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Be Ye, Indeed!

EDITOR'S CORNER

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This issue of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM deals with a well-known Pauline passage of Scripture, which reads: “Be not *conformed* to this world: but be ye *transformed* by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2).

When the 2007 Generation of Youth for Christ (formerly General Youth Conference) convenes in Minneapolis this December, its chosen theme is “BE,” which isolates that single verb so key to Romans 12:2. Stated another way, the theme will explore many nuances of making salvation a real and personal experience. It would be hard to imagine anything more important than that!

For those unfamiliar with GYC, it “is a grassroots Adventist movement organized and led by young adults from diverse backgrounds” (see [http://www.gycweb.org/about](http://www.gycweb.org/about)). It ought to be an immense source of joy among all our readers, not only that youthful *spiritual* energy is being expended by groups like this, but also that “young people are encouraged to experience revival and reformation and to work hand in hand with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in taking the three angels’ messages to the world in this generation” (ibid.).

After reading these exciting words, perhaps you, like me, are forcefully reminded of something that Ellen White wrote awhile back:

> With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world! How soon might the end come—the end of suffering and sorrow and sin! How soon, in place of a possession here, with its blight of sin and pain, our children might receive their inheritance where “the righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever;” where “the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick,” and “the voice of weeping shall be no more heard.” Psalm 37:29; Isaiah 33:24; 65:19.—*Education*, p. 271.

Bearing all of the foregoing in mind, we should understand that GYC’s leadership selects a
number of speakers to make presentations at its annual conventions. Many of these seminar presenters have high profiles. Others, though perhaps not as well known, still bring skills to a table that always guarantees an annual spiritual feast.

From recent lists of presenters we have included articles in this issue that all have something to do with the stated theme of “BE.” For example, in an excerpt from his recent provocative book, *Sure Salvation*, Philip Dunham, a new contributor, explores his topic from the standpoint of an experienced pastor/evangelist. Anchoring this issue is the peripatetic Samuel Pipim. As he explores several kinds of “BE-ness” in a two-part article, he essentially shows us just how practical and understandable sanctification (holiness) really is.

David Asscherick recently delivered a sermon at a GYC gathering at Andrews University. The impact was so powerful that we decided to include the entire sermon here. (We have endeavored to retain as much of its original flavor in writing as possible.) Bruce Ashton next contributes some thoughtful new insights on music in worship. Though new to Adventists Affirm, his experience as a career music educator makes him well qualified; his treatment is highly understandable even to nonmusicians like me.

In his usual engaging style, Dick O’Ffill offers practical pointers on how the Christian may be like Jesus. Along the way, watch for some sanctified humor to drive home very serious spiritual lessons indeed. Louis Torres covers the key ingredients needed for our salvation. He accomplishes this in terms easy to understand—a welcome approach anytime.

Christian psychologist Magna Parks, another new face to our journal, approaches the subject of secular psychology with red flags waving. Though the topic is a subtle one, her conclusions ought to resonate with GYC attendees as well as the rest of us. Neil Nedley, a medical doctor, next explains how Christians can improve their emotional intelligence: their EQ. In doing so, he takes a rather unfamiliar subject and gives it a nontechnical treatment that alludes to “cobwebs of cognitive distortion” only to make a key spiritual point at the end.

We round out this issue with an article by Phil Mills, another medical doctor and certainly no stranger to our readers. He deals with the essential tools needed in the collection of the godly leader. His comparison of Saul with David is especially thorough and highly effective.

As you read and reread these articles, dear friends, make a conscious effort to come away with the meat of each of these presentations. As you do so, your faith undoubtedly will be AFFIRM-ed in the process . . . and your mind will BE transformed. At least, that is our prayer for you.
What is the first step of salvation? How can a holy God accept a sinner? What must a person do in order to be right with God? How can we experience true peace, joy, and freedom in Christ?

Perhaps I should begin with a “pop quiz.” In college, it was a whole lot better to hear the teacher use this term than to face a full-blown, heavy-duty exam. So, don’t be nervous about this quiz. Besides, you won’t be graded.

After the establishment of the sanctuary services in the Old Testament, when one of God’s people became conscious of and convicted of some specific sin, the reason he went to the sanctuary with an offering was to be forgiven, cleansed, and made right with God. Now the quiz:

Did God instruct the individual to be the offering or to bring the offering?
Did God require that the offerer be “without blemish,” or that the offering be “without blemish”?
Whose life was taken to pay the price of God’s broken law, the sinner’s or the lamb’s?
Was it the blood of the sinner or the blood of the lamb that made atonement?
Was the sinner justified, cleansed, and reconciled with God on the basis of being the right kind of offerer or bringing the right kind of offering?

Now, please exchange papers. The answers will follow.

