. This is the goal that we pursue throughout life.

“True sanctification means perfect love, perfect obedience, perfect conformity to the will of God” (Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 565).

“Those who love God, have the seal of God in their foreheads” (Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 51).

The question is not whether we are able to love as perfectly and as absolutely as God, but are we now manifesting this same love by virtue of Christ’s dwelling within us? If we do this, we partake of this very perfection.

There is a kinship of love between us and Christ, above and beyond the awareness of our weaknesses and our unworthiness. We are sure of the eternal love of God. We know the Holy Spirit will continue to work out what God has put within us. We are sure of the sufficiency of the love applied to us. The everlasting love of God for us, the eternal vigilance of the angels toward us, the heavenly ministry of Christ on our behalf, all unite us to the living God. Amid all the temptations and

trials, the weaknesses of the flesh, we know and experience the support of the everlasting arms of God. There is nothing we know of between us and Christ.

Perfection has reference to the fullness of Christ and His love in our lives. We do not think of this in terms of a point system, of so many separate qualities to be improved and perfected. To equate perfection with sinlessness is to stress the negative aspects of the Christian life rather than the completeness we are to enjoy in Christ. The issue is not being sinless but having our lives complete in Him, filled with the love of God. Certainly, though, we will continually seek and pray for deliverance from all that is self-centered and sinful.

Perfection in love has in mind our living in Christ and Christ living in us. To interpret *perfection* to mean "sinlessness" has the tendency toward conformity to norms, rules, commandments. Religion then tends to be filled with anxiety and a sense of guilt at every infraction of the rule. This can easily lead to the communication of displeasure, disapproval, rejection with those who differ with us and do not do exactly as we think they should. There is more concern for what people should do and should not do than for what they really are as whole persons and children of God. Being the right kind of Christian is not faced.

But love by the Holy Spirit requires that we be genuine, loving people, not "perfect" people. We do not cry simply for perfection but for the fullness of Christ. Loving Christ with all our hearts and minds does not issue in isolated moral or religious accomplishments. Christ in the heart means that it is with Him we are concerned. It is to Him that we witness, not to ourselves and to our achievements even in religion. The love of Christ does not focus the spotlight on ourselves. Love does not make museum pieces out of us that catch the headlines. We are not attempting to square our lives to any rule of law. We have become one with Christ in life and purpose. We glorify Christ, not ourselves.

The belief that we have finally arrived at perfection to all of God's requirements so that we are now superior and among the top people religiously is not the answer. It can never be said too often that Christ alone is man's sole and sufficient perfection and righteousness. The basic issue is the saving power of Christ and His righteousness, not the sinlessness of the believer. Our lives are hid with Christ in God. Walking with God in love is the principal thing.

Real progress toward Christian perfection is advance in understanding and experiencing Jesus Christ. An isolated perfect moral standard set before us is limited in its power. But a Person such as Christ is inexhaustible, with fellowship unlimited. We cannot put Christ into a dogmatic code. Jesus realizes and individualizes the secret of Christianity, perpetually renewing our minds and lives, rising in us in fresh power from day to day, putting forth new spiritual energies.

Jesus' message is not concerned with our achieving perfection, but with the fulfillment of His love in us. He begins in our hearts and minds the process that gives life abundant. His character lays bare our need for God's redeeming love. Jesus communicates divine reality because in Him is the fullness of God. He shows what we may be in having Him live His life in us. "Looking unto Jesus" becomes a striving of love toward the "perfect man," toward the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Our spiritual progress witnesses to His presence in our hearts. The ideal is not defined by an obedience to a law. The ideal in Christ is too great to be grasped and understood at once. We can only permit Christ to love us to the uttermost. In our possession of Him and His possession of us hope works continually toward the Christian ideal. Jesus brings hope in our hearts, causing us to reach forward from what we are to what we ultimately will be. We are saved by hope.

Our partaking of the ideal is not through the pressure of precepts or theories, but by the touch and the grip of a Person. The love of Christ awakens that love in our hearts, makes us sharers in His ideal, His purpose, and His mission to save the lost. Loving Christ, we share in His triumph.

This is the divine pledge of final transformation and restoration to that perfect life for which He made us. This hope of becoming like Him persists in our hearts, inspires our lives, and quickens our spirit. In our weakness we are allied to His strength. Even though we see through a glass darkly, we have a clear knowledge of perfection in Him. In our insecurity, we are united with His love. To hope for and seek for the supremacy of Christ and Christlikeness is among the finest and most inspired exercises and hopes we can know. This is the certainty, not in and from ourselves, but in the gospel of sovereign love that has come to rule our hearts and lives.

“Love to God must be a living principle, underlying every act and word and thought. . . . It will then be as natural for us to seek purity and holiness, to shun the spirit and example of the world, and to seek to benefit all around us, as it is for the angels of glory to execute the mission of love assigned them” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, October 23, 1888).

One of the enemies of the Christian life is keeping a watch on self without walking with God. Religious perfectionists all too often live like a display piece in a shop window. In this approach it is easier to sacrifice oneself on the altar of religious extremism than to love God and to love the unlovable. We need to face frankly the peril of making “perfection” a self-centered process, something to be attained by fierce effort and rigid concentration. By this method you may win attention and admiration for your efforts. But where is the love of God and man? Loving God and man does not draw attention to ourselves. Always to calculate, to analyze, to judge the mistakes of oneself or others, never carries us beyond ourselves. Only by beholding Christ are we “changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Conformity to a perfect norm does not satisfy the heart of God or even ourselves. As parents this is true with our children: we desire more than conformity to the house rules. We want the loyalty, the love, and the devotion of our sons and daughters. Nothing else will suffice. This is what God wants of His children.

“True sanctification unites believers to Christ and to one another in bonds of tender sympathy. This union causes to flow continually into the heart rich currents of Christlike love, which flows forth again in love for one another. The qualities which it is essential for all to possess are those which marked the completeness of Christ’s character—His love, His patience, His unselfishness, and His goodness. . . . Christians love those around them as precious souls for whom Christ has died. There is no such thing as a loveless Christian; for ‘God is love’ ” (*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 102).

A “perfect heart” loves the Lord to the utmost of one’s capacity and insight. Love is our total response to God and man. Ours is the “faith which worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6). An imperfect heart is a divided heart, divided in its love and loyalty.

It is said of Enoch that he “walked with God; and he was not; for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). Enoch was perfect in his relationship with God. God translated him to heaven without seeing death because he was fitted for the company of perfect beings. Nothing is said of his sinlessness. He walked with God in love. That is Bible perfection. Wholly committed to God, the true Christian is absorbed in Christ and not obsessed with himself in his efforts to achieve sinlessness.

“It is impossible to reflect the image of Christ unless this love which is of heavenly birth, is in the soul. No one will pass the portals of the city of God who does not reflect this attribute” (*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 148).

“And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mark 12:42-44).

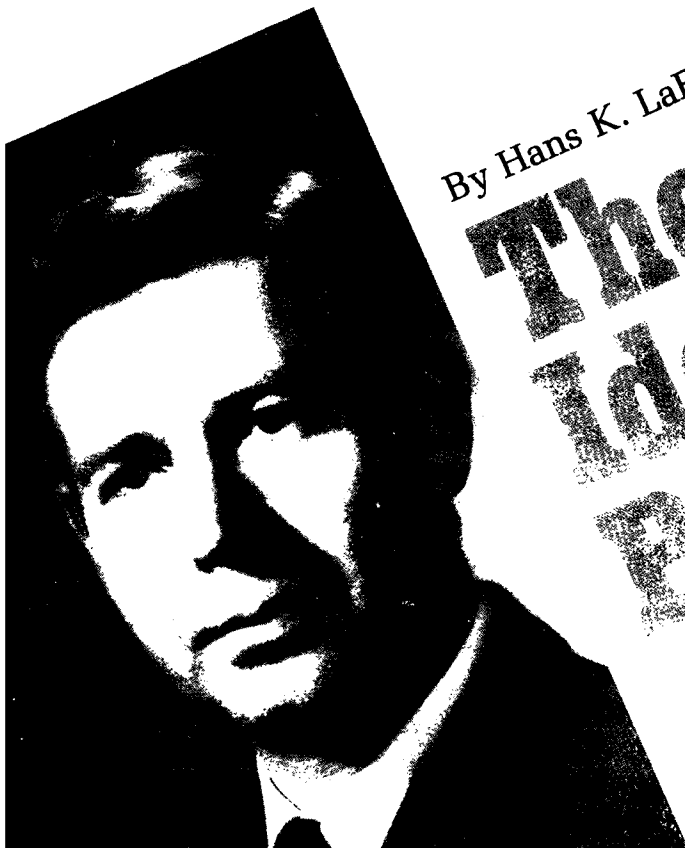
Not according to the rule of sinless perfection did Christ praise this widow. But she had given all she had with a “perfect heart.” Nor could God require more than that. When she thus heartily gave her all, she did a perfect work.

The essential point is the attitude. The believer cannot bring to God a completely eradicated sinful nature, but he can bring a love and devotion to Christ and His righteousness which can never be satisfied with less. If we as Christians do bring such a heart response, then God accepts and regards what we really mean and desire as though it were really so, and at His coming He will make it so. We are not sinless in fact, but complete in faith that works by love to the best of our ability. We are one with God.

Biblical perfection means that we want Christ, that we love Christ, that we enjoy Christ. This means walking with God as Enoch did so that we are never alone in our lives. This is the supreme thing, the crucial thing in our lives. When the Holy Spirit floods our lives with God's love so that we hold daily communion with Christ and find denial of Him impossible, so that our lives are poured out in compassion for the lost, there is really nothing more to be done.

Dr. Hans K. LaRondelle, associate professor of theology and Christian philosophy at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, comes from the Netherlands. At the age of nineteen, while a law student at Leyden University, he became a Seventh-day Adventist after reading *The Great Controversy* by Ellen G. White. He served the church in the Netherlands as a pastor, evangelist, youth leader, and teacher. He has studied at Utrecht State University and holds the ThD degree from the Free University of Amsterdam, where his promoter was Dr. G. C. Berkouwer, a famous dogmatician. He joined the faculty of Andrews University in 1967.

Dr. LaRondelle says he enjoys reading, expository preaching, music, and traveling as hobbies. He is the author of books in Dutch as well as *Perfection and Perfectionism*, from which he drew the material for this section.



By Hans K. LaRondelle

The Bible Idea of Perfection

Part One

I.	A Fundamental Principle of Interpretation	93
II.	Divine Perfection in the Old Testament	95
III.	Human Perfection in the Old Testament	100
	A. The covenant of restoring grace	100
	B. The aroused sin-consciousness in the psalms of Israel	104
	C. The soul-stirring oracles of the prophets	111

Part Two

IV.	Christian Perfection in the Gospel According to Matthew	117
V.	Perfection in the Pauline Writings	121
	A. The apocalyptic perspective of perfection	121
	B. The dual aspect of justification and sanctification	123
	C. The Christian battle	125
VI.	Perfection of Love in the First Letter of John	129
VII.	Perfection of Conscience in the Letter to the Hebrews	131
VIII.	The Ladder of Christian Perfection in the Second Letter of Peter	133
	Summary	136

Contents

I.

A Fundamental Principle of Interpretation

It is a remarkable fact that even professing Christians have often failed to understand the Bible as it must be understood. They have read the Biblical terms with preconceived ideas derived from traditional philosophy. When human philosophy is mixed with Biblical revelation, the result is always a *speculative theology*. Such a theology tends to distort the character of God and the way of salvation as disclosed in Holy Scripture.

Especially the distinctive Biblical idea of “perfection” has suffered much from various speculative theologies. The history of Judaism and of the Christian church shows a variety of religious sects and monastic movements, each claiming to have the monopoly of true perfection in the eyes of God.

A critical analysis of each specific form of perfectionism reveals, however, that without exception the Biblical concept of perfection has been distorted by a mingling with foreign elements.¹

This history of failure should caution us to the utmost in claiming to have perfection or to know exactly what it is in the eyes of God. We have to examine our pre-

suppositions and dogmatic a priori on “perfection” if we want to evaluate our concepts critically in the light of Scriptural revelation. How we need to realize the truth of David’s confession: “For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do we see light” (Psalm 36:9 *)! The divine light comes to us through the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments, “reviving the soul,” “making wise the simple,” “rejoicing the heart,” “enlightening the eyes,” “enduring forever,” “and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:7-9).

In the realm of Biblical theology many have come to realize that the ideas of prophets and apostles are more than concepts. They are heaven-born ideas, “the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2), through which God communicates His grace, wisdom, and power. This does not mean that the Bible is a collection of unrelated proverbs or isolated oracles. On the contrary, both the Old and the New Testaments are primarily records of the incomparable story of God’s deeds in Israel’s history, all structured by His holy covenants with Israel and the twelve apostles. The prophets faithfully interpreted the signifi-

* All texts in this section are quoted from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.



cance of God's righteous acts until Jesus Christ came with the fullest revelation of God's holy will and character. " 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' " (John 14:9), Jesus said to Philip.

He was more than the Perfect Interpreter of the Torah, the prophets, and the Psalms—His own words contained the creative powers of grace and healing which restored in the believer the moral image of God in true perfection. In truth Jesus could say: " 'The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life' " (John 6:63). " 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' " (John 14:6). These considerations

lead us to accept the fundamental principle of interpretation that Christ is the True Interpreter of the Old Testament, or stated differently, *the Bible is its own expositor*.

The guidance of the Holy Spirit, who inspired all Bible writers, always faithfully accompanies the Holy Scriptures to enlighten and guide our minds and to assure us of divine truth.

Our purpose is to apply this principle of interpretation now to a study of the Biblical idea of perfection. Only then can we arrive at a definition or a summarizing description of Biblical perfection.

II.

Divine Perfection in the Old Testament

Although the Old Testament repeatedly states that the God of Israel (Yahweh) is holy and righteous, gracious and merciful, not once does it say *explicitly*: God is perfect. Yet, the term “perfect(ion)” is used several times with regard to God, but always pertaining to God’s relation with Israel. Three texts use the Hebrew word *tāmîm* (perfect, blameless) concerning God.

“*The Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he’*” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

“*This God—his way is perfect; the promise of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him*” (Psalm 18:30).

“*The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple*” (Psalm 19:7).

Each time these texts reveal that God’s redeeming acts and instruction to His covenant people Israel are perfect: God’s work, His way, His Torah (the whole of divine instruction) is *perfect for Israel*. God had established a unique and perfect relationship with His chosen people through Isaiah. He even challenged them with the ques-

tion: “What more was there to do for my vineyard [Israel], that I have not done in it?” (Isaiah 5:4).

God had redeemed Israel from the house of bondage, Egypt, through the judgments of the ten plagues, the miraculous drying up of the Red Sea, and the complete destruction of the Egyptian persecutors—a perfect redemption. He had led them forty years in the wilderness en route to Canaan, giving them manna from heaven, and water from the rock—a perfect guidance, providing for all their needs. Their clothing did not wear out, nor their feet swell during those forty years (Deuteronomy 8:4)—a perfect care.

The Divine Redeemer had given His redeemed people at Sinai His holy covenant, consisting of the Ten Commandments embedded within the sanctuary and its atoning cultus of forgiving grace. The dynamic interrelationship of this great religious-moral law and the atoning grace of the sanctuary bestowed upon the worshipers revival of soul and joy of heart. In the sanctuary God Himself revealed His presence, thus dwelling among His people and transforming the true worshiper by His glorious power. “So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory”

(Psalm 63:2). This is the perfection of the Torah of Yahweh: "The Law [Torah] of the Lord [Yahweh] is perfect, reviving the soul" (Psalm 19:7).

The Old Testament is not interested in trying to explain how God is perfect in *Himself*. This would be of no real benefit to man. God's perfection is emphatically proclaimed as His redeeming love and holy righteousness for Israel. He is perfect in that He is a faithful, reliable God who faithfully fulfills His saving promises, reviving the soul and enlightening the simple.

How far removed is the Old Testament picture of God from every purely philosophical concept of God. The God of Aristotle, for instance, was the product of his own ingenious thinking, the crowning piece of his logical system of philosophy. His God was the necessary but abstract idea of pure thinking alone, "Thinking itself," and therefore exempt from all feelings and affections. All emotional expressions were regarded as disturbances of perfect thinking by Aristotle. His God was an image created after man's highest concepts: a God without passions, love, anger, or interventions in human history.

Israel's testimony of God as the dynamically speaking and acting Creator-Redeemer gave a fundamentally different picture of God. It also differed radically from all the God concepts of the contem-

poraneous Gentile nations. While every ancient nation had its pantheon, containing a plurality of gods and goddesses represented by statues and graven images, the God of Israel had explicitly forbidden the making of any graven image of Him (Exodus 20:4). He exceeded all human concepts of God, remaining the true and sovereign God. The Tabernacle or sanctuary of Israel contained no image of Yahweh. King Solomon even confessed in his inauguration prayer of the magnificent Temple: "'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!' " (1 Kings 8:27).

Isaiah tries to awaken Israel to a new vision of Yahweh's superior majesty and sovereign rulership, by pointing to the countless stars in their orderly movements: "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One" (Isaiah 40:25).

God revealed Himself to Isaiah in His incomparable holiness, a category which can only be experienced and therefore cannot be found out by mere human thinking. Isaiah experienced the overwhelming reality of holiness when he was given a vision of the Holy One in His heavenly glory and heard the seraphim singing reverently: "'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is

full of his glory' ” (Isaiah 6:3).

The personal encounter with the holy God brought home to Isaiah the sudden realization of his own inherent sinfulness, causing him to exclaim: “ ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts’ ” (Isaiah 6:5).

This dramatic revelation of God’s holiness gave the noble prophet a new self-understanding, the discovery of his complete unworthiness as contrasted with infinite purity. Yet, this experience was not the end of God’s ways. The Lord proceeded to give the repentant prophet His saving grace from the heavenly temple: “ ‘Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven’ ” (Isaiah 6:7).

How vividly this story teaches that God’s love is *holy* love, which both loves the sinner and hates sin. Sin—the mysterious spirit of disobedience and independence from God—is incompatible with God. Unanimously the prophets proclaim that God will judge the world and particularly His chosen people in righteousness.

“ ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities’ ” (Amos 3:2).

“ ‘But the Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness’ ” (Isaiah 5:16).

Yet, even when Yahweh is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” (Habakkuk 1:13), it is God’s perfection to save a remnant by His grace, as the prophet Hosea portrays:

“ ‘How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! How can I make you like Admah! How can I treat you like Zeboiim! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy’ ” (Hosea 11:8, 9).

Thus God’s perfection is revealed in holiness, love, and righteousness in the concrete reality of Israel’s history. God’s perfection thus is perfection in action, intent upon man’s salvation in this world. It means God’s wholehearted, undivided, faithful will and dedication to save man and to sanctify him in His holy fellowship. No wonder that the inspired poet arouses Israel to praise such a wonderful God, to seek His strength and presence, and to proclaim His deeds among the nations with joy, so that all peoples may worship Him.

“ ‘O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works! Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those

who seek the Lord rejoice! Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his presence continually! Remember the wonderful works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, O offspring of Abraham his servant, sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!" (Psalm 105:1-6).

It is important to notice that Moses uses the terms "just," or "righteous" (*saddîq*), and "right" (*yāshār*) as virtual synonyms of God's perfection (Deuteronomy 32:4). More specifically, the redeeming acts of Yahweh for Israel since Egypt are called "the righteousnesses" (*sidqôt*) or the righteous deeds of Yahweh (Micah 6:5; Judges 5:11). The Revised Standard Version translates the *sidqôt* of Yahweh usually by "the saving acts" or "the triumphs of the Lord." Such translations are more an interpretation, hiding the important Hebrew concept of God's righteousness, as an act of salvation by God's grace in faithfulness to His covenant with Israel. It is true that God's righteousness can also mean God's justice as an act of destruction or retribution for sin. But these concepts are not contradictory. The act of saving righteousness is always performed on behalf of the faithful covenant people; the act of destruction or punitive righteousness on the avowed enemies of Israel, who threaten the covenant people and hinder the covenant from being fulfilled to Israel.

Therefore the pious Israelite in times of distress and oppression could invoke God's righteousness as the way of salvation and deliverance (Psalms 31:1; 35:24; 71:2). God assures His chastised covenant people that He will strengthen, help, and uphold them with the right hand of His righteousness (Isaiah 41:10; 45:8). Thus God is righteous when bestowing grace and mercy. He is not partly righteous, partly gracious, but both fully.

The connection between holiness, righteousness, faithfulness, steadfast love, and perfection, therefore, appears to be very intimate. We might say that God's perfection in the Old Testament means that His way or the revelations of His holiness, righteousness, and faithful love are perfect. And this perfection man is called to follow and to manifest in the walk with his Creator and covenant God.

To be created in the image of God implies the obligation to follow Him, reflecting His image in the social life. Thus Scripture tells of the perfection of Noah, Abraham, Job, and of all true Israelites.

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9).

"The Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless'" (Genesis 17:1; see also Genesis 26:5).

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1).

“For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who

walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).

“Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!” (Psalm 119:1).

“Men of perverse mind are an abomination to the Lord, but those of blameless ways are his delight” (Proverbs 11:20).

III.

Human Perfection in the Old Testament

A.

The covenant of restoring grace

One of the questions that has haunted the human race ever since it knew the story of Adam and Eve in Paradise is, How can man ever regain Paradise lost? How can man attain to sinless perfection?