The very first time the phrase “without blemish” is used in the Bible is in Exodus 12:5, where God Himself speaks concerning instructions for the Passover offering. “‘Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.’”

Their deliverance from death depended on their offering. Their offering had to be “without blemish” because it represented Jesus Christ, “The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). They could not save themselves. They could not deliver themselves. Their only hope of deliverance and freedom and salvation from Egyptian bondage was dependence on an offering and the sprinkling of its blood. An offering directed by God. An offering “without blemish.”

This instruction concerning an offering antedated Exodus 25:8 and the institution of the sanctuary service. However, the second time the Bible uses the term “without blemish” is in a sanctuary context and specifically with setting aside the priests for their work. They were being consecrated, dedicated, and sanctified for their positions of ministry and
service. (Exodus 29:1.) And the prerequisite for all of this? An offering “without blemish.” (Is it not significant that Peter speaks of believers today as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation”? And our consecration, our dedication, our sanctification for our life and work and living and ministry comes about exactly the same as theirs, by an offering “without blemish.”) Forty-six more times in connection with the sanctuary services in the Old Testament and the instructions about how sinners could be made right with God through offering the right kind of offering, the Bible says that the offering had to be “without blemish.” This was God’s idea, God’s doing, God’s way of “reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The very last time this expression is used in the Bible is in 1 Peter 1:18, 19: “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.” From Moses to Peter, in fact from Cain to “the multitude which no one could number,” the focus for salvation is not upon the offerer but on the offering. The One “without blemish.”

**Let’s Revisit the Sanctuary**

In your mind In your mind’s eye, do you see the outer court, that altar of burnt offering, the laver, and the tabernacle itself, so wonderfully wrought, with the two apartments?

Do you see the priests (in their God-designed apparel) ministering at the altar of burnt offering or washing themselves at the laver so that, cleansed, they could minister in the first apartment of the sanctuary, the holy place?

Do you see the beauty, the color, the majesty, the awe, the solemnity of it all?

Do you see the priest examining the offering of one of God's people to make sure the offering was without blemish?

Do you see the repentant one, who, having been made conscious of his sins, places his hands on the head of the lamb, confesses his sins, and thus transfers his sins and his guilt to the perfect, totally innocent, unblemished offering?

Do you see that it was the lamb whose throat was cut, whose life was taken, whose blood was then taken into the sanctuary to make atonement and reconciliation?

From the place where they stood in the courtyard to present their offering to the Shekinah glory of God in the Most Holy Place was a distance of approximately 75 feet. Seventy-five feet to glory. Seventy-five feet into the very presence of God. Seventy-five feet from sinner to saint. Seventy-five feet from condemnation to justification, and being made right with God.

No sinner could walk into the holy place by himself, past the table of showbread and the seven candlesticks, past the altar of incense, to grab the veil that separated the holy place from the Most Holy, throw it back, brush into the Shekinah glory and say, “Here I am with my offering, God. It is I! It was three days ago that I sinned, but I thought I had better come before I did it again.” If he had made it that far, he would have been incinerated instantly by the all-consuming glory of God.

No, the only way to span those 75 feet into the presence of God was by means of an offering. An offering that God thought up. A substitute. A death. The blood of a “without-blemish” offering. Not my own sorry self as an offering, because He had said in Leviticus 22:19–21, “You shall offer of your own free will a male without blemish. . . . [But] whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf.... it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it.”

There are two phrases that are absolutely key to understanding the sanctuary and the good news that its services taught. The first phrase is the one we have been mentioning, "without blemish." The New King James translation says several times, "Be sure your offerings are without blemish." The New International Version says some 56 times, "without defect."

The second key phrase is “make atonement,” and this phrase is used nearly 70 times. If
you wanted to bridge that 75 feet into the presence of God, the bridge was called atonement, or at-one-ment.

The OT believer who understood these two phrases and who brought the God-appointed offering could leave the sanctuary singing, “Nothing between my soul and the Saviour.” He was clean, forgiven, right with God, and full of peace and joy and assurance. At one with God. No wonder the Psalmist David penned the words, “Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary” (Psalm 77:13).

**Saved Without the Blood**

The story is told that at the close of a Gospel service that an intelligent-looking man came to the minister and said, “I don’t see any necessity for the blood of Christ in my salvation. I can be saved without believing in His shed blood.”

The minister said, “OK, how do you propose to be saved?”

“By following His example”, the man said, and that’s enough.”

The minister added, “I suppose it is, and you propose to do just that in your life?”

“This is exactly what I am going to do, and I’m sure that this is enough.”

“Very well. I am sure that you want to begin right. The Word of God tells us how to do that. I read here concerning Christ, ‘Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.’ I suppose that you can say that of yourself, too?”

The man became visibly embarrassed. “Well,” he said, “I cannot say that exactly. I have sometimes sinned.” (What an understatement!)

“In that case you do not need an Example, but a Saviour; and the only way of salvation is by His shed blood.”

There is no question that we need an example. And there is no question that Jesus Christ is the Divine Exemplar. I personally long to be like Him, to be pure like Him, to hate sin like He hates sin, to please the Father like He always pleased the Father, to love like He loved. May the Holy Spirit create a hunger and thirst in each of us to reflect His life and to walk in His steps.

But even more than an example we need a Saviour. There are three sentences from a Buddhist catechism that second the hopelessness and the helplessness of the man in the story we just looked at. “No one can be redeemed by another. No God and no saint is able to shield a man from the consequences of his evil doings. Every one of us must become his own redeemer.”

If my atonement is dependent on my copying the example of Christ the sinless One, by myself; if I have to execute my own redemption; and if I have to work out my own salvation so that I can present all of this to God as my offering to merit eternal life, I would of all men be most miserable.

Yes, we need an example, but more than anything else we need a Saviour, a Substitute, an Offering without blemish that will be perfectly acceptable to the Father on our behalf.

Ellen White wrote, “In the heavenly courts there will be no song sung, ‘To me that loved myself, and washed myself, redeemed myself, unto me be glory and honor, blessing and praise.’””1 “We can do nothing, absolutely nothing, to commend ourselves to divine favor. We must not trust at all to ourselves nor to our good works; but when as erring, sinful beings we come to Christ, we may find rest in His love. God will accept every one that comes to Him trusting wholly in the merits of a crucified Saviour.”2

The book of Revelation mentions only two songs: the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. It pictures all the inhabitants of Heaven, and all of the redeemed are singing the same song: “You are worthy . . . for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your
blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and
priests to our God. . . . Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain to receive power and riches and
wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:9, 10, 12).

Behold your offering to God: “The church history upon the earth and the church
redeemed in Heaven all center around the cross of Calvary.” In order to be right with
God, accepted of God, reconciled, redeemed, saved, the Old Testament believer had to
bring an offering. The plan of salvation in the New Testament is not one whit different
from the plan of salvation in the Old. God requires an offering, one without blemish. You
are accepted on the basis of a “without-blemish” offering. This means that today my
offering must either consist of myself and my efforts and my attempts to copy the example
of Christ, and my endeavors to work out my own salvation . . . or . . . the offering of Jesus
Christ which the Father has provided Who knew that we could never in all the world
provide the offering ourselves.

**A Crushing Test of Faith**

More than 500 years before the sanctuary services were instituted, God laid upon
Abraham an extremely heavy test, the offering of his son Isaac. You know, his
only-begotten son, the one who was to be the means of fulfillment of the covenant
blessings. And yet, out of the midst of this almost crushing test of faith, came one of the
most beautiful revelations of the Gospel and the plan of salvation revealed in Old
Testament times. For at the very last moment, even as his arm was raised to kill his son,
came the voice from heaven, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for
now I know that you fear God. . . . Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there
behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram,
and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of
the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of the Lord it
shall be provided” (Genesis 22:11–14).

In His Son, God has provided an “instead of” Offering. An “in place of” Offering. An “on
our behalf of” Offering. This means that we are “accepted in the Beloved.” And out of His
incomprehensible love, God provided an Offering, the acceptance of which on our part
would mean redemption, reconciliation, and eternal life.

So many today have not caught the beauty of this simple truth that brings such relief, and
peace and joy and freedom in Christ. Their obedience, tithing, and healthful living are
more to propitiate the Deity, to please God, to get His favor, to win His approval. “Lord,
here is my vegetarianism, and I hope You like it.” “Lord, here is my offering to You: no
TV in my home, and when You come I trust You will remember that I don’t have one.”
“Lord, here is my offering to You: There is no electricity here where I live, which really
makes me unworldly; and I hope You see this.”

Doing these things may be just fine, but the only offering to God that will bring salvation is
the Lamb of God, the One He provided to Abraham who was the father of all who believe.
Our gracious Heavenly Father has provided the perfect Offering, the one “without
blemish”: His Son! There’s no other offering like the One He has provided.

Does this mean that my works don’t count? Does this mean that my spiritual growth and
sanctification mean nothing? Isn’t my obedience worth anything? Doesn’t my striving to
work out my salvation make any difference to God?

Absolutely, it does. It does as the fruit of your salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, the
Offering of God’s Own providing. But it is not the root. The things I do in loving
obedience to Him, the life I live, the growth I attain (because of the work of the Holy
Spirit) is the fruit of the loving, saving Offering that God has provided for my salvation.
Someone has written, “I cannot work my soul to save; this work the Lord has done. But I
will work like any slave for love of God’s dear Son.”