Many different philosophies and conflicting religious systems have been devised to meet man's inherent urge for seeking a higher life, the perfect life. Our specific purpose now is to investigate the inspired answer given in ancient Israel and recorded in the Old Testament.

Moses and the prophets all start from the religious presupposition that man was created by his Creator in God's image, after His likeness (Genesis 1:26), and then was placed in the beautiful Garden of Eden with the privilege of having fellowship with God and to rule the world as God's representative (Genesis 2; Psalm 8).

Man was not created to live for himself or the world, trying to find meaning or perfection in himself or humanity. Man's original perfection was the

perfect relation with his Father-Creator, who gave him his mandate and mission for the world. This religious dimension of man as creature received a concrete symbol in God's rest on the seventh day of Creation Week (Genesis 2:2, 3). The celebration of God's work of creation on the seventh day gave meaning and direction to man's life and thinking. The worship of God as Creator gave true dignity and freedom to man. Man was free from the bondage of self-deification and of imaginary gods in nature.

Knowing his Creator, man could know himself. Man does not carry the meaning of life in himself. It cannot be found in nature or the world around him. The Sabbath day was specifically designed to point man to God as the source of his nobility and destiny: to be a son of God, his Father. Not on the seventh, but on the sixth day man was created—a telling, meaningful fact. Although he could be called the crowning piece of Creation, the perfection of man was given on the seventh day, the day of worship and praise. By entering into God's rest of the seventh day as God's son and festive partner, rejoicing in

his Father's perfect work, man would receive the joy of holiness and perfection from his Maker.

Without worshipping the Creator, man is bound to worship another god, an idol of his own making. The misery of modern secularized man is that he does not even realize his self-deification and self-worship.

Israel was chosen as the only people that knew the sovereign Creator as their Redeemer God, which gave them a unique way of worship and mission in the world.

The heart of Israel's worship was the sanctuary and its sacred, atoning cultus. It is from this cultic center that we have to understand the Book of Psalms that speaks of merely two groups, or classes, of people; the righteous and the wicked. Who are these righteous or perfect ones, as contrasted with the wicked or the evildoers in Israel's temple songs? Are these classes morally defined so that the psalmists would qualify a certain kind of people as morally perfect and the others as morally wicked?

The moral aspect plays a large role in the description of both parties. Yet, the psalm poets pierce through all moral qualifications, pointing to the source of all moral life. The rela-

tion with the living God determines the quality of one's heart and life. This spiritual relation with God comes from the God of Israel, and it is established by Him in the sanctuary service. Not man's pious wishes, feelings, or prayers, only Yahweh's act of acceptance through the Levitical priest could declare a repentant worshiper as "righteous," acquitted of guilt.

" 'The priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven' " (Leviticus 4:35).

This does not imply that the priest forgave on his own authority, according to his own liking. The priest was the appointed representative of Israel's God. God Himself remained the sovereign Lord who actually forgave the confessed sins, for His own name's sake. The trend of Israel to trust in the Levitical priests and their sacrificial animals for forgiveness was met by God with emphatic rebukes:

" 'I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins' " (Isaiah 43:25).

The law of Moses taught explicitly that *Israel* did not give the atoning blood on their altars to God, but, the other way round, " 'I have given it for you upon the altar to make atone-

priests said to all Israel, 'Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the Lord your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the Lord your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you this day' " (Deuteronomy 27:9, 10).

This divine order is specifically stressed in the Ten Commandments themselves, as they begin with the reminder: " 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me' " (Exodus 20:2, 3). The great moral law of Israel thus constitutes the holy will of a Redeemer for a redeemed people in order to keep and sanctify His people within the received redemption. Grateful love of a saved people, then, would be the only true and acceptable condition for fulfillment of this law of God. Also the second commandment reminds of this motivating love: " 'showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments' " (Exodus 20:6).

No wonder that perfect love for God is constantly exalted as the specific root of Israel's worship and moral life.

" 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God

with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' " (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5).

The requirement of such a totalitarian love for God becomes understandable only when we consider the historical situation and context in which this claim of God on Israel was made. This appeal for Israel's perfect love was made *after* Israel had experienced God's perfect love and grace in their great Exodus salvation. It was the response, the thankful commitment of a saved people to their loving Saviour, the Lord expected and rightfully commanded of His people.

King David was regarded as the great example for all Israel's theocratic rulers, because " 'my servant David . . . kept my commandments, and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes' " (1 Kings 14:8; see also 1 Kings 9:4).

How perfect love would render perfect obedience to God's commandments by His grace, appears again in King Solomon's blessing:

" 'Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day' " (1 Kings 8:61).

Unabatedly God was looking for those who responded to His drawing love and inclined their

ment for your souls' ” (Leviticus 17:11).

This was the revealed and unique doctrine of Israel's sanctuary service, separating Israel from all the heathen religious cults which were based on the principle of salvation by works. Israel was fundamentally different from all the other nations in its origin and mission, its worship and theology. The cause of this was not to be sought in any superiority or virtue of the race itself, but exclusively in the God who chose this people, in faithfulness to His own promises made to the patriarchs.

They were called to be holy, because Yahweh was holy (Leviticus 11:45). The Lord had elected them to be His peculiar people, “ ‘a people for his own possession’ ” (Deuteronomy 7:6). Constantly Israel was in danger of misunderstanding the gracious purpose of their election by thinking, “ ‘It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land’ ” (Deuteronomy 9:4). Yet in spite of their stubbornness, rebellion, and apostasy from the Lord during the forty years in the wilderness, He renewed His covenant and steadfast love with Israel, appealing with renewed force:

“ ‘And now, Israel, what does

the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I command you this day for your good?’ ” (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13).

Having been provided a perfect redemption by grace alone, Israel was now under the holy obligation to render perfect gratitude and obedience to their Redeemer in return. Then Israel's moral obedience would be motivated by thankfulness for the received deliverance, forgiveness, and glorious future. The ethics of Israel were therefore conditioned and rooted in their redemption by God's grace. The covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, just like His covenant with Abraham, was a covenant of grace, of forgiving grace through the sanctuary service, directed by the hope of peace in the Promised Land.

Emphatically Moses tried to teach Israel this structure of redeeming grace as the exclusive motivation for true and acceptable obedience. At the border of the Promised Land, he reiterated this ordained order of redemption-morality.

“ ‘And Moses and the Levitical

hearts and lives completely, perfectly to Him.

“ ‘For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him’ ” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

B.

The aroused sin-consciousness in the psalms of Israel

The 150 psalms were all used as cultic hymns sung by the choirs with instrumental accompaniment in the Temple of Jerusalem. Many of these were composed by David in his early life when he still was a shepherd in the hills of Judea. Singing his hymns as prayers, he accompanied himself on his harp.

Later on a number of David's songs were incorporated in the official Temple cultus as the true and legitimate way of worshiping and communing with God (Nehemiah 12:24). In the Scripture canon these and other songs were finally accepted as inspired and effectual prayers, exemplary for all worshipers in truth and spirit at Jerusalem.

One characteristic emotion of the Biblical psalms that stands out above all literary beauty and aesthetic enjoyment is their sense of contrition and an

aroused consciousness of sin.

This recalls the prophetic consciousness of Israel's and Judah's sins as contrasted with the revelation of divine holiness and moral purity. Sin and holiness are contrasting corollaries. A deep sense of the one necessarily correlates with a great concept of the other. Yet, both ideas are not so much intellectual or purely ethical concepts as they are divine revelations to the heart and conscience of the worshiper who receives a glimpse of the reality of Israel's God.

Composers like David, Asaph the Levite, and others had a personal and living experience with God, whom they worshiped as the Creator of the world and Redeemer of Israel. Psalms 78 and 105-107 reveal a clear knowledge of the Torah of Moses, recalling its message with dramatic appeal and religious fervor.

The psalms awaken Israel to its unique heritage, arouse it out of its natural apathy and lethargy, and urge the worshiper to a renewed heart experience of the fear of the Lord. They do this by exhibiting the true nature of sin and guilt, on the one hand, and of righteousness and perfection, on the other hand.

How can the religious temple poets sing of man's perfection

or righteousness, when they have such a deep awareness of human sinfulness? A look at two psalms will help answer this question:

Psalm 19

“But who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression” (Psalm 19:12, 13).

Having confessed the glory of the Creator as it shines forth from His works of creation, the psalmist continues to acknowledge a greater glory of Yahweh, shining forth from His Torah in saving light to His covenant people. The Torah was experienced by the true Israelite as a fountain of redemptive joy, “more to be desired . . . than gold; . . . sweeter also than honey” (verse 10). It urged upon the believer the moral response of walking with his holy God, choosing His blessed way, and shunning the road of disobedience.

“Moreover by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (verse 11). Considering the claims of Infinite Purity, David realized that neither nature nor the Torah as such could save his soul in the judgment. Knowing the searching eyes of the Lord who weighs

the inner motives of every man’s heart (1 Chronicles 28:9), David sensed a sinfulness of his being that exceeded all sense of ceremonial transgressions or sinful acts. He understood sin primarily as a rebellious attitude and act against Yahweh (Psalms 41:4; 51:4). The true insight into evil and the realization of sin was not the result of ethical reflections, but a gift of revelation from the holy covenant God. Considering his heart before God, David moved on to a heartfelt confession of his own moral impotency, praying for forgiving grace:

“But who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults” (Psalm 19:12).

This far-reaching sin consciousness was the specific religious characteristic of Israel’s worship. The worshiper realized before his holy God that he was sinful at the core of his being and could not even ascertain an adequate self-knowledge. In contrast with all Greek religious philosophy, which started always with the commission “Know thyself,” Israel’s way to self-knowledge started with the knowledge of Yahweh, the Life-giver.

“For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do we see light” (Psalm 36:9).

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my

thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23, 24).

“Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind” (Psalm 26:2).

The Israelite knew that Yahweh was weighing the deepest motives and desires of his heart in a heavenly balance and that He would act accordingly.

“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psalm 66:18).

He knew that the punctilious observance of all cultic ceremonies, the keeping of sabbaths and feasts, the singing of ritual prayers, would be an objectionable show of piety if the fountain of the heart was not cleansed by the Spirit of Yahweh.

“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!”

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”

“Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”

“The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:2, 10, 12, 17).

Divine forgiveness presupposes a true, heartfelt contri-

tion, sensing the weight of sin and a willingness to obey God with joy. The prophet regards this as a matter of life and death.

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. *If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken*” (Isaiah 1:18-20; see also Deuteronomy 28:47).

David’s prayer of supplication in Psalm 19:12 considers the weight of sin in the light of God’s eyes; therefore he treasures God’s grace very highly. Having asked for God’s forgiving grace, David continues to pray for God’s keeping grace, for the power which restrains the sinful impulses:

“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression” (verse 13). What are “presumptuous” sins? They are distinguished from the unconscious or hidden faults in verse 12. These two kinds of sin—the presumptuous and the unconscious—are identified clearly in the Levitical law, particularly in

Numbers 15. The sanctuary opened the way of priestly forgiveness for sins of ignorance, which are sins committed unwittingly, without the full knowledge of their significance before God, and afterward seriously repented of. Repentance was the decisive criterion, implying confession and the forsaking of sin, as stated in Israel's wisdom literature:

"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

Presumptuous sins, consequently, are qualified altogether differently:

"But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him" (Numbers 15:30, 31).

By a sin committed "with a high hand" or "uplifted arm" is meant not an incidental falling into sin but a commitment to sin in an attitude of defying God's authority. Then the sinner deliberately sins after having received the knowledge of the truth (Hebrews 10:26). Con-

sciously and willingly he "despises" the revealed word of the Lord. Characteristic of this type of sin is the absence of any true repentance afterward as the sin is cherished and justified.

Numbers 15:32-36 presents an example of this kind of sinful attitude. A man defied the previous commandment of God to keep the Sabbath of the Lord as a day of solemn rest.

"Every one who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death" (Exodus 31:14, 15).

Showing his contempt for God's law, a man ventured upon the open rejection of God's revealed will by going out to gather sticks upon the Sabbath. By divine verdict this rebellious man was put to death. Ellen G. White explains it:

"The act of this man was a willful and deliberate violation of the fourth commandment—a sin, not of thoughtlessness or ignorance, but of presumption" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 409).

The Torah, therefore, defines presumptuous sin as a defying of God's authority, a despising

of obedience to God's ordinances (Deuteronomy 17:12). There is no provision of atonement or forgiveness for such sin, since then sin would be condoned or basically eternalized (see 1 Samuel 3:14; Isaiah 22:14; Jeremiah 7:16).

This does not imply that mortal beings can determine when a presumptuous sin is being committed. Who can discern the motives of a man's heart? Jeremiah reminds us:

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings'" (Jeremiah 17:9, 10).

Sensing his great need of God's saving and sanctifying power, he therefore prays:

"Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for thou art my praise" (Jeremiah 17:14).

For this twofold grace also David prayed in Psalm 19:12, 13. Not only forgiveness he sought, but a sanctified life under God's prevailing grace. He asked for both the acquittal of his guilt and the subduing of the evil powers that strive for the mastery. Then, he believed, he would be a *blameless* servant of Yahweh, his "Rock and Redeemer."

"Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression" (Psalm 19:13).

Thus Psalm 19 declares that human perfection is not the cultivation of any inherent goodness in man's nature but the persistent walk in dependence on Yahweh's *forgiving and keeping grace*. Divine forgiveness restored Israel in the blessed perfecting communion with Yahweh. Although guilt and sin can be distinguished, the Old Testament never separates guilt from the act or life of sin. Consequently, forgiveness also has a bearing upon the moral life. The *ruling* power of sin is broken, as God Himself wants to rule supreme. This perfection is a gift as well as a requirement of God's covenant with Israel.

A man may inadvertently fall into a sin, a transgression of the covenant law, but this does not cut him off from God or His people. The sanctuary service provided reconciliation for the repentant worshiper by means of the blood of atonement on the altar (Leviticus 4). There was no perfection without cultic atonement in God's covenant with Israel. Whatever moral perfection a willing obedience to God might develop, never could this correlate with a feeling of holiness or self-righteousness. The experience

of a contrite heart and a humble spirit would only increase in intensity if the holy Yahweh dwelled more and more in the supplicating worshiper.

“For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite’ ” (Isaiah 57:15).

Psalm 15

In Psalm 15 we encounter perfection (*tāmîm*) again. This time it is the moral prerequisite for entering the Temple and enjoying Yahweh’s protection and blessing.

“O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent? Who shall dwell on thy holy hill? He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart” (Psalm 15:1, 2).

It sounds strange to hear that perfection is the *prerequisite* for worshiping Yahweh and receiving His gracious fellowship. Is not perfection the very *gift*, to be sought and received in the sanctuary? How then can perfection be a condition for participation in Israel’s worship?

To find the proper scope of Psalm 15, we need to seek the wider perspective of the whole Torah. Morality was not the basis of God’s election of Israel

(Deuteronomy 7-9). The great historic Exodus salvation and the subsequent covenant with Israel at Sinai were pure gifts from Yahweh, given by His grace alone, in faithfulness to God’s promise to the patriarchs. The very name of the God of Israel, Yahweh, denotes Him as the gracious and faithful covenant God.

Psalm 15, beginning with the prayerful question, “O . . . [Yahweh], who shall sojourn in thy tent?” therefore, immediately presupposes the covenant of atoning grace. Both the law and the sanctuary were gifts of the covenant God, providing a continual atonement for Israel, the abiding presence of God’s holy love. The priestly ministry of forgiving grace did not intend to forgive guilt in the abstract. It rather intended to take away sins, both in their guilt aspect and in their actual dominion in man’s conduct (see above on Psalm 19).

Accordingly, it was Israel’s prerogative and duty to walk with God and their fellowmen in a new obedience to God’s will. The divine powers of redeeming grace, as manifested in Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, the house of bondage, were made available henceforth in the priestly sanctuary service. The purpose of the yearly Passover festival was to renew and

continue the gracious redemption and covenant communion with Yahweh, to give Israel a renewed, living participation in the historic Exodus salvation. The same grace was offered by God daily in the sanctuary. Yet, it was *holy* grace which cleansed from unrighteousness and wickedness, transforming the heart of the worshiper.

“O continue thy steadfast love to those who know thee, and thy salvation to the upright of heart! Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away” (Psalm 36:10, 11). “But I through the abundance of thy steadfast love will enter thy house, I will worship toward thy holy temple in the fear of thee” (Psalm 5:7).

God’s burning holiness and kingly honor could not bear with an unholy and unclean people which were enslaved to or divided by sin. Israel should be a holy nation, a light for the Gentiles, glorying not in their wisdom, riches, or power, but in their knowledge of the true and living God (Jeremiah 9:23, 24). It was their holy privilege to walk in willing and joyful obedience to God, which included repentance, confession, restoration.

This new heart necessarily would be manifested in doing what is right according to the

covenant, speaking truth from the heart. Thus the covenant of transforming grace provided the motivating power for a new social-ethical conduct. Participation in the yearly festivals is conditioned, says Psalm 15, by acceptance and appropriation of the previously received salvation and grace.

Refusing to repent, by rejecting willing obedience to God’s covenant, characterizes sin as presumptuous sin. On the other hand the requirement of Psalm 15 is not a sense of personal sinlessness or a feeling of self-righteousness. How could such an emotion ever exist with a deepening conviction of unworthiness before God?

What Psalm 15 requires is a cleansed and faithful social-ethical life, as presented in verses 3-5:

“Who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor; in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; who does not put out his money at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.”

This covenantal way of life by the grace of God is the perfect walk, because the heart is

cleansed and the hands are clean (Psalm 15:2).

This message is also conveyed in another psalm of David:

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob” (Psalm 24:3-6).

Stronger than Psalm 15 appears here the indissoluble interrelationship of the redemptive experience and the moral life. Those who seek God in prayer, who make Him daily their Lord and Saviour, will receive divine blessing and vindication. The whole moral life is rooted and anchored in God’s gracious redemption as received in Israel’s Temple service.

C.

The soul-stirring oracles of the prophets

Whenever the Levitical priests began to trust in the ceremonies of the holy rituals themselves, not seeing the divine message in them, and lost the incentive

and motivation for true moral obedience to the covenant, then Israel’s sanctuary service became distorted and objectionable to God, and He reacted by sending His prophets with special messages for the priests and their objectionable ritualism. The prophetic books in the Old Testament repeatedly testify to Israel’s sinful neglect of walking humbly with God and perfectly with their fellow covenanters.

In the eighth century BC the prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, addressed Jerusalem with some specific questions in the name of Yahweh.

“ ‘O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember what Balak, king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, *that you may know the saving acts of the Lord*’ ” (Micah 6:3-5).

Micah challenged Jerusalem’s dead ceremonialism and sinful materialism, announcing the judgment of total destruction of the holy city and its Temple (3:9-12). Yet, this judgment message implied the divine ap-

peal for repentance and return to God with heart and soul. The prophet reminded the chosen nation of their great Exodus redemption. Remember the righteous or saving acts of Yahweh! This would unmask all ritual acts as an endeavor to atone for their sins as a futile effort. Even the sacrifice of a firstborn son could not take away sin!

“ ‘With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:6-8).

With this challenging appeal the prophets thundered forth their judgment messages to a complacent nation, whether they were Amos and Hosea in the northern kingdom, or Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, for the southern kingdom. In soul-stirring and dramatic exhibitions they all brought home to the chosen nation the divine rejection of a formalized religious cultus

which tolerated and condoned sin. Where the priestly service failed to purify the chosen nation from social injustice, self-glorification, and righteousness by works, prophets of God’s ordination were called to uphold the standard of priestly perfection and holiness.

Isaiah, with his poetic glow and power, reiterates the moral prerequisites originally upheld by the priests.

“The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: ‘Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?’ He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil. He will dwell on the heights; his place of defense will be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him, his water will be sure. Your eyes will see the king in his beauty; they will behold a land that stretches afar” (33:14-17).

The Yahweh of Israel is a *holy* God, just as much as He is a *merciful and gracious* God. He cannot and will not tolerate sin in the nation chosen by His grace. The anger of God was poured out on an unrepentant

Judah through the Babylonian exile, which came in three intensified stages (605; 597; 586 BC).

After the second stage (597 BC) ten thousand “mighty men of valor” were taken captive (2 Kings 24:14), among whom was Ezekiel the priest. The exiled Judeans began to use a proverb which accused their parents of sins for which they had to bear the penalty: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezekiel 18:2). Against this trend of thinking among the captives in Babylon, which prevented any acceptance of personal guilt and therefore of true repentance, Ezekiel had to speak: “The soul that sins shall die” (verse 4).

On the other hand, if a soul would walk with God according to the holy covenant, he would surely live. The covenant of God would reckon him perfect or “righteous.” Ezekiel thus proceeds to place before the covenant people in exile the old Torah requirements of Moses, as instilled originally by the priestly ministry (Psalms 15, 24).

“If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right—if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman in

her time of impurity, does not oppress any one, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any increase, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances—he is righteous, he shall surely live, says the Lord God” (Ezekiel 18:5-9).

After a detailed application of this covenantal ethics to a parent and his child in order to instill a personal responsibility to God, the instruction climaxes with a moving appeal to Israel *to repent*, in the light of the purified picture of God’s holy, redemptive love.

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so turn, and live” (verses 30-32).

After the seventy years of exile in Babylon a new begin-

ning was made when God entered into a new covenant with the faithful remnant after the crisis. Prophets like Haggai and Zechariah revived the souls of the returned captives, conveying messages of hope, courage, and a glorious future.