Someone may object, “Paul wrote that we’re to present our bodies ‘a living sacrifice, holy,
acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service’ (Romans 12:1). Doesn’t this say that
we’re supposed to be the offering”?

As the army slogan said, “Be all that you can be,” and by the grace of God let this be a
gratitude offering, a thank offering, a praise offering to God for the offering He has provided. But we can bring only one sin Offering, reconciliation Offering, atonement Offering that is holy and without blemish, without defect, without one flaw—the Lamb of God.

It is of the utmost importance to remember this truth of how the people in Old Testament times got right with God. How they got reconciled, forgiven, accepted, redeemed. And this happened not by being the offering but by bringing the offering. It is the same today!

If I present my progress, my growth, my level of sanctification, my obedience, or whatever, as an offering to God, expecting Him to accept me on the basis of what I have done, what I am, or what I have achieved, there would be a huge question about what God would think of me. But if I present as my offering to God the “instead of Offering,” the “in place of Offering,” the substitutionary Offering—the Lamb of God—there will be no question about what He thinks of that Offering made on my behalf. This is why Ellen White wrote: “We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute. Ye are accepted in the Beloved.” And there is no question about what He thinks of His precious Son.

I don’t know if the following story is true, but I like it. On a little church in Germany stands a stone lamb with an interesting history. When some workmen were building the roof, one of them slipped off the roof and fell to the ground. His friends got down as quickly as they could, expecting to see him dead, but he was virtually unhurt. A lamb was grazing below when the workman fell, and he landed right on the lamb, absolutely crushing it in the process. The man was so thankful that he chose to carve a stone lamb as a memorial, since he owed his life to that lamb. As Christians, we know what it is to have a Lamb die to save us!

NOTES

1 Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 456.
2 Selected Messages bk. 1, pp. 353, 354; emphasis supplied.
3 Testimonies to Ministers, p. 43.
4 Selected Messages bk. 2, pp. 32, 33.
We are accustomed to hearing the Biblical phrases “Go ye . . .” and “Do ye.” But are we equally familiar with the “Be ye” imperatives? God doesn’t just command us to “go” and “do,” but also bids us to “be!”

A quick search of the King James Version Bible will reveal many “Be ye” passages—including those which say, “Be ye . . . strong, very courageous, saved, clean, glad, perfect, wise, ready, transformed, holy, merciful, followers of God, steadfast, reconciled to God, kind one to another, thankful, patient, sober,” and others.

The fact that there are so many “Be ye” references could suggest that what we are sometimes is more important than what we do. And yet, we tend to focus more on the latter. We even define our identities in terms of “Go ye” and “Do ye” categories, instead of “Be ye” terms.

Let me illustrate my point.

Suppose at a church meeting or a GYC gathering you’re asked to introduce yourself to someone you don’t know, what would you say? When I posed this question to different groups of young people, almost each of them mentioned four major things about themselves, namely, their . . .

1. Name—Smith, Jane, Kofi, etc.
2. Place of Origin/Residence—California, Thailand, Sweden, Zimbabwe, etc.
3. Occupation—student, doctor, homemaker, pastor, architect, teacher, etc.
4. Hobbies or Likes—music, soccer, apples, reading, etc.

Chances are, we also would give similar answers to describe ourselves. Observe, however, from the responses, that apart from our names and hobbies, the most we are likely to say about who we are tends to be in terms of our nationalities (“I am Ghanaian, American, Mexican, Chinese, etc.”), or in terms of our occupations (“I am a student, doctor, etc.”).

In other words, our identity tends to be expressed in “Go ye” and “Do ye” terms—i.e., where we come from and what we do—instead of in “Be ye” categories, explaining what we actually are. Even when we use the “Be ye” terms to describe ourselves as Christians, often one important aspect of our identity is missing from the list.
Missing "Be"

Let’s say that at the same church or GYC gathering where you were asked to introduce yourself, you are also asked to select one adjective to describe yourself. What word do you think would best describe who you are?

Here is a sampling of the wide variety of words that my students gave me as fitting self-descriptions: kind, cheerful, happy, understanding, compassionate, reasonable, smart, crazy, lazy, easygoing, frank, bold, unique, free, pensive, profound, introvert, etc.

It is an interesting observation that the positive words in our self-descriptive adjectives tend to include the ones in the Biblical “Be ye” imperatives, whereas the negative ones are the direct opposites.

More telling is the fact that when we describe ourselves by certain positive qualities, one description is often conspicuously absent; it is the word “holy.”

Think for a moment: When was the last time you heard someone describe himself or herself as “holy”? “Holy” is the adjective we apply to the “Bible,” “Lord’s Supper,” “Sabbath,” “the night Christ was born,” and even a tourism attraction to some Middle Eastern “land.” But few would feel comfortable applying the word to themselves.