“The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts’ ” (Haggai 2:9).

“Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain.’ ”

“And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong’ ” (Zechariah 8:3, 13).

But the new covenant required a new obedience.

“And the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy each to his brother, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart’ ” (Zechariah 7:8-10).

God was still the same holy and gracious God, hating sin while loving the sinner.

The new sanctuary service in the rebuilt Temple again offered forgiving grace, requiring a perfect life in true obedience from the heart, just as before the exile (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

In a meaningful vision Zechariah saw the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of Yahweh and being accused by Satan. Joshua represented the returned captives of Israel, “a brand plucked from the fire’ ” (Zechariah 3:2). Joshua is clothed “with filthy garments” (verse 3), Israel’s confessed iniquity. On God’s command the filthy garments are removed and exchanged for clean or perfect apparel. This action graphically portrays God’s forgiving grace. Sin is removed, a new righteousness or perfection is imputed and bestowed on the new Israel.

Forgiveness, however, presupposes real guilt and condemnation. Yet forgiveness intends not merely the negative removal of guilt, but positively—and just as real—the imputation and impartation of righteousness or perfection. The aspect of sanctification, the new obedience, is stressed as the specific prerequisite for the final, eternal blessing.

“And the angel of the Lord enjoined Joshua, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: if you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here’ ” (Zechariah 3:6, 7).

Zechariah has made it unmistakably clear that divine grace obliges to perfect obedience, the obedience of faith springing forth from a re-created and willing heart. Ellen White has made a particular application of Zechariah’s vision to the tried and tempted remnant church. Of them Christ declares: “ ‘They may have imperfections of character; they may have failed in their endeavors; but they have repented, and I have forgiven and accepted them’ ” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 589). How regretful to read in the last book of the Old Testament that postexilic Israel again failed to manifest the transforming covenantal fellowship with God and the obedience of faith. As the root cause of their degenerating social-ethical life Malachi pointed to a failing priestly ministry. The Temple worship again deteriorated into a dead ritualism, without the fear of the Lord—that is, the trembling reverence in humble obedience. God addressed Is-

rael with some pertinent questions to the priesthood in Jerusalem:

“ ‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, ‘How have we despised thy name?’ By offering polluted food upon my altar. And you say, ‘How have we polluted it?’ By thinking that the Lord’s table may be despised’ ” (Malachi 1:6, 7).

Lack of the fear of the Lord was inevitably manifested in social disloyalty, in profanation of the sanctuary, and in faithlessness in the marriage covenant (Malachi 2:14, 16). The broken covenant communion with Yahweh, however, would be restored once more through the specific grace of God. God Himself would take the initiative to bring His people back into a new and perfect covenant relationship with Him. Because the Levitical priests had “ ‘turned aside from the way; . . . caused many to stumble by . . . [their] instruction; . . . corrupted the covenant of Levi’ ” (Malachi 2:8), God would send a special messenger to His Temple. He would refine and purify Israel “ ‘till they present right offerings to the Lord, . . . pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old,

and as in former years' ” (Malachi 3:1-4).

This special messenger would come as “Elijah the prophet,” in order to lead the chosen nation to an ultimate decision for or against God, preparing Israel for “the great and terrible day of the Lord,” the judgment day of God (Malachi 4:5, 6):

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the so-

journer, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.’ ” “Then once more you shall distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him’ ” (Malachi 3:5, 18).

Thus the Old Testament closed, or rather remained open to the future, with a promise of a new revival and reformation. Ultimately, the demarcation line between the righteous and the wicked, between the perfect ones and the unrepentant evil-doers, would become clear in their reaction to God’s final warning message.

IV.

Christian Perfection in the Gospel According to Matthew

Of the four Gospel writers only Matthew uses the term “perfect” (*teleios*). It appears twice in his Gospel (5:48; 19:21) as words of Jesus Himself.

“ ‘You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect’ ” (Matthew 5:48).

This often-quoted word of Jesus summarizes and climaxes a whole series of His pronouncements which were directed against the legalistic piety of the scribes and Pharisees. Speaking emphatically with His Messianic authority, Christ brought home the true and perfect Messianic interpretation of Moses and the prophets. Being the King of Israel, He personified the kingdom of God.

The sayings of Jesus in Matthew 5-7 are all colored by and directed to the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of God in glory. Having affirmed His loyalty to Moses and the prophets (5:17-19), Jesus reiterated forcefully the old prophetic message that outward piety and observance of the law does not yet qualify one for the kingdom of God.

“ ‘For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of

heaven’ ” (Matthew 5:20).

How far Jesus was removed from creating an antithesis between Moses and His own Messianic redemption appears again from His words: “ ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe the mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others’ ” (Matthew 23:23).

Christ differentiated in the Torah between the “weightier” matters of the law and those of secondary importance; between its central principles of grace, faith, and justice and outward ritual observances. He did not reject the Temple worship and its priestly services, but He revived their reconciling and sanctifying objectives. “ ‘So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift’ ” (Matthew 5:23, 24).

The prerequisites Jesus urged for entering the kingdom of God appear to be quite the same as the priestly requirements laid down in the old covenant for entering the sanctuary (Psalm 15).

Part 2

In Matthew 5 Jesus indicated six times that Moses and the Torah were to be understood positively as motivated by love to God and love to fellowmen. Thus Jesus corrected the superficial and inadequate interpretations of the scribes and Pharisees. In this way Jesus gave the Jews His Messianic Torah. Finally Christ explained how the love of the heavenly Father, flowing out impartially to both the good and the evil, is a perfect love that must be imitated or reflected by the true children of God.

“‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, *therefore*, must be perfect, as your heavenly *Father* is perfect’ ” (Matthew 5:43-48).

From the context it becomes clear that Jesus did not address Himself to the Gentiles who did not know Moses and the covenant but to the children of Israel who knew God as their heavenly Father.

They are addressed as the saved children of God: “‘You are the salt of the earth’ ”; “‘You are the light of the world’ ” (verses 13, 14).

The redemptive experience of Israel is definitely presupposed. Those who have tasted the gracious love of God are now called by Jesus to manifest this redemptive love to their fellowmen, even to their enemies. As children of God, they cannot but follow in His footsteps and reveal His spirit.

The command of Christ to His disciples that they be as perfect as their heavenly Father is therefore both a promise and a duty, a gift and a demand. It is not an ideal that at best can only be approached, yet never attained. On the contrary, Christian perfection implies a personal experience of the saving love of the God of Israel and the manifestation of its sanctifying power in wholehearted love to all who need our help.

This love, says Jesus, is not an unattainable perfection but a reality that “must” be experienced and radiated here and now by the children of the heavenly Father. Those who *are* loved by God can and will radiate this love to their fellowmen, even when the fellowmen are inimical. This perfect or wholehearted love is perfection in action. This gospel perfection is the revival of the principles of perfect love as proclaimed by Moses and the prophets (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

The second use of the word *perfect* (*teleios*) by Matthew appears in chapter 19, verse 21: "Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' "

While the Sermon on the Mount stressed the basic harmony and continuity of the old covenant and the new covenant, Matthew also wants to disclose why the Christian faith and rabbinic Judaism diverge. The story of the rich young ruler can be seen as the crucial encounter of Pharisaic Judaism and Christ Jesus. To the sincere question of the ruler, "What good deed must be done in order to have eternal life?" Christ referred him first to the Holy Scriptures and the covenant of God: " 'If you would enter life, keep the commandments' " (Matthew 19:17).

When the young man finally asserted, " 'All these I have observed; what do I still lack?' " (verse 20), he revealed a need of personal assurance of salvation. He lacked the redemptive experience of God's forgiving love as offered in the Scriptures and the Temple service. In reality, therefore, he had not observed the Torah, since he didn't have the knowledge of the saving and assuring love of God. Christ, however, offered him what he lacked by a direct call to be with Him and enjoy His saving fellowship:

" 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me' " (Matthew 19:21).

The crucial test was not the sale of his possessions but whether the rich ruler would accept Jesus of Nazareth as the saving Messiah to be followed and desired above all earthly treasures. The Jewish ruler was taught to love Yahweh with all his heart and all his soul. Now Jesus claimed this supreme love of the ruler, promising him that he would be "perfect" if he followed Jesus as the Son of God and accepted Him as his personal Lord and Saviour.

According to Jesus, consequently, perfection exists not in doing self-sacrificing acts for the neighbor but in the fellowship of Christ, following His footsteps in communion with Him.

The real test for the Jewish leader then was not whether he was willing to give abundantly to the poor, but whether he would accept Jesus as the ultimate authority to be followed and the divine Lord of his heart.

Refusing this call of Christ, the ruler disclosed that his "great possessions" were the highest treasures of his heart. His possessions functioned as an idol from which Christ had to free him in order to give him His own fellowship and kingdom.

Perfection then is not the striv-

ing after ethical ideals or even the endeavor to imitate or copy Christ's life independent of Him, but it is the wholehearted, undivided belonging to Him and living with Him by His saving and sanctifying power.

As perfection is required from every disciple of Christ according to Matthew 5:48, not just of some elite group within the church, every Christian believer is placed basically before the same test as the rich young ruler: to renounce every personal treasure or idol in order to follow Christ Jesus with an undi-

vided, complete heart.

Christ wants to possess the heart of every Christian and to transform it into a temple wherein the Spirit of God can dwell and rule with perfect love. To such He promised the ultimate salvation: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Thus Christian perfection is defined not by one's living according to moral law only but by belonging to and following the living Lord Jesus with a pure heart. Such "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Revelation 14:4).

V.

Perfection in the Pauline Writings

A.

The apocalyptic perspective of perfection

In the writings of the apostle Paul the word *perfect(ion)* appears rather frequently (Roman 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 3:12, 15; Colossians 1:28; 3:14; 4:12). Although he uses the term with different shades of meaning, one overall and supreme characteristic stands out in Paul's use of the word: the fullness of the redemptive state of the believers in Christ Jesus. Paul calls the believers "saints" and "perfect ones" (*teleioi*) because they receive the full donation of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

The redemption of Christ in its fullness is in the New Testament distinguished by two aspects or phases, the *present salvation* of justification and sanctification by faith in Christ on the one hand, and the *future salvation* of glorification at the second advent of Jesus Christ on the other. Like the concept of the kingdom of God, so also *perfection* is a present gift and reality; yet, in another sense, it is a promise to be realized only

at the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of glory. This dual distinction Paul applies also to the concept of the believers as *God's children*. In Romans 8:14 he assures the Christians that they have become already "sons of God," since they are led by the Spirit of God. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

This present redemptive assurance Paul then underlines by stating: "When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (verses 15, 16). However, when the apostle proceeds to dwell on the future glory to be revealed to us, he makes the remarkable statement that we, while we have the Spirit of God, "groan inwardly *as we wait for adoption as sons*, the redemption of our bodies" (verse 23).

The relationship of God and the believer as Father and son, therefore, is both a *present reality*, in one real sense, and a *future reality*, in another sense. The difference is determined by the meaning of the two advents of Christ. The same principle applies to the use of "perfection" with the apostle Paul. On the one hand he can say that the

believers in Christ are perfect in Him and may grow up together into one perfect body or spiritually mature manhood (Colossians 1:28; 3:14; 4:12; Ephesians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 14:20). On the other hand Paul stresses that the ultimate perfection has not yet arrived and is still future (1 Corinthians 13:10). Only the glory of the second advent of Christ will sweep away all the imperfect.

In this way the apostle tries to correct the ideas of those believers in Corinth who one-sidedly focused all their attention on the first advent of Christ, thinking that *ultimate* perfection could *already* be experienced *in this life*, and even boasted in theirs above that of fellow believers (1 Corinthians 4:6-8). To such the hope for the resurrection of the dead was irrelevant and superfluous, since to them the resurrection was "past already," which they probably explained as a *spiritual* experience received in baptism (2 Timothy 2:18). This caused the apostle to write an elaborate chapter (1 Corinthians 15) on the significance of the future resurrection of the dead for the benefit of those believers who said that "there is no resurrection of the dead" (verse 12).

When Paul heard that in another church in Greece, at Thessalonica, the error was

propounded that also the second advent of Christ, the day of the Lord, was not to be regarded as a future reality but had come already, he wrote to them specifically on the future reality of the day of the Lord Jesus and "our assembling to meet him" (2 Thessalonians 2).

This trend of spiritualizing away the future redemptive realities of the resurrection and the Second Advent into some present spiritual experience was the fatal influence of Gnosticism which evidently had made its inroads in the primitive church.

This so-called Christian Gnosticism was characterized further by its devaluing of the physical and moral well-being of the believers. Both extreme asceticism and moral licentiousness were propagated as the way of perfection or perfect freedom and perfect love.

Over against the boasting in their immoral conduct (1 Corinthians 5:1-6), the apostle stressed that "the body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord" (1 Corinthians 6:13), reminding them: "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God. You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (verses 19, 20).

Paul upheld the human body

as a good and holy creation of God which was to be consecrated to the service of God. In contrast with those whose "god is the belly, and . . . [who] glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things" (Philippians 3:19), Paul explicitly renounced every self-righteousness or perfection (verses 8-12). Seeking his righteousness exclusively in Christ, he looked forward to his ultimate perfection in the resurrection from the dead (verse 11).

"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own."

"But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (verses 12, 20, 21).

B.

The dual aspect of justification and sanctification

What does the apostle Paul mean by the present perfection of the Christian believers? Are they perfect in Christ in the sense of *justification* by faith alone, which means that the perfection or righteousness of Christ is *imputed* to them?

The Pauline gospel specifi-

cally focuses on this blessed truth in the following passages:

"For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Romans 3:28).

"Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:4, 5).

This gracious act of God, reckoning Christ's righteousness or perfect obedience to the repentant sinner, means that God sets the believer right with Himself. The Christian, therefore, has peace with God in his conscience, no longer under the condemnation of the holy law of God (Romans 5:1; 8:1). The perfect forgiveness of his sins and sinful life by God means the complete acquittal of his guilt before the judgment of God *because of Christ's obedience*.

"Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:18, 19).

Therefore Paul wanted to glory only in the cross of the Lord Jesus (Galatians 6:14). To the apostle Paul the justification of the ungodly, however, has

not only a saving *legal* aspect, but also a dynamic *sanctifying* aspect, because Christ becomes the King of the justified believer.

“He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13, 14).

Justification by faith, therefore, implies the transference of the soul from the dominion of sin, in which he was born because of Adam, to the kingdom of grace, where the Spirit reigns, because Christ is the Ruler. The overruling power of sin in the world was broken in Christ, since He conquered sin in our human body (John 16:33; Romans 8:3).

Through baptism into Christ, into His death and resurrection, the believer is legally incorporated into Christ, participating in all that Christ has achieved in His victory at the cross and in the resurrection (Romans 6). On this redemptive basis Paul asks the meaningful question to the Christians in Rome, “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (verse 2). Explaining the profound significance of Christian baptism as an incorporation into Christ’s own death at the cross, he states:

“We know that our old self

was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin” (verse 6).

“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (verse 11).

This saving indicative calls for a sanctifying imperative that the apostle then urges home:

“Let not sin *therefore* reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” (verse 12).

“For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification” (verse 19).

This is the Pauline ethic of Christian perfection! It presupposes a daily appropriation by faith of the life and death of Jesus Christ as accepted in baptism. Romans 6 follows Romans 3 to 5. The apostolic order is first redemption, then morality; first justification, then sanctification; and this as a daily experience. The dynamic and total consecration of Christian perfection Paul unfolds in his grand appeal of Romans 12:1, 2:

“I appeal to you *therefore*, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be

transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

In Romans 12:1–15:13 the apostle develops how the righteousness of God should be revealed in Christian living as a witness to the grace received. This appears to be in fundamental harmony and continuity with the Old Testament covenant of grace, in which obedience to the covenant law was conditioned and motivated by the Exodus redemption and daily participation in the sanctuary service. The apostle, therefore, can appeal also to the Old Testament promises of God to give Israel a cleansed and obedient heart (Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37:27) and apply them directly to the Christian church, saying: “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

The apostle Paul summarizes his gospel message and its moral purpose very briefly as follows:

“And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:15; see also 1 Peter 2:24).

C.

The Christian battle

Paul had such a close fellowship of heart with the living Christ that he could testify, “For to me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21), and “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

With this profound testimony the apostle touches upon the inward Christian struggle, which he also knows himself (1 Corinthians 9:27), and which he develops more fully in Galatians 5:16-24 and Romans 7:14-25.

First of all it is essential to notice the *passive voice* in Paul’s confession, “I have been crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). With this Paul refers to his baptism into the historic death of Christ at the cross. Legally, before God, before His holy law, the apostle says, I am dead, “it is no longer I who live” (verse 20). Paul means by his dead “I” his self-centered, natural ego. He also calls it “the old man,” KJV, or “nature” (Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:22); “the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24); or simply “the flesh”

(Romans 7:5). Paul did not say that his “I” was shot to death or was hanged to death, but it had been “crucified,” which indicates a prolonged dying process. Although a crucified one was legally dead and exterminated, in actual reality such a one could live on for several days and nights on the cross, but in increasing sufferings and agonies.

This illustration may serve to clarify the apostle’s message in Galatians 5 and Romans 7: On the one hand, the baptized Christians have to consider themselves, by faith in Christ, legally dead to sin and the condemning law of God (Romans 6:11; 7:4). On the other hand, they discover that the old self is still alive in empirical reality; that the inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil and wrongdoing still send their desires and impulses to the cleansed heart.

It is a significant fact that not one apostolic letter in the New Testament presupposes a sinless church or a Christian life without the abiding battle with self. All the New Testament writings abound with moral exhortations and admonitions to fight the good fight against the flesh, the world, and the powers of darkness.

For the baptized believers, however, there is no despair or

defeat necessary in this battle. Christ dwells in their hearts and gives the victory (1 Corinthians 15:57). The believers are called to be “strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (Ephesians 6:10). Being led by His Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit may be developed: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23). Paul, therefore, summons:

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. . . . If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law” (Galatians 5:16-18).

“So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:12-14).

“Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

James adds the important idea that the various trials of life for the Christian operate as the testing of his faith which pro-

duces steadfastness and, in this way of battle, perfection of character (James 1:2-4; compare also Romans 5:3, 4). These apostolic admonitions show that the Christian life is not one of mere peace and joy; on the contrary, the way of Christian perfection or sanctification knows inexpressible depths of struggle, sorrow, and repentance, besides the heights of redemptive joy.

Not all Christians will necessarily experience the same intensity of spiritual battle, as Ellen G. White remarks:

“While some are continually harassed, afflicted, and in trouble because of their unhappy traits of character, having to war with internal foes and the corruption of their nature, others have not half so much to battle against” (Testimonies, Vol. 2, p. 74).

The way of Christian perfection can never be one of feeling holy or sinless, because God will gradually reveal more and more the defects of our character through an ever-increasing understanding and efficacy of His holy, spiritual law. This particular message Paul tries to convey in the much-debated chapter 7 of his letter to the Romans, verses 14-25. The secret to understanding this passage seems to lie in the realization that to Paul the holy law of God, through the working of the Holy

Spirit (“the law is spiritual,” verse 14), functions specifically to convince the Christian believer increasingly of his own inherent sinful nature, in spite of his holy desires and ambitions.

“For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it” (Romans 7:18).

The apostle reaches the climax of this religious self-knowledge when he finally confesses before God both his utter moral bankruptcy and his complete and exclusive trust in Christ’s righteousness. “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24, 25).

The consciousness of both truths *simultaneously* in Paul’s mature Christian experience is the most profound proof that Christian perfection is not just a life of ecstatic joy or emotional elation, but it is also a life of faithful obedience and wrestling submission to our divine Lord and Saviour. Fighting in the divine power of the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:13ff), the Christian is called to destroy every obstacle to his living connection with God and to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The Christian can accept no other gods before Him. Christ wants to reproduce His own perfection of character in those who were originally created in His likeness and image.

“My little children with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!” (Galatians 4:19).

This can be attained, however, only when the Christian continually and wholeheartedly *beholds* the transforming glory of Christ, *dwelling upon* His holy love which consumes all sin.

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”

(2 Corinthians 3:18).

This is the dynamic, increasing Christian perfection which the apostle Paul extols and with holy passion urges upon the primitive church and thus on the church of all ages. The Old Testament covenant imperative to follow Yahweh is not annulled, but fulfilled and concretized in the true following of Christ. To know Christ and to love Him with all our soul and all our heart means neither the renouncing of Yahweh or apostasy from Moses and the prophets of Israel. On the contrary, only through the Son, “who is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), can the Father be known, loved, obeyed, and fully honored.

VI.

Perfection of Love in the First Letter of John

The apostle John, at the end of the first century, wrote against the demoralizing influences of early Gnosticism in the church. While claiming to be in the light, in the love of Christ, and in sinless perfection, the Christian Gnostics justified hate and licentiousness in the church. John traced the false claims of such believers back to a heretical Christology that separated Christ from His concrete historic and moral existence in the human body. Exalting, therefore, Christ as the righteous and holy Christ (1 John 2:1, 29; 3:3, 5, 7, 8), John draws a powerful conclusion:

“No one born of God commits sin; for God’s nature [literally: seed] abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

The apostle John evidently proclaims only a Christian love which consumes sin in the lives of the believers. When Christians are really in Christ, and Christ in them, they will “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7).

“He who says ‘I know him’ but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but *whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected*. By this we may be sure that we are in

him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:4-6).