Yet the Bible calls upon us: “Be ye holy” (1 Peter 1:15, 16).

Unknown "Be"

The Biblical teaching about holiness has received either no press or bad press today. We either do not talk about it, or if we do at all, our discussion of the subject is confusing, if not completely mistaken. 2

Of the many self-help Christian books, “How To Be Holy” is conspicuously absent from the list of best sellers.

To the unconverted, the term holy conjures up images of monks or nuns languishing in some gloomy, killjoy monasteries. For others, the call to holiness evokes pictures of a vindictive celestial being who is harsh, arbitrary, and ready to punish his earthly subjects for the slightest infraction of his moral laws. Thus, today’s hedonistic and relativistic culture does not want anyone to talk about holiness.

Besides the unconverted, some Christians also detest the Biblical teaching of holiness, believing that this teaching nullifies their assurance of being saved or justified by grace. To such, holiness conjures up images of either weird or straitlaced people with outdated clothing and hairstyles, or even people with judgmental attitudes to all who don’t measure up to their standards. In this view, holiness is synonymous with formalism (a mere outward conformity to rules), or even with perfectionism or legalism (doing things to earn God’s favor).

Regrettably, even within our own ranks, there are some Seventh-day Adventists who also loathe the Biblical doctrine of holiness. In the minds of “liberal” Adventists (which is the new label for old-fashioned, backslidden Adventists), the Biblical teaching about holiness is reminiscent of “our Victorian heritage, which has been well preserved through the work of Ellen G. White.” To such, anyone who dares to talk about holiness is automatically tuned out or dismissed as a “fundamentalist,” a “legalist,” or even a “Pharisee.”

Misunderstood "Be"

As a result of misunderstandings on this important Biblical teaching of holiness, many well-meaning Adventists today are confused about the subject. This observation is always borne out in the results of the following series of questions I posed to several Adventist groups —adults and young people:
How many of you believe that holiness is possible in our sinful world? Can weak, sinful human beings, fraught with inherited and cultivated tendencies to sin, actually be holy in today's world?

The response to the above question was overwhelmingly affirmative. Almost all in the audience indicated that they believed holiness is possible. But then, when I sharpened the question by way of application, the responses were disappointing. I asked:

Are you holy?

Notice that the question is not, “Do you believe in holiness?” Neither is it, “Do you hope to be holy one day?” The issue is of far greater import than what a person thinks or feels about holiness, or even whether the Bible speaks about holy men and women of old. The question is: Are you yourself holy, or are you not? Are you holy this very moment? If you think you are holy right now, raise your hand.

Typically, I see only very few hands. When I probe further into why the hesitancy of my audiences in responding affirmatively to the specific questions, three types of groups soon emerge. I refer to them as: (1) “Boasting Be”—those who make presumptuous claims about their holiness; (2) “Skeptical Be”—those who essentially deny that God expects His people to be holy today; and (3) “Uncertain Be”—those who are not sure how to answer.

The first two views are mistaken, and the last is unfortunate. In the remainder of this article, I’ll briefly respond to these three “Be’s” about holiness.

Boasting "Be"

The first major mistake we make about holiness is to boast about having attained it. Contrary to this mistaken view, the Bible teaches that true Christians will never make boastful claims of their own holiness, perfection, or sinlessness. When we fully understand the spiritual nature of God’s moral law, we shall discover our true sinful condition—how far we fall short of God’s expectation—and how much we must daily repent and ask God for help.

The apostle John therefore wrote: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him [God] a liar, and His Word is not in us” (1 John 1:8, 10).

Ellen White also warned that it is never safe for us to boastfully claim holiness: “Let those who feel inclined to make a high profession of holiness, look into the mirror of God’s law, which discovers to us the defects of our character. Those who see the far-reaching claims of the law of God, those who realize that it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, will not presume to make the boast of sinlessness, and venture to declare, ‘I am perfect, I am holy.’ ‘If we,’ John says, not separating himself from his brethren, ‘say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.’ ‘If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.’ ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”3 Again she wrote: “No one who has an appreciation of the verity of the law of God will claim an exalted character for himself. Our true position, and the only one in which there is any safety, is that of repentance and confession of sins before God. . . . When the conflict of life is ended, when the armor is laid off at the feet of Jesus, when the saints of God are glorified, then and then only will it be safe to claim that we are saved and sinless. True sanctification will not lead any human being to pronounce himself holy, sinless, and perfect. Let the Lord proclaim the truth of your character.”