Thus to John, Christian perfection is more than “sinlessness”; it is a moral communion and dynamic love relationship of the soul with Christ, revealing the same character of holy love as Christ. Then there will be no fear in his heart for the day of judgment or shame when Christ appears in His holy glory:

“In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:17-19; see also 2:28).

John stresses the truth that Christian love is not the outflow of the natural human heart, but the redemptive gift of Christ in the Christian, who can only love unselfishly because he has been loved first in a greater love by Christ. The perfect love of the Christian is John’s concept of perfection in action. It stems from a real love union of the soul with God in Christ. Therefore he who is born of God cannot sin or hate. John bases the impossibility of the

believers' sinning, not in the Christian as such but in the keeping presence of Christ who, in a higher sense, is born of God (1 John 3:9).

"We know that any one born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him" (1 John 5:18).

As long as the soul is united with Christ and the Spirit of Christ abides in him, that soul cannot sin, says the apostle in 1 John 3:9. The walk of the regenerated Christian in the light does not imply, however, any consciousness or feeling of sinlessness. On the contrary, the walk in the light means a continued dependence on God's forgiving and keeping grace.

Interestingly, John used the *present tense* when he wrote to the baptized Christians: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

In other words, the victorious life of the Christian is not the automatic result of any sinless nature in himself. There is no inherent righteousness in the Christian before his final glorification in the day of God. Therefore he can fall into sin again, as appears from John's consolation:

"My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus

Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

Far from being written as an excuse for sinning or for a walk in darkness, this comforting message reveals the consciousness that in the reborn children of God also the old, sinful nature is at work, always striving for the mastery again. The knowledge of inherent lusts of the flesh and of the eyes (1 John 2:16) will lead the believer to a deepening repentance of heart and self-condemnation. Only implicit trust in the word of acquittal from a God who "is greater than our hearts" (1 John 3:20), while walking in loving obedience to Him, will "reassure our hearts before him" (1 John 3:19).

When John distinguishes between mortal sin and nonmortal sin (1 John 5:16, 17), he is only continuing the old-covenant doctrine of sin, which differentiated sharply between deliberate, presumptuous sin and unintentional sin which afterward is repented of (Numbers 15:27-31; Psalm 19:13, 14). The apostle wants to clarify finally that the Christian is kept from mortal or presumptuous sin because he is being *kept* from this way of sinning by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The child of God is no longer under the overruling power of the evil one, as the world still is (1 John 5:18, 19). He is now living in Christ (verse 20), sharing the love of Christ with his fellow believers in holy and joyful fellowship (1 John 1:3, 4).

VII.

Perfection of Conscience in the Letter to the Hebrews

Of all the writings of the New Testament, the Letter to the Hebrews most explicitly makes perfection its theme, pointing constantly to the glorified Christ as the sole Mediator of forgiving grace and sanctifying power. Christian perfection constitutes the central unifying idea of the whole letter. This means that Christ's high priestly ministry in the heavenly temple "is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

From the outset the author tries to prove, on the basis of the Old Testament, that the ministry of Christ as the Messianic King-Priest is of a superior quality and efficacy than that of the Levitical priesthood. His argument centers on the mediation of perfection: "Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood, . . . what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?" (verse 11).

He appeals repeatedly to the significant promise of Psalm 110:4 (Hebrews 5:5, 6; 7:17, 21), that implied the abrogation of the Le-

vitical priesthood. Stressing the undeniable fact of the inefficacy of the many cultic sacrifices by stating that these "*cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper*" (Hebrews 9:9), the author exalts the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, made once for all, and His mediation, which *can* perfect or cleanse the accusing consciences of the believers (verse 14).

The author does not intend to say that the first covenant did not know the reality of this atoning experience in the heart but only that animal sacrifices as such cannot take away sins (Hebrews 10:1, 4). The Old Testament cultic sacrifices and priests as such could never cleanse or perfect the heart from the defiling power of sin. But Christ by His single offering "*has perfected for all time those who are sanctified*" (verse 14). By the perfect tense ("*has perfected*") the author wants to show the ever-abiding efficacy of Christ's single offering of His body, one for all and once for all. This establishes the superiority, the more-powerful efficacy of the new covenant (Hebrews 7:22). On the basis of Christ's sacrifice, every worshiper can daily obtain a perfect or clear conscience, that is, a conscience which has a perfect relationship with God, being cleansed from the

guilt and defiling power of unforgiven sin. Such reconciliation makes all the other sacrifices superfluous (Hebrews 10:18), since the soul may find the rest of grace by drawing near to Jesus with confidence. From His throne of grace is bestowed mercy and grace “to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16) so that the Christians can render full and acceptable service to God and their fellowmen. However, the ultimate perfection will be experienced only when the saints will see the Lord in His glory. Therefore the expectation of the judgment and the second ap-

pearing of Christ (Hebrews 9:28) intensifies the commission to persevere on the way of sanctification.

“Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

Under way as pilgrims to a better country, the faithful perfect ones will not be “dull of hearing” or “sluggish,” but they will remain teachable and receptive, growing continually in religious and theological knowledge and in the distinction of good from evil for daily life (Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:11, 12).

VIII.

The Ladder of Christian Perfection in the Second Letter of Peter

The apostle Peter stresses the necessity of *fruitfulness* in the Christian's knowledge of God. Over against the destructive heresies of false teachers manifesting themselves in moral licentiousness and the despising of authority (2 Peter 2:2, 10), Peter dwells specifically on the practical moral purpose of the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. In particular is he concerned with the necessity of progressive sanctification on the way to ultimate salvation. Such advancement he views as the prerequisite for entering into the eternal kingdom of our Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:11). In view of the reality of the coming day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly men, as sure as that which came on the antediluvian world and on Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter passionately summons the Christians to live holy and godly lives "without spot or blemish" (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 11, 14). He summarizes his epistle in this ever-challenging appeal:

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18; see also 1 Peter 2:2).

Growth means progress. But how can growth be cultivated by

the believers if it is basically a gift from God (see 1 Corinthians 3:7)? The answer is presented in 2 Peter 1:3-8, where the apostle develops his remarkable *ladder of perfection* on which every Christian needs to advance constantly in order to be a living Christian (verse 8), prepared for the eternal kingdom of Christ (verse 11).

Peter founds his ladder of sanctification on the recognition that God's "divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence [literally: virtue]" (verse 3); in other words, on the acknowledgment that the whole life of faith and godliness is a *gift* of divine grace and power. This power and grace God communicates to us through His "precious and very great promises" (verse 4) as transmitted by the prophets of Israel in the Old Testament Holy Scriptures and confirmed by Jesus Christ (see verse 19).

The saving and sanctifying purpose of God's gracious covenant promises is "that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature" (verse 4), a very strong expression for the perfec-

tion of Christian character. Since “character” is formed by the acts of man, man is called to participate actively and wholeheartedly in the personal appropriation of the promised grace, putting into operation the powers of the covenant promises. This will make his faith in God and Christ morally effective and fruitful, since God is holy, righteous, merciful, and faithful.

On this redemptive foundation Peter exhorts all Christians to proceed from faith to virtue, to knowledge, to self-control, to steadfastness, to godliness, to brotherly affection, and to love—all divine attributes or virtues.

“For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (verses 5-8).

The tenor of the enumeration of this series of virtues is not to suggest a synthesis of disconnected virtues which can be attained only one after the other. His intention is rather a call to cultivate and unfold fully the grace and knowledge of Christ as Saviour into a mature Christian character (compare Gala-

tians 5:6, 22, 23). However, the danger of beginning to trust in the power of man and of losing sight of Jesus will always threaten the progressing Christian. Peter therefore closes his letter significantly with the emphatic counsel to grow “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Thus Peter is in keeping with the counsel of the Lord in the Old Testament:

“ ‘But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord’ ” (Jeremiah 9:24).

The apostle Peter, therefore, is not stimulating any adding of virtue to virtue in a disciple of self-culture, but he is calling the Christians to follow in the steps of Christ as their great example of character (see 1 Peter 2:21). In communion with Christ they can and will attain victory over every sin and reach in this life the standard of Christian perfection of character. If the virtues of faith are lacking in the Christian, Peter says, then the believer is still blind and shortsighted, having lost sight of the cleansing from his old sins in baptism (2 Peter 1:9); yes, even forgotten the purpose of his heavenly call and election.

“Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you

will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10, 11).

Contemplating these words, Ellen G. White rightfully exclaims:

“Precious assurance! Glorious is the hope before the believer as he advances by faith toward the heights of Christian perfection!” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 533).

Each Christian is placed under the holy privilege and obligation by God’s grace to strive for holi-

ness, to partake of the divine nature, and to reveal in the concrete reality of his social life a constant growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ. This maturing of Christian character in the likeness of God is Christian perfection in action. Thus the Christian may participate in the joy and beauty of holiness, preparing himself for “a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

“To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity” (verse 18).

Summary

The Old and the New Testaments teach a profound and yet practical concept of human perfection. Man's perfection is a religious-moral walk with the God of Abraham and Moses, rooted in God's covenant of restoring grace. It is living daily out of God's forgiving and keeping grace, to be received in God's sanctuary. It implies a transformation of man's character through daily justification by faith in the Redeemer and progressive sanctification. Such a life of perfect reconciliation with God is manifested in wholehearted, holy love for all fellowmen—friends and foes. The only absolutely perfect, that is, inherently sinless, character has been revealed in the life of Jesus Christ, "who is the likeness of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Man's relation to God is determined by his relation to Christ. Through faith and baptism the believer participates legally and dynamically in the perfection of Christ. Man has no perfection in himself. In himself the true Christian feels increasingly imperfect and unworthy while beholding more and more of Christ's all-sufficient glory and mercy. Where Christ reproduces His own image in the soul, there man walks in true perfection with God and his fellowmen.

It is the inspiring message of the three angels of Revelation 14 that the preaching of the everlasting gospel will soon climax in a glorious manifestation of primitive godliness when the remnant people of God will be endowed with Pentecostal power to enlighten the whole earth with Christ's righteousness (Revelation 18:1). Then all true Christians will practice the gift of saving and sanctifying grace as a perfection in action, visible in all their social relationships so that God will be glorified and praised. The redeemed believer will never feel holy or righteous in himself since he realizes before God the sinful tendencies of his own natural heart (Romans 7:14-25). Therefore he walks in hope, in the fear of the Lord, eagerly waiting for the ultimate perfection of man and of the world at the second appearing of Christ in glory (Romans 8:23).

This apocalyptic hope to him is not an act of wishful thinking but a sanctifying power that prepares him for the glorious encounter with his Lord and Saviour, without shame:

"And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

Note 1: See *Perfection and Perfectionism*, H. K. LaRondelle, Vol. III, chapter V, in Andrews University Monograph Series, Kampen, 1971.

READY FOR HIS APPEARING

By C. MERVYN MAXWELL



Dr. C. Mervyn Maxwell, chairman of the department of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, started his ministry as a pastor in California. He holds a PhD degree from the University of Chicago and is a member of the American Society of Church History. Before going to Andrews University, he was chairman of the department of religion at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Among other things Dr. Maxwell enjoys gardening, nature study, and home repairs when not in the classroom. He is the author of numerous magazine articles and several books, including *Man, What a God!* and *Look at It This Way*.

CONTENTS

141	PREFACE
142	THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES The Great Advent Awakening "Not Yet Ready to Meet Their Lord" "A Special Work of Preparation" "Through the Grace of God and . . ."
154	SANCTUARY AND SABBATH Character Perfection and the Sanctuary Character Perfection and the Sabbath
165	PERFECTION AND SINLESSNESS Will the Saints Still Be Sinners? Tendencies to Sin Is Character Perfection "Sinless Perfection"? Is Character Perfection "Absolute Perfection"?
175	EXPECTANT FATHER, HESITANT CHILDREN The Letter to Laodicea Appeals Through the Years
181	RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH The Term Defined Minneapolis 1888 Righteousness by Faith and the Great Controversy
187	QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS 1. Does God Have a Double Standard? 2. Why Sabbath and Sanctuary? 3. Victory Without Christ? 4. How Possible in Our Time? 5. Are We Not Already Perfect? 6. Is it a Realistic Hope?
196	PERFECT FOR A PURPOSE Christ Is Waiting; All Heaven Is Waiting Ready at Last

PREFACE

Our first three authors have brought us some excellent counsel. They have warned us against superficial checklist perfectionism, and against claiming to be sinless. They have warmed us with the assurance that God graciously accepts us as righteous in Christ. They have focused time and again on the Source of all goodness and have reminded us repeatedly that righteousness by faith implies growth as well as forgiveness.

This final section, like the one with which the book began, deals with character perfection in preparation for the Second Advent, but it is developed from a different and supplementary point of view.

The hope of developing a perfect character before Jesus comes again is a most encouraging prospect, alive with the promise of victory and bursting with

the secret of finishing God's work in the earth.

Character perfection is the outliving in everyday life of Christ's character, of the loveliness of Jesus. Of *His* faithfulness. *His* self-discipline. *His* thoughtfulness. *His* generous attention to the needs of others. *His* unwavering loyalty to the will of God.

Character perfection is emphatically more than not being bad. Sin is the transgression of the law, and the law requires service as well as sinlessness. The great commandment in the law is "Thou shalt love." Character perfection responds as readily to God's "thou shalt" as to His "thou shalt not." "The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within" (Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384).

**Be like Jesus, this my song,
In the home and in the throng;
Be like Jesus all day long!
I would be like Jesus.**

Through a living faith in Christ's righteousness I believe that this prayer can be answered in God's saints and that it will be answered before Jesus comes again—before Jesus can come again.

THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

I am a student of church history and of the development of doctrine. In the historical experience of the Advent movement numerous items point to the desirability and availability of character perfection. I should therefore like to couch my section in the story of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Great Advent Awakening

On October 22, 1844, Jesus entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. To herald the event, God raised up an intercontinental movement devoted to the study of prophecy and to preparation for the Second Coming. During the 1840's hundreds of ministers preached the first angel's message in Great Britain; and in America, William Miller was supported in a similar enterprise by at least a thousand and possibly

two thousand ministers and lecturers. So great was the interest that every mission station around the world heard the news. "In some countries there was the greatest religious interest . . . since the Reformation" (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 611).

As every Adventist knows, the happy anticipation of the Millerite movement was followed by keen disappointment—and, within hours, by the realization that Christ had begun His great new work for sinners in the most holy place. This grand prophetic discovery, which resulted in the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, had vast implications for the people living on the earth.

"The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God's people upon the earth" (Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 30).

"Not Yet Ready to Meet Their Lord"

The devotion and dedication of the Millerite Adventists as they looked for Christ to return in October, 1844, was remarkable. Many of them sacrificed lifelong friendships and severed close

family ties in order to live in harmony with their convictions. Some left their potatoes undug and their apples unpicked as testimonies to their faith that Christ's coming would soon put them beyond the need of ordinary harvests. Schoolteachers and justices of the peace resigned their jobs, and business houses closed.

In earnest little groups, believers questioned one another, "Have you seen anything in me that is not right?" If a fault was pointed out in any one of them, all knelt together to seek forgiveness. If alienation existed between two brethren, they went together to a secret place to plead with God, then returned arm in arm, their hearts united in love. The believers' faces shone with heavenly light (E. G. White, in *Historical Sketches*, p. 213).

One Millerite recalled later that the presence of the Spirit was so powerful at Adventist meetings that even casual visitors were led to confess their sins with tears, then to praise God for His forgiveness. He vividly remembered the "heavenly sweetness" of the singing, the deep solemnity of the preaching, and the numerous groups at camp meetings who prayed with unconverted people until they began to pray for themselves. He especially remembered the solemn, humble feeling that prevailed

as October 22 drew near, with everyone anxious to know how his case would stand in the judgment (G. I. Butler, in *Review and Herald*, February 17, 1885, pp. 105, 106).

Ellen White recalled how prayerfully she and others prepared to meet Jesus face-to-face and how each day they reestablished their inner sense of assurance. "With diligent searching of heart and humble confessions," she wrote later, "we came prayerfully up to the time of expectation. Every morning we felt that it was our first work to secure the evidence that our lives were right before God. We realized that if we were not advancing in holiness, we were sure to retrograde.

"Our interest for one another increased; we prayed much with and for one another. We assembled in the orchards and groves to commune with God and to offer up our petitions to Him. . . . The joys of salvation were more necessary to us than our food and drink. If clouds obscured our minds, we dared not rest or sleep till they were swept away by the consciousness of our acceptance with the Lord" (Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, pp. 60, 61).

We can scarcely assume that every Millerite was sincere. Nonetheless Ellen White could say that "of all the great religious movements since the days of

the apostles, none have been more free from human imperfection and the wiles of Satan than was that of the autumn of 1844" (*The Great Controversy*, p 401).

"There was persevering prayer and unreserved consecration to God" (*ibid.*).

"They prayed much with and for one another. . . . The assurance of the Saviour's approval was more necessary to them than their daily food. . . . As they felt the witness of pardoning grace, they longed to behold Him whom their souls loved" (*ibid.*, p. 403).

It is noteworthy that Ellen White was shown that three of the Millerite leaders would be raised in the first resurrection and welcomed into heaven. She saw that angels guard the grave of William Miller and that he would "come forth at the sound of the last trump" (Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 258); and in her first vision, which carried her beyond the Second Coming, she met Levi Stockman and Charles Fitch under the tree of life. Fitch and Stockman were Millerite Adventist ministers who "had preached the gospel of the kingdom" and whom "God had laid in the grave to save them" shortly before the great disappointment (*ibid.*, p. 17).

Here is where history brings us to perfection of character. After discussing the remarkable spiritual preparation experienced by the Millerite Adventists prior

to October 22, 1844, Ellen White wrote in *The Great Controversy*, pages 424, 425:

"But the people were not yet ready to meet their Lord. There was still a work of preparation to be accomplished for them. Light was to be given, directing their minds to the temple of God in heaven; and as they should by faith follow their High Priest in His ministration there, new duties would be revealed. Another message of warning and instruction was to be given to the church.

"Says the prophet: 'Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.' Malachi 3:2, 3. Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the

battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth. This work is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14.

"When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing."

This basic passage begins with a "not yet ready" and ends with a "will be ready." Thank God, a people will be ready one day to meet Christ.

But it is almost staggering to observe that the people who were "not yet ready" were not the heathen who never heard the Advent message, nor the casual Christians who rejected it, but the Millerite Adventists who in response to it gave their all!

The Millerite Adventists sacrificed fortunes and friends. But they were not yet ready to meet their Lord. They manifested "unreserved consecration to God," but they were not yet ready to meet their Lord. They sought "the Saviour's approval" every day and "felt the witness of pardoning grace," but they were not yet ready to meet their Lord.

We ask, scarce comprehending, "What more, O God, could they have done?"

The sincerest of the Millerites were God's true saints. Their membership was in the Philadelphia church of brotherly love (Revelation 3). Fitch, Stockman, and Miller are unquestionably only samples of many who, dying during the peak of the movement, await Christ's call at the last trump. But although they were ready for resurrection, the message of this passage is that they were not ready for translation.

The final proclamation of God's character which God's people must in their own persons deliver to the world, the final crisis of Christ's withdrawal from the most holy place, and the final savage temptations that will mercilessly harass the saints evidently require a preparation that goes significantly beyond even the wonderful Christian experience possessed by the Millerite Adventists.

Richly robed in Christ's righteousness, the best of those early Adventists were undoubtedly "perfect" in the same sense that many Bible heroes were perfect. Like Noah and others they walked with the Lord. They committed no conscious or willful sins. They made no boastful claims to sinlessness. They enjoyed the assurance of Heaven's

acceptance. Yet they were not ready to meet their Lord! They did not know that degree of sanctification, that measure of mature, imparted righteousness, which is required of all who will be translated without seeing death as were Enoch and Elijah.

But one day "the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing."

"A Special Work of Preparation"

What will make the difference between the "not yet ready" of the Millerites and the "ready for His appearing" of the saints who will one day see Him come?

Our passage says, "There was still a work of preparation to be accomplished for them."

What was involved in this work of preparation?

"Light was to be given, directing their minds to the temple of God in heaven." They needed to learn about Christ's entry into the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary and about His Day of Atonement ministry there.

But mere knowledge of the doctrine would not suffice. The believers must participate in it! "As they should by *faith follow* their High Priest in His ministrations there, new duties would be

revealed. Another message of warning and instruction was to be given to the church" (*italics supplied*).

What was this new message? What were these new duties?

The new message was, of course, the third angel's message. The Millerites had proclaimed the first angel's message. The core of their work was to announce that "the hour of his [God's] judgment is come" (by which they understood the time of the Second Coming). And they clothed their warning in such beautiful presentations of the "everlasting gospel" that at almost every series of meetings they held, sinners came forward in repentance. Then in 1843 and 1844, as the popular churches disfellowshipped them, the Millerite Adventists proceeded tearfully to proclaim the second angel's message, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen."

But in their concern for the first and second messages, they virtually ignored the third. They did not comprehend the significance of its symbolism. They did not know how to explain the mark of the beast or the worship of its image. Neither did they fathom the promise "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." But if they were to be ready to meet Christ at His appearing, they would first have to understand clearly

the warning against the beast and to experience in their own lives what it really means to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus!

But it would not be enough merely to understand and experience the third angel's message. They would have to proclaim it. The third angel's message is to be proclaimed with a "loud voice."

Here was "another message"! Here were "new duties"! And they were taught in the Bible. They had been foretold for nearly two thousand years.