These statements are not to question our assurance of salvation— which is grounded in the merits of Christ alone. Rather, they are warnings against the complacent notion of “once saved, always saved.” The closer you get to know the Lord, the more you see your sinfulness. When the prophet Isaiah saw the glory of God, he exclaimed: “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).
A true Christian always recognizes that “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). This is why Ellen White explains that, “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.”

Thus, there is no roam at any time for a Christian to boast of his perfection or sinlessness. If there was anyone who could make the boastful claim of holiness or perfection, it should have been the apostle Paul. After all, in 2 Corinthians 12, we are told how he was given the unique privilege of being caught up to see and hear things in the third Heaven. He himself wrote about living a holy, unblamable, and perfect life (1 Thessalonians 2:10). And yet, in Philippians 3:12 this exalted apostle confessed that he had not attained perfection: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12).

Writes Ellen G. White: “The attitude of Paul is the attitude to be taken by every one of the followers of Christ; for we are ever to be urging our way, striving lawfully for the crown of immortality. Not one may claim to be perfect. Let the recording angels write the history of the holy struggles and conflicts of the people of God, let them record their prayers and tears; but let not God be dishonored by the proclamation from human lips, declaring, ‘I am sinless. I am holy.’ Sanctified lips will never give utterance to such presumptuous words. Paul had been caught up to the third Heaven, and had seen and heard things that could not be uttered, and yet his modest statement is, ‘Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after.’” Let the angels of Heaven write of Paul’s victories in fighting the good fight of faith. Let Heaven rejoice in his steadfast tread heavenward, keeping the prize in view for which he counts every other consideration as dross. Let the angels of Heaven rejoice to tell his triumphs, but let Paul utter no vain praise of himself in making a boast of his attainments.

In fact, the clearest evidence that a person is not holy or perfect is when he/she boastfully makes such a claim. Writes Job: “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me; if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life” (Job 9:20, 21).

**Skeptical "Be"**

The second mistaken view of holiness is the denial of God’s demand for His people to be holy. Contrary to such teaching, the Bible clearly teaches that God expects His people to be holy and sanctified, or perfect. Let me share with you some pertinent Scriptural passages:

1. *Holiness is necessary for salvation.* "Without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).
2. *Holiness is God’s will for our lives.* "This is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 5:3).
3. *Holiness is a command from the Lord.* “As He Which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, ’Be ye holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15, 16); “Be ye perfect, even as your Father Which is in Heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).
4. *Jesus died so that we can be holy.* “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 7:1).
   "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it" (Ephesians 5:25, 26); “He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).
5. *Holiness or sanctification simply means godliness, or revealing a Christlike character in a sinful world.* Writes the apostle Paul: “For it is God Who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe” (Philippians 2:13–15, NIV).
   Notice that to live a holy life in a sinful world is to be “blameless and pure,” and “without fault in a crooked and depraved generation.” It is shining like stars amidst the moral darkness around us.
6. *Holiness is the preparation we need for Christ’s Second Coming.* "The grace of God that brings
salvation... teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very Own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:11–14, NIV).

7. Holiness will polarize people in the last days. The book of Revelation also indicates that before the Second Coming of Christ, there will be a crisis, a final test that will polarize or divide the world into two camps: the righteous and wicked, the godly and ungodly, the holy and unholy. At the end of that final or eschatological test, Jesus will declare: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Revelation 22:11).

The end-time polarization or division in the world and in the church will be over holiness. This polarization or shaking has already begun in the church. Seventh-day Adventists call it a shaking or sifting process.

- Whereas there is a revival of primitive faith and godliness in one group, in the other there is worldliness.
- While there is heartfelt repentance and consecration in one, in the other there is entertainment and frivolity.
- Whereas one group seeks to uphold the teachings of God’s Word for its faith and practice, the other patterns its beliefs and lifestyle after the world’s.
- And while in one there is genuine godliness evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit, the other merely has “a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5).

This polarization between the two camps is becoming clearer and wider with each passing day. Whereas in the past things were fuzzy, today the gap between truth and error, between godliness and worldliness, between light and darkness, is becoming very clear for all to see. Each time you hear that there is polarization or division in the church, it simply evidences the fact that the shaking or sifting is going on. And each one of us will have to choose to belong to one group or the other. There is no neutrality.

Notice how Ellen White describes the two groups in The Great Controversy:

The power of godliness has well-nigh departed from many of the churches. Picnics, church theatricals, church fairs, fine houses, personal display, have banished thoughts of God. Lands and goods and worldly occupations engross the mind, and things of eternal interest receive hardly a passing notice.7

But observe the next few sentences:

Notwithstanding the widespread declension of faith and piety, there are true followers of Christ in these [popular] churches. Before the final visitation of God’s judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times.8

It is therefore encouraging that amidst the widespread worldliness sweeping our churches today, there is also a quest for godliness. Many in our churches and many young people (such as those who gather yearly at GYC meetings) are seeking, by God’s grace, the revival of primitive godliness that will characterize God’s end-time people.

**Uncertain "Be"**

You may recall my observation that very few hands go up whenever I ask the pointed question: “Are you yourself holy, or are you not? Are you holy this very moment?” Besides the two mistaken reasons for the
hesitancy in responding to this question, the ultimate reason is that many are simply not sure how to answer this type of question.

But we don’t have to be uncertain about the Biblical teaching of holiness. We have assurance from the Word of God that, regardless of what our past may have been, God can take us sinful human beings—the dishonest, immoral, proud, fearful, violent, intemperate, and wild—and transform us so completely that we can actually reflect the character of a holy God! God can actually make and keep us clean or pure (Jude 24, 25; Philippians 2:13–15)! This is what holiness is all about.

The unique process by which sinners are transformed into saints is called sanctification; the result of this process is holiness; and the divine Agent responsible for this miraculous operation is called the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:3–5). He can do it because He Himself is holy!

Christian holiness is therefore the Biblical teaching that, within the limitations of our humanity, God’s sanctifying grace is able to enable us to overcome both our hereditary and cultivated tendencies to sin, and thus to live victorious Christian lives through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This is good news!

This brief background should make us want to study some more about Biblical holiness without being frightened about the term. In part 2 of this article, we shall provide Biblical answers to the “uncertain be,” by exploring important aspects of the “forgotten be.”

NOTES

1 GYC, Generation of Youth for Christ (formerly known as General Youth Conference), is a grassroots Adventist movement initiated and led by young people (see www.gycweb.org).
3 The Signs of the Times, May 23, 1895; emphasis mine.
4 The Signs of the Times, May 16, 1895; emphasis mine.
5 Steps to Christ, p. 64.
6 The Signs of the Times, May 23, 1895; emphasis mine.
7 The Great Controversy, pp. 463, 464.
8 Ibid., p. 464.
In the previous article, we discussed holiness as a forgotten Christian identity. We looked at the three groups that often emerge in discussions about holiness. I refer to them as: (1) “Boasting Be” — those who make presumptuous claims about their holiness; (2) “Skeptical Be” — those who essentially deny that God expects His people to be holy today; and (3) “Uncertain Be” — those who are not sure how to answer.

In this follow-up article, we shall provide some Biblical answers to the “Uncertain Be.” In this way, we shall be revealing the identity of the “Forgotten Be.”

A Dynamic "Be"

Be-ing holy is not static or stagnant. It is dynamic. Thus, the Bible uses the imagery of a “walk” to emphasize this spiritual motion. The Christian life is a movement towards a particular goal. It is a journey towards a particular destination. That destination or goal is to be Christlike. It means reflecting Christ’s life of love and humility, courage and self-control, and His compassion and purity.

In other words, the Christian walk or Christian life is a process of spiritual growth. The person who is born again as a child of God does not remain a baby. As he is nourished by the Word of God, the child grows day by day until he matures into the full stature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian experience is never flat or at a plateau. Either you are growing up or growing down. If you are not growing, you are regressing. Other expressions and imageries used in the New Testament for this Christian walk are: “following after righteousness” (1 Timothy 6:11), being “transformed” (Romans 12:2), “perfecting holiness” (2 Corinthians 7:1), “growing up . . . into the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:15), “pressing toward the mark” (Philippians 3:12–15), being “built up in Christ” (Colossians 2:7), becoming “complete in all the will of God” (Colossians 4:12), fighting “the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12; cf. v. 11), “partaking of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), and “growing in grace” (2 Peter 3:18).

In short, the Christian walk refers to living a holy or sanctified life. This walk of holiness is the only kind of life that fits a person for Heaven. Thus, we find in the Old Testament that “Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” (Genesis 5:24).
Decoded "Be"

The noun *holiness*, together with the adjective *holy* and the verb *sanctify* (the word “holify” does not exist in English), belong to a single word group in Hebrew and Greek. In both Biblical languages the words carry the meaning of *setting something apart, either because it has extraordinary value, or because God intends it for some extraordinarily special purpose*. Thus, although scholars sometimes make a distinction between sanctification (the process of becoming holy) and holiness (the state of being sanctified), the two terms may be viewed as functional equivalents.²

When Scripture repeatedly emphasizes holiness as an attribute of God (Leviticus 19:2; Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8), it means that “God is pure and morally perfect, with a purity beyond any conception that we have. He is ‘set apart’ in the sense that He is removed from sin or evil; He is morally flawless. Therefore, He is the ultimate, perfect standard of right and wrong.”³

Things and people are not holy in themselves except as they are associated with, or consecrated to the service of, the Holy God. For example, the *seventh-day Sabbath* is a holy day because it is set aside by God (Genesis 2:1–3); *a place* is considered holy because it manifests God’s presence (Exodus 3:5); the *tithe* is holy money because it belongs to God (Leviticus 27:30–33; Malachi 3:8–10); the *tabernacle or Temple* was holy because God’s glory was revealed there (Exodus 28:29; 2 Chronicles 35:5); and its *priests* (Exodus 29; Leviticus 8; Hebrews 5:1, 4), *sacrifices* (Exodus 29:33), *ceremonial materials* (30:25; Numbers 5:17), and *utensils* (1 Kings 8:4) were holy because they were all consecrated to God’s service.