How helpful history can be to theology! In this case history shows that of course the Millerites in 1844 were not yet ready for the Second Coming. For one thing, they preached only the first two angels' messages; they did not announce the third—and the third most emphatically had to be proclaimed. The third angel's message is God's most fearsome warning. The world must hear it before the great controversy can be closed. It is a decisive "crisis" message, calling for ultimate decisions and polarizing earth's population into two opposing camps—those whose minds are molded into the character of the beast and those whose transformation is so consummated that they truly keep the commandments of God.

When Ellen White wrote that the Millerites were not yet ready and that

new truths and duties awaited their experiential appropriation, she was fulfilling her role as an inspired commentator on the Bible, a lesser light pointing to the greater light. Long before *The Great Controversy* was published, Scripture foretold a third message and a sealing ministry about which the Millerites in 1844 knew nothing.

Many Millerites were sincere, but they did not comprehend essential last-day truth. They thought they were keeping the commandments, but they were not doing so. They mowed their hay on God's holy Sabbath! They carried on their ordinary business—honestly enough, to be sure—on God's holy Sabbath!

History reveals that the Millerites needed the true theology of the Sabbath and the sanctuary.

But not a correct theology alone. As they came to understand the Sabbath and Christ's high-priestly ministry, their lives would have to mature into harmony with the new light. Jesus would not stay in the most holy place forever, and when His intercession would cease, they would be required "to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator."

History shows that a majority of the Millerites were so far below this level of perfection that their characters could

not withstand the disappointment of October 22! Even Fitch and Stockman had to be “laid in the grave” before the disappointment in order “to save them” (*Early Writings*, p. 17).

How then was the requisite degree of maturity to be achieved?

According to our passage in *The Great Controversy*, they must become conquerors in the battle with evil “through the grace of God and their own diligent effort.” No sentimental faith would suffice. No mere ecstatic cry (as is sometimes heard) that “He touched me!” No superficial relationship that lazily leaves all to “grace alone.” They must conquer, and they must do so “through the grace of God and their own diligent effort.”

“Through the Grace of God and . . .”

Is it surprising to read about the grace of God *and*? Are not sinners saved *sola gratia*, by grace alone?

In an exquisitely beautiful sense, sinners truly are saved by grace alone. So infinite is the penalty for sin, so infinite the bounty of eternal life, that no “work” of ours through a hundred thousand lifetimes could ever hope to pay a significant portion of the price. If man is to be redeemed, it must be

through the infinite generosity of the Redeemer. And redemption is a “gift by grace” (Romans 5:15); God’s “free gift” (verses 16, 18); “the gift of God” “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Indeed, Jesus Christ Himself is “the gift of God” (John 4:10)—His “unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Let “everyone that thirsteth, come, . . . buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1).

When some Adventist ministers, faithless and unbelieving, hesitated before such greathearted munificence in the years following the memorable meeting at Minneapolis in 1888, Ellen White wrote to them with winsome insistence:

“Justification is wholly of grace. . . .

“Whatever we possess . . . of money, of houses, of lands, of reasoning powers, of physical strength, of intellectual talents, . . . is stamped with the cross and bears the image and superscription of Jesus Christ. . . .

“‘All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.’ 1 Chron. 29:14. . . .

“The Lord Jesus imparts all the powers, all the grace, all the penitence, all the inclination, all the pardon of sins, in presenting His righteousness for man to grasp by living faith—which is also the gift of God. . . .

“There may be a fervor of labor and an intense affection, high and noble achievement of intellect, a breadth of understanding, and the humblest self-abasement, laid at the feet of our Redeemer; but there is not one jot more than the grace and talent first given of God. There must be nothing less given than duty prescribes, and there cannot be one jot more given than they have first received; and all must be laid upon the fire of Christ’s righteousness to cleanse it from its earthly odor before it rises in a cloud of fragrant incense to the great Jehovah and is accepted as a sweet savor” (MS 36, 1890).

But even this same document went on to state:

“The Lord does not propose to do the work He has given man powers to do. Man’s part must be done.”

Not, though, as if man must do his part alone! The statement explained:

“He must be a laborer together with God, yoking up with Christ, learning His meekness, His lowliness. God is the all-controlling power. He bestows the gifts; man receives them and acts with the power of the grace of Christ as a living agent. . . .

“God works and man works. There

needs to be a continual taking in of the gifts of God, in order that there may be as free a giving out of these gifts. . . .

“God gives us bodies, strength of brain, time and opportunity in which to work. It is required that all be put to the tax.”

It deserves mention that the Bible nowhere says that men are saved by grace alone. It says, instead, that we are saved “by grace . . . *through faith*.” This is significant, for although even faith is a gift of God, we must exercise it before it can avail for our salvation. Even to the covenant of grace there are conditions, the basic one being that we must choose to believe.

And it is not enough to keep our faith locked up inside our hearts. At the least we must express it in words. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, *and* shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Elsewhere we are told to “look” (Isaiah 45:22), to “come” (Matthew 11:28), to “repent” (Acts 2:38), to “confess” (1 John 1:9), to “fight” (1 Timothy 6:12), and to act on other verbs too numerous to mention.

Sometimes the actions which God expects us to perform in order to express our faith are laborious and taxing.

Abraham was accounted righteous when he professed faith in God prior to the birth of Isaac, but it was not until “he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar” that “by works” his faith was “made perfect” and “the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness” (James 2:21-23).

Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah “became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” when, believing God’s warning about the Flood, he “prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” Noah’s belief in the imminent Flood would have earned him neither earthly protection nor heavenly salvation if he had been content merely to keep it at the level of mental assent. He needed to express his faith in works as well as in words. He had to negotiate with employees, secure necessary tools, and labor for 120 years, shaping timbers. It was laboring with all his might in response to his faith that he became an “heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”

So it is today. The love of Jesus motivates us to keep the Sabbath. God’s grace empowers us to keep it. But—to be almost crassly practical—who mops the floors, vacuums the carpets, and cooks the food on Friday as we get ready for the Sabbath? Do angels do it

for us? Does God’s grace sew on missing buttons, polish shoes, or set a vase of flowers on the table? Who opens our Bibles and pulls commentaries off our shelves as we prepare to teach the Sabbath School lesson? Who signs our offering checks? Who, when necessary, writes our sad letters of apology to persons we have wronged? Who buys the gas and washes the car and drives all day as we travel to distant places to give Bible studies and preach the Word? Who orders the literature we propose to give away, and who gives it away? Does God do all this for us, or do we do it, with His aid?

It is helpful, when discussing works and grace, to make a distinction between different kinds of works. Just as there are two kinds of faith—a living faith which leads to salvation and a dead faith which, like the devil’s, merely believes and trembles (James 2:19)—so there are two kinds of works. Hebrews 6:1 warns us to repent from “dead works,” but in almost the next breath it commends our good works which God is not unrighteous to forget.

When we use our facial muscles and diaphragms to express our joy in the Lord, everyone responds, “What a beautiful testimony; what wonderful faith!” It is useful to know that when, in a spirit of loving, grateful obedience, we

use our arm and leg muscles to write sacrificial offering checks, drive to see a shut-in, or mow a cripple's lawn, we are also expressing our faith—just as surely as Noah was expressing his faith when he used his muscles to build the ark. Abraham also was expressing his faith when he used his muscles to raise the knife above Isaac's heart.

Legalism has less to do with what we do as with why we do it. Works of faith are no more legalism than are words of faith.

"Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). No man can expect to be justified by dead faith. The very fact that faith and strength are given to us argues that we are expected to exercise and develop them.

The phrase "by grace alone" is, in its extreme application, the basis for predestinarianism. Martin Luther, for all his explicit statements about justification by faith, was at times—inconsistently, I believe—a predestinarian. On one such occasion, in the heat of battle with Erasmus, he declared that "man's will is like a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills. . . . If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have

and hold it" (*The Bondage of the Will*, translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston [London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1957], pp. 44, 103, 104).

Man's will is meaningless in such a theology. Man is powerless even to choose. Man's faith means nothing. Man himself is nothing. God in heaven is everything. Man is saved by grace alone.

The Bible does not teach this extreme position of *so la gratia*. It says that God's grace is available to all men and that it works mightily to re-create men in God's image (Ezekiel 36:27; 2 Corinthians 5:7), but it adds that it is effective only for those who, keeping their eyes on Jesus, choose to believe (John 3:16) and who express their faith through appropriate words (Romans 10:9) and appropriate works (James 2:14-17; John 13:14).

Our works, of course (we repeat ourselves to avoid misunderstanding), earn us no merit. They express faith, and they connect us with the Source of faith. Supremely, our "diligent effort" operates to maintain the union and communion of our souls with God. "Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. . . . Here is where we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to *choose* another master. . . . But let us keep our eyes fixed upon

Christ, and He will preserve us. Looking unto Jesus, we are safe" (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 72).

Who will say that all this diligent effort of ours has nothing to do with our personal salvation? Dare anyone assert that if, being healthy and normally bright, we refuse to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and, by His grace, obey His will, He will nonetheless save us by grace alone?

"Let my brethren be very careful how they present the subject of faith and works before the people, lest minds become confused," Ellen White has written. "Let no man present the idea that man has little or nothing to do in the great work of overcoming; for God does nothing for man without his cooperation. Neither say that after you have done all you can on your part, Jesus will help you. Christ has said, 'Without me ye can do nothing' (John 15:5).

"From first to last man is to be a laborer together with God. Unless the Holy Spirit works upon the human heart, at every step we shall stumble and fall. Man's efforts alone are nothing but worthlessness; but cooperation with Christ means a victory. . . . Effort and labor are required on the part of the receiver of God's grace; for it is the fruit that makes manifest what is the character of the tree" (*Selected Messages*,

Book One, pp. 379-382).

"Let us not be deceived by the oft-repeated assertion, 'All you have to do is to believe.' Faith and works are two oars which we must use equally if we [would] press our way up the stream against the current of unbelief. 'Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone' " (Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, June 11, 1901).

It is true that "when it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man's best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit. But He will not accept those who claim to have faith in Him, and yet are disloyal to His Father's commandment. We hear a great deal about faith, but we need to hear a great deal more about works. Many are deceiving their own souls by living an easy-going, accommodating, crossless religion. But Jesus says, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me' " (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 382).

This emphasis on the necessity of man's diligent cooperation in the work of overcoming directs us back to the burden of our passage in *The Great Controversy*, pages 424, 425. In this section we are talking about character perfection in preparation for the Second

Coming, and "Christ has given us no assurance that to attain perfection of character is an easy matter. A noble, all-round character is not inherited. It does not come to us by accident. A noble character is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ. God gives the talents, the powers of the mind; we form the character. It is formed by hard, stern battles with self. Conflict after conflict must be waged against hereditary tendencies. We shall have to criticize ourselves closely, and allow not one unfavorable trait to re-

main uncorrected. . . . Set your mark high, and step by step, even though it be by painful effort, by self-denial and sacrifice, ascend the whole length of the ladder of progress" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 331).

This painful, stern work, empowered by the grace of God, is part of what is meant by the "special work of purification, of putting away of sin" that must be completed before "the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 425).

SANCTUARY AND SABBATH

This "special work of purification, of putting away of sin," is to be accomplished "while the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 425). Let us, therefore, look a little closer at the work going on now in heaven.

Character Perfection and the Sanctuary

In the middle of the last prophetic week of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9, on Passover Friday in the year AD 31, Jesus performed a great act of atonement on the cross of Calvary just outside old Jerusalem. His death offered reconciliation and forgiveness; it made atonement possible for every sinner on the earth (2 Corinthians 5:20; Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 249). At

the close of the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8, on Tuesday, October 22, 1844, Jesus entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary to begin His "final atonement" (*Early Writings*, p. 253) for those whose names are found written in the book of life.

This new work which Christ entered the most holy place to perform is today customarily designated by Adventists as "investigative judgment." But Christ is doing much more than judging. Indeed, judgment is only ancillary, only incidental, to the great work that He is really doing.

According to the Bible (Leviticus 16:30-34), when the high priest entered the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary on the typical Day of Atonement in September or October of each year, his great purpose was not to officiate at a judgment; it was rather to "make an atonement for the holy sanctuary," and to "make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord." It was a day of "at-one-ment," on which all sin was removed so that man and God could be "at one" in a very special sense.

It was because it was a day of at-one-ment that the people were urged to enter into its spirit seriously (to "afflict . . . [their] souls") and were warned that

they would be “cut off” if they did not do so (Leviticus 23:27-29).

On the Levitical Day of Atonement, the high priest as Christ’s special representative set himself in a unique sense to achieve reconciliation between the people and their God. Men and women were cut off on this occasion, not because it was primarily a day of judgment but because it was a day of supreme spiritual concord and communion, and *they didn’t care!*

Hiram Edson and the other early Adventists who joined with Edson in studying the new insight which Christ gave him in the cornfield after the disappointment clearly understood that the most-holy-place ministry is primarily one of sin-removal. Their publication, *The Day-Star Extra*, of February 7, 1846, showed from Scripture that on October 22, 1844, Jesus began a great work of cleansing, a blotting out of sins. Their position was endorsed in vision shortly after it appeared in print, and Ellen White wrote, “I feel fully authorized by the Lord, to recommend that Extra, to every saint” (*A Word to the “Little Flock,”* p. 12).

The Day-Star Extra did not breathe a sentence about investigative judgment!

Then how did the judgment concept come to be central in Seventh-day Adventist thinking about the sanctuary?

The steps do not need to be recounted here. It is enough to say that several years after Edson’s discovery, Adventists learned that the Day of Atonement was *also* a day of judgment, and James White coined the helpful term “investigative judgment.”

In her later writings, Ellen White presented her mature interpretation of Christ’s heavenly ministry, showing that it is truly a time of judgment in which each case is taken up, name by name, and in which all the events of each life are reviewed—some names are accepted, others rejected.

But she makes it plain that this judgment is not an end in itself; that its purpose, unlike that of many earthly tribunals, is not the condemnation of the accused but the total justification of the redeemed. As in Daniel 7, so in her writings also, the judgment sits to take away the enemy and to give “the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven . . . to the people of the saints of the most High.”

In the investigative judgment, faithful attention is paid to the good deeds of the defendants as well as to their bad deeds. And the grand climax and consummation is not so much the death sentence of the lost as the restoration of the saved, including the permanent blot-

ting out of their sins. Christ is performing today a "great work of atonement, or blotting out of sins" (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 358, italics supplied).

In this judgment, the "book of remembrance" (Malachi 3:16) is opened, where "every deed of righteousness" committed by God's victorious people "is immortalized. There every temptation resisted, every evil overcome, every word of tender pity expressed, is faithfully chronicled," along with "every act of sacrifice, every suffering and sorrow endured for Christ's sake" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 481).

The judgment, Ellen White pointed out in almost incredible terms in the *Review and Herald*, November 22, 1898, is "held in the presence of other worlds, that the love, the integrity, the service, of man for God, may be honored to the highest degree"!

Wonder, O heavens; be amazed, O earth.

"They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up"—not my pebbles, nor my stones, but—"my jewels" (Malachi 3:17).

God makes no mistakes, of course, in His estimation of character. "How solemn is the thought! Day after day . . . our acts, our words, even our most secret motives, all have their weight in

deciding our destiny for weal or woe" (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 486, 487). But when Christ sees that a child of His has remained faithful to the end, He claims for him full pardon and forgiveness.

Of that glorious time when the sins of the righteous will be blotted out finally, completely, and forever, Ellen White wrote with warmth: "Christ will clothe His faithful ones with His own righteousness. . . . Thus will be realized the complete fulfillment of the new-covenant promise: 'I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.' 'In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none.' Jeremiah 31:34; 50:20" (*ibid.*, pp. 484, 485, italics supplied).

The new-covenant words seem incomprehensible: "I will remember their sin no more." Can God the infinite forget anything? Is not past, present, and future all the same to His omniscience?

The Bible does not say that God cannot remember their sins anymore; it says that He will not remember them anymore.

What a lot this tells about God! With what eagerness He must anticipate this moment of the blotting out of sins. How deeply He has desired, since the moment when rebellion first began, to be

rid of sin, to have done with it once and for all and forever. When He closes our cases in our favor, He will remember our sins no more, not because He could not remember them if He chose to, but because even though of course He could, He emphatically and lovingly chooses not to remember them.

We should probably remind ourselves at this juncture that when their sins have been blotted out, the saints will not *claim* to be sinless. Far from it! One essential mark of perfection is humility. It is not they who claim to be sinless; it is God who makes the claim on their behalf. The remembrance that they have fallen far short of the glory of God and their awareness that they are utterly dependent on Jesus for support and safety fill the saints with dismay as regards their status before the Lord.

But as the time of Jacob's trouble sets in, although the saints "have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they have no concealed wrongs to reveal" (*ibid.*, p. 620). Their confessed sins are blotted out, and they have none unconfessed. So complete is the removal of sin that "they cannot bring to mind any particular sins" in their whole lives. Their sins have "gone beforehand to judgment." They have been "borne away into the land of forgetfulness" (Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, p. 135). "Their

sins . . . have been *blotted out*" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 620, italics supplied).

Our point just now is that the Biblical doctrine of the sanctuary points to a wonderful moment prior to the second coming of Christ when through triumphant grace and their own diligent effort the saints of God will be clean; when the happy heralds of heaven will announce concerning them, "You are clean from all your sins before the Lord."

This leads to the next point: This blotting out of sins cannot be something done merely to books up in heaven. Suppose just after their sins were blotted out, the saints committed new ones—what would the blotting out of sins have meant? God can blot out the sins of the victorious dead by simply attending to their records; they are dead and cannot sin again.

It will be a vitally different thing for those who are alive when their cases are called up in the judgment. Can their sins be blotted out in heaven unless they are also blotted out on earth? Hardly! The blotting out of sins must be achieved in the hearts of the saints on earth before it can be accomplished in the most holy place in heaven.

Character perfection must be an experience if it is ever to be a declaration.

We read, "Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. . . . There was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble" (*ibid.*, p. 623).

At the great righteousness by faith General Conference held in Minneapolis in the fall of 1888, Ellen White preached a number of noteworthy sermons. One of these, delivered in the church on Sabbath, October 20, reminded the large congregation that "now Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary," and went on to ask, "What is He doing?"

The answer followed: "Making atonement for us, cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people."

What then? "Then we must enter by faith into the sanctuary with Him, we must commence the work in the sanctuary of our souls. We are to cleanse ourselves from all defilement. We must 'cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' "

We must do it? We must cleanse ourselves from all defilement? Is that in the Bible?

Indeed it is. It is a quotation from 2 Corinthians 7:1. And James 4:8 adds: "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded."

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" asks Psalm 119:9, and replies, "By taking heed thereto according to thy word."

Referring to the white-clad multitude in heaven, Revelation 7:14 describes them not as those whose robes Christ washed but as those who "washed their robes, and made them white." Where did they wash them? In the blood of the Lamb, of course! But they brought their robes to the blood; Jesus did not do the washing for them while they slept.

"It will cost us something to obtain a Christian experience, and to develop a true and noble character. It requires sacrifice and earnest effort, and this is why so little advancement is made by professing Christians. They do not go to the great source of wisdom, because they shrink from the toil, the cost, the inconvenience. They wish to have righteousness put upon them as a garment. But the white-robed throng of the redeemed ones, are those who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Christ has presented the matter as it is: 'Agonize to enter in at the strait gate;

for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able' " (Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, May 30, 1882).

While our High Priest is engaged in His final atonement, we, like the Israelites of old, must earnestly afflict our souls; for if we do not do so, then, tragedy of tragedies, we shall be cut off—because we didn't care.

Scripture indicates that the blood of Christ is a wondrous-strong detergent by which, if we submit ourselves, we can be made eternally sweet-smelling and clean. "He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap," Malachi 3:2, 3 tells us; then, speaking of the work Jesus is doing now in the heavenly temple, it adds, "He shall purify the sons of Levi." The cleansing of the sanctuary involves the cleansing of the people who look to the sanctuary. The blotting out of sins is not concerned merely with records but with rectitude; not with the quantity of sins confessed but with the quality of lives changed.

"While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth." "Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from

sin by the blood of sprinkling."

The sanctuaries of our souls must be cleansed if our records are to be cleansed in the sanctuary of heaven. "The soul temple is to be sacred, holy, pure, and undefiled" (Ellen G. White, MS 36, 1890). Now, while Christ is blotting out our sins, we must be busy blotting them out too. Not in our own strength! In His strength, calling on Him to help and bless at every step. We must enter by faith into the most holy place with Jesus. We must take hold of His arm. We must share with Him in His work.

And then because—through God's grace and our own diligent effort—we have entered fully into the work of Jesus during the climax of His term as our High Priest, we shall be victorious in the power of Jesus our Friend and Defender during that awful time which follows, when men will have "to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator."

Character Perfection and the Sabbath

The passage in *The Great Controversy*, pages 424 and 425, says that just as the Millerite Adventists needed to follow Christ in His work in the most holy place, so they also needed to learn

about the third angel's message which, of course, is a message about the Sabbath; just as the sanctuary points to an experience in character perfection, so does the Sabbath also. In fact, the two doctrines are so intertwined that they cannot be separated. If one points to character perfection, the other does so inevitably.

It is well known that the earliest Adventists to adopt the Sabbath learned it from a Seventh Day Baptist lady, Mrs. Rachel Oakes (later Mrs. Rachel Preston). A couple of years afterward, when former sea captain Joseph Bates sat down to write his first Sabbath booklet with only a York shilling in his pocket, he presented essentially the Seventh Day Baptist position.

For centuries the Seventh Day Baptists had taught that the Sabbath is part of the unchanging moral law, which was not abrogated with the ceremonial law when Jesus died on the cross. They quoted from Matthew 5, James 2, and other passages to show that neither Jesus nor His apostles changed the day from Sabbath to Sunday but that Sunday was the work of the great apostate church predicted in Daniel 7.

Was anything wrong with the Seventh Day Baptist position? It was soundly Biblical, and it has been widely used by

Seventh-day Adventist evangelists to the present day.

Joseph Bates wrote his first Sabbath tract in August, 1846. The following winter and spring marked a new epoch. In January he produced a revised edition tentatively linking the Sabbath to Christ's ministry in the sanctuary and presenting a clear but brief exposition of the third angel's message. In March and April Ellen had two memorable visions which endorsed and amplified these new developments.

Jesus called Ellen's attention to the two tables of the law, located in the ark in the most holy place, and as she looked at them she noticed that the first four "shone brighter than the other six," that the Sabbath commandment "shone above them all," and that a "halo of glory" encircled it (*Early Writings*, pp. 32, 33). She was shown that the Sabbath was to be the great "separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers; and that the Sabbath is the great question to unite the hearts of God's dear, waiting saints" (*ibid.*, p. 33).

"This view was given in 1847 when there were but very few of the Advent brethren observing the Sabbath, and of these but few supposed that its observance was of sufficient importance to draw a line between the people

of God and unbelievers" (*ibid.*, p. 85).

Here was light. Seventh Day Baptists had considered the Sabbath important, but they had scarcely regarded it as the ultimate truth to unite and divide Christendom!

As she watched further, Ellen saw that "at the commencement of the time of trouble, we were filled with the Holy Ghost as we went forth and *proclaimed the Sabbath more fully*" (*ibid.*, p. 33, italics supplied).

Finally she saw that the third angel represents "the people who receive this message [the Sabbath], and raise the voice of warning to the world to keep the commandments of God and His law as the apple of the eye" (*Life Sketches*, p. 96).

Our pioneers were fascinated with the prediction that they were to proclaim "the Sabbath more fully."

More fully than whom? More fully in what way?

The answer was at least this: that they were to attach to the Sabbath greater meaning and a deeper personal experience than the Seventh Day Baptists did. That is, they were to reveal to the world more than the perpetuity of the Sabbath, its relation to the moral law, and its attempted change.

As our handful of pioneers studied the

three angels' messages of Revelation 14, they came upon the solemn evidence that they themselves were occupying a specific role at a specific time foretold in Scripture. As Millerites in the early 1840's, they had helped proclaim the first and second angels' messages. Now to their astonishment they realized that they were summoned to deliver the third angel's message.

Here was another advance beyond the Seventh Day Baptists. It brought a sense of destiny, an awareness that they were being called to fulfill yet another prophecy whose time had come.

Their sense of timing was reinforced in the April 3 vision (which we have just discussed) by the information that Jesus had been standing beside the ark since October 22, 1844, revealing a halo of glory about the Sabbath. Another vision two years later, on March 24, 1849, provided the specific information that "the time for the commandments of God to shine out with all their importance . . . was when the door was opened in the most holy place [that is, on October 22, 1844], . . . where He [Jesus] now stands by the ark" (*Early Writings*, p. 42).

The relation of the Sabbath to the sanctuary was further confirmed by yet another vision in which the third angel, as he proclaimed, "Here are they

that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus," pointed upward to the heavenly sanctuary (*ibid.*, p. 254).

The passage in *The Great Controversy*, pages 424 and 425, states that "light was to be given" to the Adventists, "directing their minds to the temple of God in heaven; and as they should by faith follow their High Priest in His ministration there, new duties would be revealed. Another message [the third angel's message] of warning and instruction was to be given to the church." That is, the believers were to be directed to *the Sabbath in the sanctuary* in order to make the necessary preparation for the Second Coming.

It was through a correct understanding of the Sabbath in the sanctuary that they were to advance from being "not yet ready to meet their Lord" to being "ready for His appearing."

When Jesus leaves the most holy place, the seven last plagues will be poured out. According to the third angel's message they will be poured out on those who do not exercise enough faith in Jesus to keep the commandments of God, who instead accept the "mark of the beast."

In 1848 and 1849 it came clear to the Adventist pioneers that the Book of Revelation speaks of two opposite in-

signia that people will receive into their minds before the close of probation.

The "mark of the beast" is placed on those who do not keep the commandments; the "seal of God" is for those who do keep them—all of them, including the Sabbath. They discovered, in fact, that the seal of God is the Sabbath, properly observed through faith in Jesus, and their interpretation was confirmed through extensive Bible study and by further visions given to Ellen White.

As they examined Revelation 7, they observed that a special angel is commissioned in the last days to attend to the "sealing" of God's people into the Sabbath experience and that the seven last plagues will not fall until every sincere follower of Jesus has been sealed.

From their study of these items the early Adventists conceived a new sense of urgency and purpose. The Sabbath is important because time is short and Christ is coming soon. It is while He is doing His *closing* work in heaven that Christ calls attention to the Sabbath. It is in these last days that He is blotting out sin, and Sabbathbreaking, of course, is sin. "Let the message fly," James White wrote, "for time is short!"

Sad to say, although the early Adventists comprehended the urgency and the truth of the Sabbath, they failed to *live* the Sabbath as they should. Their

prophet mourned that many of them did not “realize what they must be” at the close of probation “in order to live in the sight of the Lord without a high priest in the sanctuary through the time of trouble.” As early as May 14, 1851, God revealed that “those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully” (*Early Writings*, p. 71).

Through the decades similar warnings were repeated. “Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them” (*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 214). The Sabbath is not for us the seal of God when we merely refrain from work on that day. The seal is not something that God miraculously affixes to people because they happen to be Seventh-day Adventists. “It is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved” (Ellen G. White *Comments, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4, p. 1161). The seal is an experience, a maturity, a perfectly developed Christlike character!

Our minds flash back to the Millerites. They loved Jesus and they had the assurance of His acceptance, but when disappointment came, only a handful of

them held on. The Millerites were not so settled into the truth that they could not be moved! Justified they most certainly were; sealed, they as certainly were not.

In the Old Testament, when God commanded His people to keep the Sabbath holy (Exodus 20:8), He also said, “Ye shall be holy men unto me” (Exodus 22:31). In *The Desire of Ages*, page 283, Ellen White called attention to this fact. She pointed out that “in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy,” and she at once explained the only way in which this could be achieved: “Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ.”

We must be holy people if we hope to keep the Sabbath holy! But what is holiness? “Holiness is not rapture; it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; . . . it is trusting God in trial; . . . it is walking by faith; . . . it is . . . resting in His love” (Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51).

To keep the Sabbath holy a person will live for an entire day in complete surrender, living by the Word, walking by faith, resting in Love. Who can do this all day on Sabbath unless he practices it every day all week? Indeed,

to be “sealed” into true Sabbathkeeping means to be so united to Christ that a person “cannot be moved” from God’s loving will day and night all week long.

To live like this all the time is to be like Jesus. It is to have His wonderful character reproduced in us. It is to be consistently as kind, thoughtful, patient, helpful, self-denying, and generous as Jesus is. It is nothing less than to “live love.”

And this, as we stated at the beginning, is character perfection.

Since October 22, 1844, Jesus in the most holy place has been calling attention to the Sabbath, not merely because it is the seventh day of the week but because it represents a way of life. As a part of His work of blotting out sins He has been calling attention to the holi-

ness of the Sabbath because this in turn points to the holiness of life which God requires in these closing days of history. It also shows the way to holiness. “I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them” (Ezekiel 20:12).

Christ’s most-holy-place ministry cannot be separated from the present truth about the Sabbath. His new light on the Sabbath is an integral factor in the blotting out of sins. Seeking with His help to keep the Sabbath holy is part of what is meant by entering into the sanctuary with Him, taking hold of His arm by faith, and with His help cleansing the sanctuaries of our own souls—and achieving character perfection.

PERFECTION AND SINLESSNESS

We have concluded that the saints are to be “holy.” They are to have characters like Christ’s. In order for them to be “ready for His appearing,” prior to the close of probation “there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth.” Through “the blood of sprinkling,” “the grace of God,” and “their own diligent effort,” “their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin” (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 424, 425).

What we are talking about is more than the glorious imputation of Christ’s righteousness to eager but faulty converts. *The Great Controversy* calls for a character transformation that goes beyond anything that even the dedicated, surrendered, prayerful Millerites experienced, one that enables the saints “to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator.”

Will those who achieve this degree of character transformation still commit sin? Will they still be “sinners”?

Will the Saints Still Be Sinners?

Sin is defined in various ways by Christian theologians. For example, it is spoken of as including (1) conscious acts of disobedience, (2) unconscious acts of disobedience, (3) the basic attitude of the human race (“the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God”), and (4) “sinful human nature,” “sinful propensities,” the “tendency” of human flesh toward disobedience.

Without doubt the saints will not commit conscious acts of disobedience after the close of probation. But will they in some sense continue to be tainted with sin in any of these other categories? Will they still be “sinners” in the sense that their “sinful human nature” with its “tendencies to sin” will still continue alive and well?

It is my conviction as a historical theologian that this question is not clearly illuminated by the allusions which are sometimes made to pelagianism, semipelagianism, Augustinianism, or a famous dictum of Martin Luther: *simul justus et peccator* (“at the

same time both saint and sinner").

Adventists do not base their theology on the tradition of elders but on the writings of apostles and prophets.

Luther knew nothing of the third angel's message or of Christ's final ministry in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, blotting out sins in the blazing, healing light of the seventh-day Sabbath. He knew nothing about living in the sight of a holy God without a mediator.

In so important a matter as the one before us, even the great sixteenth-century Reformers cannot be admitted as final authorities; neither can Augustine, Calvin, Berkouwer, or any other theologian, Protestant or Catholic, conservative or liberal.

If we agree that the saints will commit no conscious sin after probation closes, we still have to admit that the distinction between conscious and unconscious sin does not submit to ready analysis. One thing is certain, however, and this is that the saints who stand invincible in the sight of a holy God will not *commit* sin, in whatever manner the term is defined. "Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort" they will have become "conquerors in the battle with evil" (*ibid.*, p. 425).

We are not speaking here about peasants who lived in Luther's Witten-

berg shortly after the Reformation began four hundred years ago but about saints who live in the light of the third angel's message at the close of the ages, when the seal of God will have been deeply and eternally imbedded into their minds. These eschatological saints will be "settled into the truth both intellectually and spiritually so they cannot be moved" (Ellen G. White *Comments, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4, p. 1161).

But will they still be sinners in some particular sense of the word?

In the same sense, perhaps, in which Paul, the dedicated servant of Christ who died daily was still "chief of sinners." He was chief of sinners *except* for the grace of God! In truth, Paul was a glorious ex-chief of sinners, a *former* chief of sinners, a *this-one-thing-I-do-looking-unto-Jesus-forgetting-the-things-that-are-past* chief of sinners! With a use of language similar to this we might appropriately describe the glorified saints a million aeons after their translation as being *redeemed* sinners; and the saints who live in the sight of a holy God without a mediator as *invincibly victorious* sinners!

If such saints are still sinning sinners, words have lost their meaning.

But what about their "sinful natures"? Won't they still have the carnal natures

that we now possess, and doesn't the Bible say that the carnal nature is "enmity against God" (Romans 8:7)?

Yes, the carnal nature is enmity against God, but when a man is converted, he becomes a "new creature" in Christ Jesus. "Old things are passed away; . . . all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Conversion is no mere "modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of *nature*" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 172, italics supplied). If this is true of conversion, then to say after the saints have become "conquerors in the battle with evil" and a "special work of purification" has been done in them that they are still "enmity against God" would be to deny the efficaciousness of the plan of salvation.

Rather should we quote at this point: "If we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses" (*ibid.*, p. 668)! Whatever may be the state of their natures, their basic drives as transformed *persons* will not be enmity against God. No, no! They will have been changed to the point where their deepest desires—indeed, their very "impulses"—are to serve the Lord who loves them and to

do good to their neighbors around them (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384).

Tendencies to Sin

But will not even these wonderful saints still have to battle with their "inherited tendencies" to sin?

What do we mean by this?

I should like to propose a helpful definition or, at least, one that I hope may prove helpful. For the sake of discussion, let us call a "tendency to sin" just that—a tendency to sin. A smoker, for example, has a tendency to smoke. When someone hands him a cigarette, his tendency is to put it into his mouth and light it. An alcoholic has a tendency, when he's walking past a saloon, to step in and order a drink.

We should remember, of course, that a person can have good tendencies, as well as bad. Many a confirmed Christian has a tendency every month to pay tithe. The man who has won the victory over smoking has a tendency, when offered a cigarette, to say, "No, thanks, I've quit," while the man who has given up drinking has a tendency to walk past the bar and refuse to go inside.

Used in this way, tendency is so habitual as to constitute, for all practical purposes, habit itself. In ordinary usage, tendency is virtually equal to habit.

In contrast now to the tendency to sin, we may speak of the inner “prompting” to sin, the temptation that arises out of one’s deformed human nature.

Every person born since the fall of our first human parents has inherited a degraded body with natural promptings to sin. Sex glands operate out of balance with the rest of the organs and prompt to lustful thoughts and practices. Imperfect adrenal glands irritate abnormally; brain cells that fail to remember quickly or to reason soundly create frustration and anger; and so on. With this in mind, we may intelligently speak of inheriting sinful promptings in our genes and chromosomes.

If we analyzed this topic further, we might well conclude that not all physical promptings are sinful. The weariness that prompts to sleep; the hunger to eat; the thirst to drink; and the natural love that leads a couple to marry, remain monogamous, and cherish their children are scarcely sinful in and of themselves. Birds and mammals, of course, show these same instincts, including, in many instances, noteworthy family fidelity. In unconverted sinners, however, even desirable promptings are defiled by other promptings that are wrong. “All that man can do without Christ is polluted with selfishness and sin. It is the grace of Christ alone,

through faith, that can make us holy” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 60).

Because some of the promptings of human nature are temptations to sin, it is appropriate to speak of human nature as being “enmity,” as Paul does in Romans 8. And since the saints may feel such promptings right up to the moment of glorification, it may be permissible—so long as we understand our terms clearly—to speak of them as still having “sinful” human natures. It would be quite wrong, though, to say that as “whole” Christian persons they are either “sinful” or “sinning.” “Not even by a thought” do they yield to temptation (*The Great Controversy*, p. 623). In mind and heart they cannot be moved. God has so identified Himself with their thoughts and aims that their very impulses prompt them to do good!

Promptings to sin the saints may have; tendencies to sin (as we have defined the term) they will not have. “The Christian will feel the promptings of sin, but he will maintain a constant warfare against it. . . . Human weakness becomes united to divine strength, and faith exclaims: ‘Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ’ ” (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 469, 470).

This discussion about tendencies and promptings seems to be confirmed by

statements like the following: “As we partake of the divine nature, hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good.” “We must realize that through belief in Him it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, and so escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin, all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity” (Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 943).

“In cleansing the temple from the world’s buyers and sellers, Jesus announced His mission to cleanse the heart from the defilement of sin—from the earthly desires, the selfish lusts [promptings?], the evil habits [“tendencies” as we have defined them?], that corrupt the soul” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 161).

Surely no one will insist that being prompted to sin is the same as committing a sin! When the victorious alcoholic passes up a drink, by the grace of God manfully resisting his screaming flesh, shall we say that he is a “sinner,” just as truly as if he had given in? God forbid.

It is noteworthy to read in *The Desire of Ages*, page 123, that Jesus was not fitted for His conflict with temptation by

the reception of a special body but by the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” Not because His body was different but because His humanity was united with divinity, “He did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation.” The promise follows at once: “So it may be with us”!

We do not need a new body in order to overcome sin; we need an abiding union with the Vine! “He came to make us partakers of the divine nature. So long as we are united to Him by faith, sin has no more dominion over us. God reaches for the hand of faith in us to direct it to lay fast hold upon the divinity of Christ, that we *may attain to perfection of character*” (italics supplied).

Is Character Perfection “Sinless Perfection”?

If it is true that the saints will not commit sin after their probation closes, is it appropriate to refer to their perfection at that time as “sinless perfection”?

Unfortunately, sinless perfection is a concept that has suffered tragic abuse. As understood by many Christians, it is neither sinlessness nor perfection; it is not an experience of living without sin but a fanatical claim to be beyond the reach of sin, to be so good that one *cannot* sin.

Seventh-day Adventist pioneers had experience with this type of thing in their early days.

When on October 22, 1844, Jesus failed to appear and cleanse the sanctuary on earth as the Millerites expected, most of them were deeply disappointed. A few, however, said that they were not disappointed. Christ, they insisted, had come; He had come to His true followers (themselves) to cleanse *them* from every stain of sin. The result, they claimed, was that they could never sin again (*Selected Messages*, Book Two, p. 27).

While she was still a girl, Ellen Harmon was called by the Lord to go to these persons and lead them out of their delusion. As she observed that their claim to sinless perfection was often accompanied by extravagant foolishness and even by gross immorality (*Life Sketches*, pp. 83, 84), she developed a strong aversion to all kinds of fanaticism. Repeatedly through the years that followed she warned against the danger of claiming to be free from sin.

During the decade of the 1890's, and especially toward the end of that period, leading brethren in the Indiana Conference became increasingly interested in preparation for the latter rain. Unfortunately, some of them coupled their concern with a declaration that through a

special work of grace, believers could be rendered incapable of sinning. To prepare church members for this experience, emotional preaching was employed along with the loud playing of musical instruments. This whole phenomenon, which has come to be known as the Holy Flesh movement, reached its peak at a camp meeting held in Muncie, Indiana, in the summer of 1900.

At the great General Conference which was conducted the following April in Battle Creek, Michigan, Sister White—who had seen it all ahead of time in a vision of January, 1900—was moved by God to deliver a severe rebuke to those who had taken part in the debacle. “We cannot claim perfection of the flesh,” she declared. “No human being on the earth has holy flesh. It is an impossibility” (*Selected Messages*, Book Two, p. 32).

The character perfection I present here is no theoretical sanctification of the flesh. It presupposes that men and women will retain the same bodies they now possess, right up to the moment of glorification at the Second Coming.

I do believe in sinless perfection if the term is properly defined, and I wish that we could snatch the term away from the enemy and use it correctly—and gloriously. Not sinless perfection of the flesh

but sinless perfection of the soul. Perfection that triumphs over every sinful prompting of human nature and dynamically emulates the virtues of Jesus Christ. The saints are not sealed because they could not sin if they chose to but because they are so rooted and grounded in Christ and His truth that even Satan himself cannot persuade them to choose to.

Is Character Perfection “Absolute Perfection”?

For all of this, character perfection (or sinless perfection as I have defined it) is not “absolute perfection.” Only God is absolutely perfect. We are assured that throughout eternity the characters of the redeemed will continue to improve (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 332). Faith and love are undeniably the basic ingredients of good character, and as the redeemed in eternity see more and more to admire in the character and handiwork of God, their trust in Him and their love for Him will inevitably grow deeper and richer.

“The years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will

be their admiration of His character” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 678).

But because the faith and love of the redeemed will be deeper and richer a thousand aeons after probation’s close than it will be when Jesus leaves the most holy place, does it follow (as some writers have worried) that during the time of trouble they will commit sin or be “sinners” in the ordinary meaning of that term?

When angels saw Jesus leave heaven to be born in a stable and nailed to a cross, their love for Him and their trust in Him were greatly strengthened in comparison with what had been the case before. Indeed, the cross of Christ was necessary to secure the permanent allegiance of the angels as well as of human beings (*Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889). (In this sense we could speak even of angels as being benefited by the “grace” of God—grace primarily intended for humans but serving also to secure the loyalty of angels.)

If angels love God more deeply now than they did six thousand years ago, it follows that they loved Him less six thousand years ago than they do today. If they trust God more today than they did six thousand years ago, they had less faith in Him six thousand years ago than they do today.

Their love and faith were not abso-

lutely perfect six thousand years ago! Does it follow, then, that the angels were "sinners" six thousand years ago? Of course not!

Now what is sin? The Bible says that sin is the transgression of the law. And what is the law? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." God asks us to love Him with everything we have; that is, with everything we have, not with everything someone else has. Every man's capacity to perceive and respond to truth differs from everyone else's. The third angel's message and the sealing work indicate the minimum which all must reach who hope to be translated.

They must not, even by a thought, consent to sin, and they must be so rooted and grounded in the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, that they cannot be moved. Beyond this minimum, each person will show individual variation in the exact manner in which he cherishes and responds to his particular awareness of God. As eternal ages roll, each individual will advance in the manner in which he cherishes and responds to God's love. "As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 678).

The second commandment in the law is this: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Here is the place to introduce the observation that we may be "as perfect in our sphere as God is in His sphere" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, Vol. 4, p. 455).

This statement does not say that we are to be imperfect. It says the opposite: We may be perfect. And it indicates the location in which we are to be perfect—our sphere.

If the universe is God's sphere, then what is ours?

Our sphere is the neighborhood where we live, the place where we work, the school where we study.

Ellen White's statement is a commentary on Matthew 5:48: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The immediate context of that verse calls for Christians to love their enemies as well as their friends and to say Good morning to extortioners (tax collectors) as well as to church members, because God sends sunshine and rain on the bad as well as on the good. If God practices cosmic generosity, we should practice neighborly generosity.

Paraphrasing her statement about spheres, Ellen White wrote in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 77: "We are to be centers of light and

blessing to our little circle, even as He is to the universe" (italics supplied). In other restatements in her writings our sphere is "whatever the hand finds to do" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 4, p. 591), the classroom (*ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 64), the practice of medicine (*Medical Ministry*, pp. 112, 113), a city mission (*Gospel Workers*, p. 366), or the operation of a publishing house (*Testimonies*, Vol. 4, p. 455).

Our sphere is our neighborhood. Here is a challenge: to be perfect at home; to be perfect among our closest associates!

But if this is an almost incredible challenge, it is also a limited one. "*With our limited powers we are to be as holy in our sphere as God is holy in His sphere. To the extent of our ability, we are to make manifest the truth and love and excellence of the divine character*" (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 337, italics supplied).

God asks us to serve our neighbors; He does not ask us to serve equally the billions of people inhabiting our planet. He asks us to lay our all on the altar; that is, He asks us to offer Him our savings accounts, our homes, our automobiles, and the few years of our lives. He does not ask us to sacrifice a heavenly home, to leave the adoration of angelic choirs, to risk eternal loss for

the sake of the human race.

Here, if you will, is a kind of "relative perfection." Christ on earth manifested qualities of excellence that human beings will never manifest (Ellen G. White, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 904). He did leave a heavenly home. He did sacrifice the adoration of angels. He did risk eternal loss (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 49). And He did all this for all the billions of earth. Herein is love. "He laid aside His glory, His dominion, His riches. . . . He humbled Himself to our necessities, that He might exalt us to heaven. . . . We cannot equal the pattern" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 2, p. 549).

Angels cannot equal the pattern either.

Christ's love transcends the love of angels as the sun transcends a candle. Shall we say that angels therefore are sinners?

How can we? Creatures are not required to love with the infinite love of the Creator. They do not have the capacity to do so, for God has never given it to them. If, as we reminded ourselves near the beginning of this chapter, everything we give to God has come originally from God ("of thine own have we given thee"), it stands to reason that our ability to give anything to God is limited to what He has first

given us. This is why He requires us to love Him only as much as our ability, aided by His Spirit, qualifies us to love Him; to love only those fellow creatures whose welfare He lays on our hearts.

“If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not”

(2 Corinthians 8:12).

To love with all we’ve got is to manifest, in fully surrendered creatureliness, the unsullied beauty of Christ.

And it is this kind of perfection, rather than “absolute perfection,” that God is waiting for—true sinless perfection, true perfection of character.

EXPECTANT FATHER, HESITANT CHILDREN

The Millerites, at the height of their preparation for the return of Jesus, were "not yet ready." A new message had to be entrusted to them, new duties performed by them, and a special work of purification completed "through the grace of God and their own diligent effort" (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 424, 425). *How long did this additional preparation need to take?*

The Letter to Laodicea

In a famous passage Ellen White once observed that "if all who had labored unitedly in the work in 1844 had received the third angel's message, and proclaimed it in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts. A flood of light would have been shed upon the world. Years ago the inhabitants of the earth would have been warned, the

closing work completed, and Christ would have come for the redemption of his people. . . . It was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be so long delayed, and his people should remain so many years in this world of sin and sorrow. But unbelief separated them from God."

This statement, included in the 1888 edition of *The Great Controversy*, page 458, can also be found in the fourth volume of *The Spirit of Prophecy*, pages 291, 292, published in the year 1884. If the Millerite Adventists had cooperated with God, Christ could have come years before 1884. It appears, therefore, that they could have advanced from "not yet ready" to "ready for His appearing" within a relatively limited period of time.

God was eager for His special people (in the 1840's, the Millerites) to get ready; tragically, His special people were reluctant to do so. It was a pathetic case of "expectant Father, hesitant children."

In the 1850's the Sabbath-and-sanctuary Adventists repeated the Millerites' mistake.

It is not too well known today, but in the 1850's those Adventists who (unlike most of the Millerites) did accept the third angel's message might have been filled with the latter rain before the year

1860 and, thus equipped, could quickly have finished the work and made the Second Coming possible.

The Millerite Adventists at the height of their dedication had looked on themselves as constituting the Philadelphia church of brotherly love (Revelation 3). It is understandable that those Adventists who went on to accept the sanctuary and the Sabbath doctrines considered themselves to be Philadelphia still, and to regard the other Adventists who mocked and rejected the new light as constituting the Laodicean church.

However, in the fall of 1856 (please remember the date), James White ran an editorial in the *Review* giving convincing evidence that the Sabbath-and-sanctuary Adventists had themselves so far backslidden in spite of their new light that they had become Laodicea. In two visions in 1857 Ellen White was shown that her husband's analysis was correct. The people of God had much "rubbish" to remove from the doors of their hearts. She indicated what the rubbish was: differences with their brethren, love of material things, opposition to organized leadership, and so on.

In the second vision (*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, pp. 179-184) Ellen White saw a company of Adventists accepting the message. They were clearing away the rubbish, though not in their own

strength! They were agonizing in prayer for God's strength, and they *obtained the victory*. They marched in perfect order, they were filled with the latter rain, they witnessed to the world with phenomenal success, and they soon welcomed Christ at His second coming.

This glorious vision was, as a matter of fact, partially fulfilled. Although membership at the time was only around two thousand, over three hundred letters were received by the *Review* and *Herald* office expressing appreciation for the candor of Elder White in his application of the Laodicean letter. A work of revival and reformation was begun.

Sad to say, the work, though well begun, was never finished. In a vision on July 15, 1859 (again please notice the date), an angel showed Sister White what the problem was: "As they failed to see the powerful work accomplished in a short time, many lost the effect of the message." Ellen White added: "I saw that this message would not accomplish its work in a few short months" (*ibid.*, p. 186).

The work needed to make Adventists ready for the latter rain in the 1850's could not be accomplished in a single all-night prayer service, nor in several weeks of spiritual devotion, nor even in "a few short months." There needed to

be a continuous heartfelt seeking of the Lord over a more adequate period of time. As a matter of fact, God intentionally waited for the excitement to wear down in order to allow the people to act on principle rather than on feeling.

“If the message had been of as short duration as many of us supposed [Ellen White wrote in the 1859 testimony], there would have been no time for them to develop character. Many moved from feeling, not from principle and faith, and this solemn, fearful message stirred them. It wrought upon their feelings, and excited their fears, but did not accomplish the work which God designed that it should. God reads the heart. Lest His people should be deceived in regard to themselves, He gives them time for the excitement to wear off, and then proves them to see if they will obey the counsel of the True Witness” (*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, pp. 186, 187).

Our minds again revert to the Millerites. Their glorious adventure in the weeks prior to October 22, 1844, was one of deep spiritual enthusiasm, of as holy an excitement, it would appear, as the world has ever known. Revival and reformation? They experienced both, especially during the period from Au-

gust to October—by coincidence, “a few short months.” Forgiveness, fellowship, and sweet peace they most certainly enjoyed, but the disappointment of October 22 revealed that they did not possess that degree of character development which the times ahead required.

In the following decade a more adequate reformation was again called for (by the Laodicean message) than was achieved in a few short months. But, we must ask, were many years of such earnest reformation needed before the people could have been ready to receive the latter rain?

In the same testimony cited just above, Ellen White also wrote, “*God has given the message time to do its work*” (italics supplied). It was July, 1859, when she penned these words, less than three years after the Laodicean message first came to Sabbathkeeping Adventists. Think of it! While the needed reformation would not be accomplished in a few short months, it could have been achieved in less than three years. Before July, 1859, God’s loving followers could have removed every stain of sin from their characters (*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 214). They could have obtained the victory! They could have been filled with the Spirit as the disciples were filled on the day of

Pentecost, and they could have gone out to witness with truly phenomenal success! Before July, 1859! No wonder *The Great Controversy* revealed in 1888 that Christ could have come years before.

Historian Arthur W. Spalding commented on this experience in his colorful manner: "Like an electric shock the Laodicean message ran through the ranks. . . . If it had had free course, it would soon have finished the gospel message in glory.

"But the work done was not thorough enough. The people generally were content with half measures, a little stirring, and then a settling back on the lees. . . . And being so content they backslid" (*Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, Vol. 2, pp. 287, 288).

As in the 1840's, so in the 1850's it was expectant Father, hesitant children.

Appeals Through the Years

Repeatedly through the years that followed, Ellen White called for deep-seated revival and reformation. Here is a typical appeal from the year 1887 (once more, please notice the date): "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our

needs. To seek this should be our first work" (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 121). She explained on other occasions that "revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. *Reformation* signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices" (*ibid.*, p. 128, italics supplied).

Evidently the people of God as late as 1887 still needed a special work of purification, of putting away of sins.

The next year was 1888, the year of the famous General Conference held in Minneapolis, at which Elders E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones presented in a new and striking way the doctrine of righteousness by faith. But what they taught was not just a reinterpretation of familiar theology. It was essentially a vital new presentation of Jesus Christ and an earnest appeal to accept Him for revival and reformation. Arching over all exegetic subtleties that might or might not be adoptable by this or that specialized theologian, Ellen White summarized the 1888 messages of Waggoner and Jones as being simply what "I have been presenting . . . to you for the last forty-five years—the *matchless charms of Christ*" (MS 5, 1889, pp. 9, 10; quoted by A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory*, p. 48, italics supplied).

Somewhat more fully she summarized their sermons in this way:

“The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. . . . It is the third angel’s message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91, 92).

What was the 1888 message? It was the third angel’s message about faith in Jesus and obedience to all His commandments. In other words, it was the same message that the “not yet ready” Millerites needed in 1844!

The Saviour desired to be uplifted so that His Spirit could be poured out in large measure. This was the Laodicean message repeated from the 1850’s!

And what was the result of the 1888 message?

As in the 1850’s, there was for a while a hearty revival. Ellen White, E. J. Waggoner, and A. T. Jones traveled to

campmeetings and various Adventist centers over the succeeding two or three years, and conversions occurred that Heaven approved. “I have never seen a revival work go forward with such thoroughness,” wrote the prophet, “and yet remain so free from all undue excitement” (*Review and Herald*, March 5, 1889, p. 146).

Ellen White called it the time of the latter rain (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 511, 512). Membership figures grew at the noteworthy rate of 10 percent a year. A national Sunday-closing bill was introduced into Congress, presaging the fulfillment of Revelation 13, and in the Southern states Adventists were persecuted with vigor. The end seemed near.

Then the tide turned. In the first decade of the twentieth century membership growth worldwide dropped to a sluggish 3.3 percent a year. Ellen White mourned: “In the lives of many of those whose names are on the church books there has been no genuine change. . . . They profess to accept Christ as their Saviour, but they do not believe that He will give them power to overcome their sins” (*Review and Herald*, July 7, 1904).

After the 1901 General Conference—marvelous as that epochal reorganizational session most certainly was—she wrote through her tears about her

"agony of disappointment" that to a tragic degree the work Heaven longed to accomplish there was left undone. "If stubborn hearts had then broken in penitence before God, there would have been seen one of the greatest manifestations of the power of God that has ever been seen." "Minds were convicted, and hearts were touched; but thorough work was not done" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 8, pp. 106, 98).

Thank God all has not been lost! The church, "enfeebled and defective as it may be, is the only object on earth on which He bestows His supreme regard" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 15). Thank God we can say, "We have . . . ever been on gaining ground" (*Selected Messages*, Book Two, p. 397). But how can we thank God for the conditions existing in the church today? A *Review* editorial asks some pertinent questions:

"Are Adventist homes stronger [today] and more spiritual than they were in past decades? Is there less

tendency on the part of church members and leaders to compromise with the world? Is there less criticism, less bitterness, less self-seeking? Is there more praying? Is there more careful Sabbathkeeping? Is there more love and unity? Is there more faith? Is there more Bible study? Is there greater confidence in inspired writings and a greater willingness to accept their authority? If not, there is a clear need for revival and reformation" (*Review and Herald*, August 2, 1973, p. 2, italics supplied).

Can it be that, like the Millerite Adventists of 1844, we in the 1970's also need the inner working of the third angel's message? Do we, like them, also need through grace and our own diligent effort to enter with Christ into the most holy place and complete a special work of purification?

Are we, like the 1844 Millerites, still "not yet ready"?

Expectant Father, hesitant children.

RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH

Reference to the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference suggests that I say something explicit about my understanding of righteousness by faith. I have not used the term much so far because, like “sinless perfection,” it is often misunderstood. For many it implies only justification, forgiveness, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, a sense of assurance, and acceptance with God. It does imply all this but also vastly more besides.

The Term Defined

In the phrase “righteousness by faith,” righteousness is just that—righteousness: rectitude, uprightness, honesty, purity, and every other virtue that represents goodness and truth. It is “holiness, likeness to God”; it is “conformity to the law of God” (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 18), and

“obedience to God’s law” (Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 1073). In other words, righteousness is “right doing” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 312).

So much for righteousness. *Faith* as employed in our phrase is plainly that kind of belief which results in righteousness.

Defined this way the term is simple indeed; and so it would be, if God’s grace did not leap beyond our dictionary definitions. For through the cross God undertakes to account people righteous who in conspicuous details are not yet either holy or obedient. Borrowing words from the Latin, theologians call the step by which God accounts us righteous when we really aren’t yet, *justification*. The process by which He makes us truly righteous, they call *sanctification*.

Righteousness by faith includes both the step and the process, both justification and sanctification.

Minneapolis 1888

Elder E. J. Waggoner made these dual aspects clear at the Minneapolis General Conference in 1888. (We reconstruct his Minneapolis messages through study of his subsequent publications.)

To illustrate justification with an ex-

perience from everyday life, Waggoner asked, Would a man who came into a store, requested something, and paid for it, be content to leave the store without taking the item with him? Of course not. And the more he paid for it, the more certain he would be to take it with him. Christ, Waggoner pointed out, asked for us and paid for us. In fact, He paid an enormous price for us—His own precious blood (1 Peter 1:19). We can rest fully assured, therefore, that He accepts us.

But, Waggoner went on, you may doubt that God will receive you, for you know that you are not worth the price He has paid. God “knew what was in man,” Waggoner comforted, quoting John 2:25. He did not buy you because you were worthy but because He knew you were very unworthy, and He wanted to transform you into His own image to the eternal glory of His grace (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Having presented this aspect of righteousness by faith, Waggoner advanced at once to the other aspect, victorious sanctification by faith. The fullness of the Godhead, he said, dwelt bodily in Christ (Colossians 1:19), and Christ offers to dwell in every Christian (Ephesians 3:17). Thus, said Waggoner, through faith, divinity may dwell in every one of us! “What wonderful pos-

sibilities there are for the Christian! . . . No matter how much Satan may war against him, assaulting him where the flesh is weakest, he may abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and be filled with the fullness of God’s strength.” Christ, who is far stronger than Satan, may dwell continually in the Christian’s heart; “and so, looking at Satan’s assaults as from a strong fortress, he [the Christian] may say, ‘I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me’ ” (*Christ and His Righteousness*, pp. 30, 31).

The process is not automatic. Waggoner taught in detail how a person would need to train himself in the science of prayer if the possibilities of faith were to become realities.

In the same vein, Ellen White implored the 1888 delegates to “educate” themselves to talk and think of Jesus and to discipline themselves to hang memory’s halls with God’s promises so that they could in fact be “found perfect.”

As we have already seen, when Ellen White summarized Minneapolis 1888, she said that it presented justification by faith and *also* sanctification by faith—“the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. . . . *It is the third angel’s message*” (*Testimonies*

to *Ministers*, p. 92, italics supplied). The third angel's message, you remember, closes with the words: "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

The Ellen White summary of 1888 goes on to say, "Unless he makes it his life business to behold the uplifted Saviour, and by faith to accept the merits which it is his privilege to claim, the sinner can no more be saved than Peter could walk upon the water unless he kept his eyes fixed steadily upon Jesus. . . . [In 1888] God gave to His servants a testimony that presented the truth as it is in Jesus, which is the third angel's message" (*ibid.*, p. 93).

Unless our obedience is a result of our purposefully looking to Jesus, it is not His obedience but ours, and our obedience is filthy rags. But looking to Christ is not a sentimental feeling, an unstructured sense of assurance that everything is OK when everything isn't OK. The third angel's message is "the truth as it is in Jesus," and the truth about Jesus today includes the fact that He is in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, standing by the Ten Commandments, shedding on earth the radiant light of the Sabbath as part of His program to forever blot out sin.

It is by looking to Christ that we are saved and changed from one glory to

another. Clearly, then, faith that leads to character perfection must be focused on the promises, precepts, and prophecies of our Lord and Saviour. And also on His priesthood! "All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 488).

No message about Jesus is adequate today that leaves a congregation bathed in repentant tears—or wreathed in grateful smiles—at the foot of the cross. Jesus is not hanging on the cross today. The Christ of the cross is now the High Priest of the most holy place. The Christ-centered truth for the twentieth century is that the contemporary Jesus is doing far more than even the glorious work of forgiving sin. He is doing a special work of purification, blotting out sins in both the heavenly sanctuary and the sanctuaries of our individual souls. In a unique sense He is helping people become conquerors in the battle with evil. He is preparing them to stand without an intercessor, ready to meet their Lord.

Righteousness by Faith and the Great Controversy

On Sunday, March 14, 1858, while Elder and Mrs. James White were at-

tending a funeral at Lovett's Grove, Ohio, Ellen received a two-hour vision about the great controversy between Christ and Satan. In consequence, the Bible took on new meaning for Adventists, and so did the doctrine of righteousness by faith.

According to the history of the great controversy, rebellion entered the universe based on lies. Satan was "a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). He misrepresented God's character. Many angels adopted his lies, chose to doubt God's affirmations to the contrary, and shared Satan's disobedience. The universe was corrupted with unrighteousness by doubt.

Soon humanity was largely believing Satan's lies, doubting God's love, and siding with the rebels. To win back as many as possible, God instituted the plan of salvation and righteousness by faith.

God demanded righteousness, but in order to secure it He provided a great new basis for faith. "God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 105). To the human race He revealed His true character through nature, judgments, miracles, personal communion, answered prayer, fulfilled prophecy, the pages of Scripture, and supremely through the life and

death of His Son. The testimony was "abundant" (*ibid.*).

God did more. Knowing man's weakness, He sent the Holy Spirit to woo him: "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:27).

Most of the rebels replied, "No, thanks; it's not for us. God is wrong. Our ways are right. We do not want to change." They justified themselves and condemned the Lord.

But sooner or later a rebel here or there accepts the evidence. He sees that God's way is right and his own ways are wrong. He confesses his sin. He condemns himself and justifies God!

What does God do in response? There is joy in heaven (Luke 15:7), you can be sure. With celestial festivities, God welcomes the prodigal home and honors him highly as His own son. He makes no mention of his former life of sin. Of course not! To do so would introduce a discordant note, and it would be entirely opposed to His feelings in the matter.

Instead, the newborn babe is afforded the richest privileges that his emerging faith can grasp. Could he use an angel escort? It is dispatched at once. Answers to prayer? God outperforms His promises. The personal companionship of the

Holy Spirit? The heavenly Father is more willing to send the Spirit than parents are to give presents to their children (Luke 11:13). Indeed, God treats His new son as if he had never been a rebel. Christ's character stands in place of his character, and he is accepted just as if he had never sinned (*Steps to Christ*, p. 62).

No pretense is made that this new child of heaven at once possesses mature perfection. He has, quite obviously, been wonderfully changed, but mature, dependable Christlikeness doesn't develop in a moment. Even knowledgeable, sacrificing Adventists in the 1850's needed a maturation process that "would not be accomplished in a few short months." God does not say that the new Christian has a character like Christ's. He treats him "just as if" he had such a character, and in the meantime, Christ's character necessarily stands "in place of" his own. This is justification by faith.

Growth comes next. Growth within the family. Growth as an accepted son or daughter of God. This growth we call sanctification by faith.

A person becomes a Christian (justification) when he gets acquainted with true evidence about God and chooses to believe and live in harmony with it. If sanctification is to be a growth in faith, then faith must grow; and faith must

grow by feeding daily on evidence.

"In order to strengthen faith, we must often bring it in contact with the word" (Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 254).

"Faith cometh by hearing . . . the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

This is why when Seventh-day Adventists invite people to join their church, they take them through a series of evangelistic meetings or Bible studies; after they are baptized, they get them to join a Sabbath School class and, if possible, to attend an Adventist academy or college. They want them to go on studying God's truth all their lives, because they know that as knowledge about God increases, their faith in Him will deepen. Only in this way can their faith measure up to that degree of righteousness which can make them ready for His appearing.

The Millerites were surely justified by faith. How they trusted God when they gave up family and friends and left their harvests in the field! How they turned their minds and hearts to Jesus and His Word! God loved them in return and bestowed on them the sweet assurance of acceptance. But plain history proves that they did not have that mature degree of righteousness which will be needed to endure the time of trouble without an intercessor. The disappointment of October 22 destroyed both their

faith and their righteousness! They were not ready to meet their Lord.

Why were they not ready? Because they did not have the needed faith.

Why didn't they have enough faith? Because they did not yet understand the evidence required to provide a basis for this measure of faith, and they had not engaged in reformation long enough to develop the requisite character.

A new message must be opened up and new duties revealed. Christ must be followed into the most holy place. Only after learning these new facets of God's truth would they be in a position to believe them, and believing, reach out

for the kind of righteousness necessary for translation. Without a knowledge of Christ's contemporary ministry, it would be "impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 488).

Most even of the more conscientious of the Millerites, upon hearing the new truth about the sanctuary, chose not to accept it, and doubting, fell away from Christ (*Early Writings*, p. 70). Only those who accepted the sanctuary explanation of the disappointment continued to grow either in faith or in righteousness, in preparation to meet their Lord.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Discussion of the position presented in this chapter often stimulates a number of questions. Perhaps I should comment on some of them.

1. Does God Have a Double Standard?

Whenever a distinction is made, as I have made it, between righteousness adequate for resurrection and righteousness requisite for translation, the question naturally arises, Does God have a double standard?

The answer is, Of course not! God has only one standard; but times and circumstances do vary in substance and degree, and in the windup of the great controversy, greater challenges than before will demand greater faith and more perfect characters than before.

When Jesus leaves the most holy place, there will be "a time of trouble,

such as never was since there was a nation" (Daniel 12:1). This is a fundamental fact of unfulfilled prophecy. The same crisis is spoken of also in Revelation 7:3: "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, *till* we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads."

When the saints have been sealed, "Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 614).

"The 'time of trouble, such as never was,' is soon to open upon us; and we shall need an experience which we do not now possess and which many are too indolent to obtain. It is often the case that trouble is greater in anticipation than in reality; but this is not true of the crisis before us" (*ibid.*, p. 622).

Faith that suffices for the spring may wither and fade in the fall. This is a commonplace of Christian experience. (It was certainly true of the Millerite Adventists, whose genuine spiritual enthusiasm largely vanished when the disappointment came.) It is because God knows our limitations that He "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb"—that He promises not to let the waters overflow us (Isaiah 43:2) or any temptation attack

us above what we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In His merciful eagerness to save as many as He can, unwilling that any should perish, God postpones the final crisis, knowing that when it comes, it will be so crushingly severe that men will aptly cry, "Who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6:17). But before the issues in the great controversy can be permanently resolved, it appears that this ultimate peril must be faced. Satan must be allowed to disclose his demonic wickedness, to unfurl his true colors. The demonstration will prove decisively that rebellion is a way of death. It will strengthen the unfallen worlds in their confidence in God. It is essential, evidently, to the future security of the universe.

But it will put a terrible strain on the saints.

A special work of purification is necessary before Christ can return, partly because prior to His second coming there will occur this special period of trial, a time so fiercely and cruelly deceptive that God will not permit it to come until His saints are settled, intellectually, spiritually, unswervingly, in the truth.

Justification by faith suffices for resurrection. Thank God through Jesus Christ! But in addition to justification,

the shattering times ahead demand character uniquely resolute and well informed.

Incidentally, more than seventy years ago, W. W. Prescott, one of Adventism's early educators and at the time managing editor of the *Review and Herald*, also observed that a more than ordinary preparation is needed for translation. In the *Review* for January 13, 1903, he wrote:

"We have not developed that strength of Christian character of which we might be the possessors today. . . . We should not forget that a belief in the coming of the Lord in our day means also that we shall outlive the time of probation, and that we shall spend a certain length of time, whether longer or shorter, on this earth, before we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, without any mediation for sin. . . . The same faith which will lift us from the earth to meet the Lord will lift us above the power of sin.

"This does not mean that we shall not be tempted, but it does mean that we shall in every case of temptation be 'more than conquerors through him that loved us.' Translation faith is keeping faith. It is said of Enoch that 'before his translation he had been well-pleasing unto God.' This will be true of

all who are translated in the last day. But this experience does not come suddenly, or without our taking time to become acquainted with God and his plans for us. . . . We are in the time of refreshing, but not all are prepared for it. 'I saw that none could share the "refreshing," unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action.' "

2. Why Sabbath and Sanctuary?

Why, in particular, are the doctrines of Sabbath and sanctuary so essential to last-day character perfection? Since they were not available to most Christians in most ages of the church, does *this* requirement imply a double standard?

The Sabbath is God's chosen "sign" of sanctification, both that a person is being sanctified and that God is his Sanctifier (Ezekiel 20:12, 20). Properly understood, the Sabbath leads to unique holiness of life, to character perfection. We have discussed this matter earlier.

In addition, moreover, the seal of God (Revelation 7) and the mark of the beast (Revelation 14) teach us that "the Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth [that will be] especially controverted" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 605). Unless people

know the truth about the Sabbath, they will be deceived in the final crisis.

If, a few minutes after the midnight of October 22, 1844, as bitter tears flowed copiously down the cheeks of the disappointed Millerite Adventists, Satan had appeared in the charming form of Jesus, wiped their eyes, healed the sick, and called on all good Christians to worship him on his holy day—on Sunday, of course, the day "he" rose from the dead—it is not farfetched to suppose that many a Millerite would have followed his instructions. After all, they were already devout Sunday-keepers!

Devotion alone will not keep the saints loyal to God in the final crisis. "So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them *except by the Holy Scriptures*" (*ibid.*, p. 593).

So the Sabbath truth is obviously essential for last-day loyalty. But why the sanctuary doctrine?

The message about Jesus in the most holy place is the present truth about Jesus. No longer on the cross, Christ is now the "Lamb as it had been slain," our Priest and our Sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary. We developed this point earlier.

We all know that the truth of Christ's death on the cross converts sinners. The Book of Hebrews shows likewise that

the truth about His mediation in heaven sustains saints. "The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross" (*ibid.*, p. 489). The doctrine of investigative judgment and the blotting out of sins is vital because it is a truth about Jesus and because it leads believers to cooperate earnestly with their High Priest.

But perhaps the most impelling aspect of the sanctuary doctrine is the information it provides that Jesus is soon to step out of the most holy place, leaving the human race without a mediator. How thrilling to know that through full acceptance of new-covenant promises (e.g., Ezekiel 36:27), a man may become so transformed by the Spirit and so identified with God's will that he no longer needs to have sins forgiven! Even his impulses lead him to obey God (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668).

"The impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384)! On the other hand, how alarming to learn that when Jesus leaves the sanctuary, those whose union with Him is not firm enough to resist all temptation will find forgiveness no longer to be had; that there is then "no atoning blood to cleanse" from sin (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3, p. 134).

"When the seven last plagues shall be poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation, then it will be forever too late to repent and find shelter. No atoning blood will then wash away the stains of sin" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 212).

"How important . . . that every mind contemplate often the solemn scene when the judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 488).

3. Victory Without Christ?

To avoid misunderstanding, let me raise a question of my own. Does the concept of character so perfect that it no longer needs a mediator presuppose that the saints will no longer need Jesus during the time of trouble?

The answer, of course, is the very opposite. Christ's caution, "Without me ye can do nothing," remains absolutely true throughout our earthly lives and even through eternity as well. The tiniest insect floating in the summer sunshine is totally dependent on God for its fleeting moment of existence; how much more will the saints be dependent on the power of God when they are pitted against the ultimate in spiritual wickedness!

The saints will not need Christ as *Mediator* after the close of probation because prior to its close they will have learned perfectly to make Him their *wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification*. Because they will have learned through His power to endure small temptations victoriously day by day, they will know how to endure greater temptations victoriously through His power. The branches will bear fruits of righteousness during the great tribulation, not because they have learned to get along without Christ (how could they?) but because they have grown so firmly, so permanently, so immovably attached to the Vine that no wind of temptation can tear them loose.

They will not let go His hand, He will not let go their hand, in the hour when they need Him most. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience," Jesus promises, "I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

Jesus will not leave the most holy place until sinners have so settled themselves in their defiant independence of God that His priesthood cannot benefit them anymore, nor until the saints have so settled themselves in their victorious, trustful, loving, permanent dependence

on Him that they do not need His atoning mediation anymore.

4. How Possible in Our Time?

If God has not succeeded in perfecting a people in any previous generation, how can we suppose that He will be able to do it in our time?

There are many answers. Here is one: Greater light means greater opportunity. As we come to know God better, we are enabled better to become like Him.

It is a plain fact that since 1844 there has been more truth available about obedience to God's will (e.g., Sabbath-keeping) than there had been for many centuries in the past.

It is surely not wrong to imagine that ever since the Reformation began, God has been "impatient" to show His children the full truth required for translation; but after advancing a few steps under the leadership of a Luther or a Wesley, men have faltered and stood still. It has taken our expectant Father hundreds of years to get His hesitant children to the place where more than a handful of them will even think about the Sabbath.

But it is most helpful to reflect that when Jesus knew the time had finally come for this next great advance, and in 1844 He began to shed the light of the

Sabbath upon mankind, at that very same time He began to send spiritual messages through a chosen prophet. The *Testimonies for the Church* are dispatches from our High Priest in the most holy place. As Jesus, our Friend in court, assays to blot out our sins, He mails personal messages to each of us through His humble messenger, helping us to visualize what Christ-centered holy living is all about and pointing us to the one Way it can be attained.

5. Are We Not Already Perfect?

Another question commonly raised is, Are we not already perfect? Wasn't Noah called "perfect" even when he was still weak enough to get drunk occasionally? Wasn't Paul "perfect" even when he admitted, in virtually the same breath, that he was not yet perfect? Doesn't *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 65, say that "at every stage of development our life may be perfect"? Is not this concept of perfection at every stage true "Biblical perfection"?

Light has been shed on this question elsewhere in this book. A number of heroes who may seem more or less imperfect to us are indeed described in the Bible as being *perfect*, with the word employed perhaps in a variety of ways, sometimes referring to Christ's imputed

perfection, sometimes to their own determination to do God's will, sometimes in an accommodated sense that might better be translated "upright" or "righteous." This is most encouraging, and it confirms Ellen White's statement about being perfect at every stage.

But let us look at her statement again. After the words "at every stage of development our life may be perfect," she adds, "yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement."

This sentence occurs in the chapter (pages 62-69) which is entitled "'First the Blade, Then the Ear'" and which is a commentary on Mark 4:26-29:

"So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

Ellen White's comment about perfection at every stage refers to the perfection of the blade, followed by the perfection of the ear, and then by the

perfection of the full corn in the ear. But we must ask ourselves a crucial question: Though the perfection of the blade, the ear, and the full corn is sufficient for resurrection, is it sufficient also for translation, for standing through the time of trouble, for being alive on the earth when Jesus comes? What does the Bible say? In the parable before us does the husbandman harvest blades? Does he harvest ears? Does he harvest full corn in the ears? Or does he come for the harvest *when the fruit is brought forth*?

It is in direct allusion to this parable that Ellen White writes: "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (*ibid.*, p. 69).

It is not resurrection readiness that Christ is waiting for but, as another writer has expressed it, harvest readiness.

The Millerites in 1844 unquestionably enjoyed a good degree of perfection. The perfection of the blade at least; possibly even of the full corn in the ear. But it is the fundamental evidence presented in this section that with their partial degree of perfection, they were not yet ready to meet their Lord. Perfection of blade, ear, and full corn are evidently adequate (praise God!) for assurance

and resurrection, but they are definitely not adequate for translation.

6. Is It a Realistic Hope?

Does God give us solid evidence to believe that we really and truly can achieve harvest-ready character perfection? If even Noah didn't reach it, how can we hope to?

We do not know that Noah did not ultimately reach it, and we do know that some Biblical giants did do so. In fact, according to Ellen White, a good many people through the ages have reached the perfection which God requires for translation.

"Some few in every generation from Adam resisted his [Satan's] every artifice and stood forth as noble representatives of what it was in the power of man to do and to be—Christ working with human efforts, helping man in overcoming the power of Satan. Enoch and Elijah are the correct representatives of what the race might be through faith in Jesus Christ if they chose to be. . . . These noble, holy men stood untainted, . . . perfected righteous characters, and were accounted worthy for translation to Heaven" (Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, March 3, 1874).

There it is! And there is much more to encourage us. But before we leave

Enoch, look at this: "As was Enoch's, so must be their holiness of character who shall be redeemed from among men at the Lord's second coming" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 54). The command is a promise. "Enoch was a representative man. . . . He simply did that which every son and daughter of Adam may do" (MS 43, 1900)!

But it takes time to become thus sanctified. What about the people who are converted down near the end of probationary time?

Admittedly, "courage, fortitude, faith, and implicit trust in God's power to save do not come in a moment" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 213). When the Laodicean message was sounded in the 1850's, God revealed that it "would not do its work in a few short months." As we near the close of earth's history, "we either *rapidly* advance in Christian growth, or we *rapidly* retrograde toward the world" (Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, December 13, 1892, italics supplied).

The Bible says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). It says, "With God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). It says, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be *filled*" (Matthew 5:6). It says that the God who inhabits eternity

dwells "with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Isaiah 57:15).

When at a man's invitation God dwells within his contrite, humble heart, who on earth dare say that that man cannot vanquish all his foes? To be sure, when we look at the man, we see only a dull mind, stiff muscles, and crippling habit patterns, a being who cannot possibly obey his Lord. But when we look at the God within, do we not see glory, grace, power, health, truth, and conquering success?

Can God the Creator strengthen and illuminate a willing human being to the point where that man can obey the Creator's will? Does God come in to a man only like a casual visitor, content to dwell indifferently and temporarily as in a rented flat, or does He come to the heart of a prayerful, earnest man as Re-decorator, Redesigner, Re-Creator? The Bible tells us, "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:27).

That, reader, is Biblical perfection. That is the New Covenant. That is the King at work. And if we say that God cannot give us power to obey Him, then our God is far too small.

Is it God who whispers in the tempest, "Never mind; you cannot overcome, but the blood of Jesus covers

all"? Or is it the enemy of our souls repeating his familiar lies?

"Exact obedience is required, and those who say that it is not possible to live a perfect life throw upon God the imputation of injustice and untruth (Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, February 7, 1957).

It is God's purpose that His saints shall "have power to resist evil, power that neither earth, nor death, nor hell can master, power that will enable them to overcome as Christ overcame" (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 679, 680).

But is it not true that "the closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 64)? Yes, it is; but does this mean that the closer you come to Jesus the faultier you will really be? Of course not; the closer you come to Jesus, the more like Jesus you will become, until His character can be perfectly reproduced in you (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69). There is comfort in remembering that it is God, not we ourselves, who is the Judge of all our faults and victories. And "the life of His trusting disciples" is to be "a series of uninterrupted victories, not seen to be such here, but

recognized as such in the great hereafter" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 679).

Christ has "provided every facility, that man may possess completeness of character. . . . Man may stand conqueror of himself, conqueror of his own inclinations" (Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, p. 131). "'Be ye therefore perfect.' . . . *This command is a promise. . . . As the Son of man was perfect in His life, so His followers are to be perfect in their life*" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 311, italics supplied).

"If we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses." "As Christ lived the law in humanity, so we may do if we will take hold of the Strong for strength" (*ibid.*, p. 668). Through faith we can "quench all the fiery darts" of the enemy (Ephesians 6:16).

Without Christ we can do nothing. With Christ, we can do everything. "Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. *So it may be with us*" (*ibid.*, p. 123, italics supplied).

PERFECT FOR A PURPOSE

In an age of total depravity, God seeks a generation of the totally transformed. Only with perfect characters can people resist the deadly trials that precede the coming of Christ; and only with perfect characters can they adequately represent God's love and truth to the fallen in this world and the unfallen in worlds afar. By revealing the true glory of God in their daily lives, they can help God secure the eternal loyalty of the universe and the consent of sinners to be saved. God wants people to be perfect for a purpose.

Christ Is Waiting; All Heaven Is Waiting

And so we review the familiar lines from page 69 of *Christ's Object Lessons*: "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ

shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."

With these lines we should also quote another, likewise taken from *Christ's Object Lessons*: "All heaven is waiting for channels through which can be poured the holy oil to be a joy and blessing to human hearts" (page 419).

Christ is waiting for perfect people. All heaven is waiting for channels of blessing. These longings are intimately related. It is no private perfection that Christ is looking for in His saints; no irritable, cloistered, self-renouncing saintliness that fractures, like a fine crystal, the moment it is confronted with real life. The perfection that Christ seeks is one like His own—outgoing and self-forgetful in the service of others. A perfection that loves people because people need to be loved; that is patient because people need to be treated patiently; that heaps coals of fire on enemies because this is the way enemies are won to Christ.

It is essential to emphasize the positive aspects of character perfection. Christ was supremely a soul winner. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Today He "ever liveth to make intercession" (Hebrews 7:25). No one can reflect Christ's character perfectly unless he is an ear-

nest seeker after souls.

The basic ingredient in character perfection is love, and love cannot exist without expression. "Where there is no active labor for others, love wanes, and faith grows dim" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 825). If we are to increase in faith and love so that a special work of purification can be accomplished in us, we must not permit our love and faith to grow dim!

We are not surprised, then, to read that "the very work that is essential for every one who receives the present truth, is to aim at perfection of character, and thoroughness in winning souls to Christ" (Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, July 26, 1887). Perfection of character and thoroughness in winning souls are two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other.

Returning to *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 419: "It is the privilege of every soul to be a living channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is nothing that Christ desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and *character*" (italics supplied).

Every Christian who deserves the name is already to some extent a chan-

nel for the Holy Spirit. But "if all were willing to receive, all would become filled with His Spirit" (*ibid.*). Before we can be filled with Christ, we must be emptied of self, and here is where the struggle comes. "The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 43). But as the Christian fights this battle successfully (through the grace of God and his own diligent effort, choosing to talk and think of Jesus), he provides more and more room for the Spirit's power. "As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of *unselfish love and labor for others*—you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces of the Spirit will ripen in your character. Your faith will increase, your convictions deepen, your love be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely. . . . When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 68, 69, italics supplied).

Christ is waiting for the perfect reproduction of His character in His people, *because* He is waiting for channels who will perfectly manifest His character to the world! Christ desires a perfect generation through which He can witness with unprecedented persuasiveness

to souls as yet unreached and snatch them from the burning before it is too late. He wants perfection for a purpose.

Revelation 18 foretells an angel who will lighten the earth with his glory. Some seek the fulfillment of this symbol in a "quick work" that God will soon perform almost independent of His regular methods. They refer hopefully to a phrase about angels doing a work men might have done.

The angel of Revelation 18 does not typify an ordinary angel as much as it does the people of God who do the work he symbolizes. (The angels who bring the three angels' messages are fulfilled in the Millerite Adventists and the Seventh-day Adventists, and this other angel, too, will be fulfilled by people.) The glory with which he illuminates the world is not a literal light but a manifestation of the character of God (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 499). The most glorious thing about God is not the light which surrounds His person but the gracious love with which He forgives and restores sinners. The work which "angels will perform" is not *the* work that men might have performed, but a work they might have performed. God does not finish the work independently but through His church when His people surrender themselves unreservedly as instruments of His grace.

"The earth is to be 'lightened with his glory.' The Spirit of the Lord will so graciously bless *consecrated human instrumentalities* that men, women, and children will open their lips in praise and thanksgiving, filling the earth with the knowledge of God, and with His unsurpassed glory" (Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 984, italics supplied).

"When divine power is *combined with human effort*, the work will spread like fire in the stubble. . . . Angels will do a work [not *the* work] which men might have had the blessing of accomplishing" (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 118, italics supplied).

"God will do the work if we will *furnish Him the instruments*. . . . When we keep before our minds the urgency and importance of our work, the salvation of God will be revealed in a remarkable manner" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 9, p. 107, italics supplied).

"The work which the church has failed to do in a time of peace and prosperity, she [not the angels] will have to do in a terrible crisis under most discouraging, forbidding circumstances" (*ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 463).

"The great outpouring of the Spirit of God, which lightens the whole earth with His glory, will not come until we

have an *enlightened people*, that know by experience what it means to be laborers together with God. When we have entire, wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His Spirit without measure" (Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 253, italics supplied).

"The Spirit of the Almighty is moving upon men's hearts, and those who respond to its influence become witnesses for God and His truth. In many places consecrated men and women may be seen communicating to others the light that has made plain to them the way of salvation through Christ. And as *they continue* to let their light shine, as did those who were baptized with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, they receive *more and still more* of the Spirit's power. *Thus the earth is to be lightened with the glory of God*" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 54, italics supplied).

The character development that Christ is looking for will satisfy both of His longings—His longing for the reproduction of His character perfectly in His people, and His longing for soul-winning channels to demonstrate His Spirit and character to the world.

As His believers present the beauty of His character to their neighbors (that is, within their "sphere"), countless

honest-hearted seekers will be persuaded by this glorious evidence of God's character and will seek, through the grace of God and their own diligent effort, to emulate it. In this way God will raise up a people ready at last for His appearing.

Ready at Last

Ready at last.

The promise is sure. So many lines of evidence lead to this same conclusion. The Sabbath, the sanctuary, the third angel's message, the blotting out of sins, the letter to Laodicea, Minneapolis 1888, the seal of God, the great controversy, grain ripening in the field, the angel enlightening the earth—all proclaim the electric hope that we can have characters like Christ's!

"Be like Jesus, this my song!" It can happen. It must happen. It will happen.

God will have a people who in their own spheres are as pure and thoughtful and generous as Jesus is in His sphere. It is a practical perfection. Mothers will know how to guide their children without getting angry. Fathers will have perfect mastery over their passions and impatience. Youth will dare, courteously and kindly, to "stand for the right though the heavens fall" (*Education*, p. 57).

When it happens to us, we will not realize it. Such a rich taste of Jesus in our souls will have us panting and thirsting for more of Him. But others will realize it. What they see in us will leave them panting and thirsting for the righteousness of Christ to be seen in their lives.

“Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified

from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth. . . .

“When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 425).