As far as human beings are concerned, God’s people are called the “holy ones” or “saints” because they have separated themselves from the world and its ways to a life of service and obedience to God (Exodus 19:6; Leviticus 20:24; 1 Peter 2:9; Colossians 3:12).

Twin "Be"

How can a drunkard, a liar, prostitute, adulterer, proud, bad-tempered individual become holy? How does a sinner become holy? And how does he/she remain holy? Twins called justification and sanctification provide the answer.

**Justified “Be.”** You become holy, the very moment the Holy Spirit leads you to repent of your sins and to surrender your life to Jesus Christ. At that very instant, your sins are forgiven, and you are saved from sin’s guilt. You are declared “not guilty,” not because you are innocent (in the sense of being “not guilty as charged”), but because you have been pardoned. Christ’s perfect and blameless life is credited to your account. No longer condemned to die, you are “justified” by God’s grace and restored to favor with God. Justification cannot be earned—it is a free gift (Romans 5:16) that can only be received by faith.

In justifying the sinner God acquits him, declares him to be righteous, *regards* him as righteous, and proceeds to *treat* him as a righteous man. Justification is the act of acquittal and the accompanying declaration that a state of righteousness exists. Charges of wrongdoing are cancelled, and the sinner, now justified, is brought into a right relationship with God that Paul describes as being at “peace with God” (Romans 5:1).⁴

**Sanctified “Be.”** But the Holy Spirit does more than just saving you from your past sin. He also saves you from the power or dominion of sin. He begins another exciting work of keeping you day by day from falling into sin. The process is called sanctification, and the purpose is to make us “partakers of holiness” (Hebrews 12:10; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:2).

Justification and sanctification—two processes in salvation—are the means by which a person becomes holy and is kept holy. A person *becomes* holy through justification, and he *remains* holy through sanctification. Both processes in salvation are the operations of the Holy Spirit in
the life of a person. Justification describes the Spirit’s work for us, and sanctification is His work in us.

Note that while the terms justification and sanctification describe two different operations of the Spirit, the two are always together. Responding to those who were in the habit of speaking loftily about justification at the expense of sanctification, one Christian scholar wrote poignantly in 1879:

I fear it is sometimes forgotten that God has married together justification and sanctification. They are distinct and different things, beyond question, but one is never found without the other. All justified people are sanctified, and all sanctified are justified. What God has joined together let no man dare to put asunder. Tell me not of your justification, unless you have also some marks of sanctification. Boast not of Christ’s work for you, unless you can show us the Spirit’s work in you. Think not that Christ and the Spirit can ever be divided.5

There never comes a time when a person can claim he or she has arrived. While the Christian’s salvation is assured (through the justifying grace of Christ), and while the believer’s salvation is being sustained (through the sanctifying grace of Christ), there is a future aspect of salvation—when our Lord and Saviour will come and save us from this world (an act that we may call the glorifying grace of Christ).

Here’s how the apostle Paul describes these three tenses of salvation through Christ: “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in Whom we trust that He will yet deliver us” (2 Corinthians 1:10). Salvation has three tenses: past, present, and future.

In short, “holiness is the goal of our redemption. As Christ died in order that we may be justified, so we are justified in order that we may be sanctified and made holy.”6

Schooling "Be"

Another way we may think of holiness is as a school from which we never graduate. Holiness is an educational process designed by God to rebuild, reshape, and refine us progressively into conformity with His Own character.

Like every good school, we need some good teachers, textbooks, standards, goals, companions, helpers, and role models in our school of holiness.

- Our teachers in this school of holiness are the Holy Trinity; because God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are holy. They can make us holy if we maintain a right relationship with Them.
- Our textbook is the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15), not some human books, opinions, junk magazines, sleazy magazines, etc. (we must preach and study from the Word, not Internet sermons, jokes, etc.).
- Our standard is the holy law (Romans 7:12), not comparing ourselves to others.
- Our goal for this education is holy service (Romans 12:1, 2; Luke 1:74, 75); our professions, occupations, and talents are all for holy service.
- Our helpers and companions are the holy angels (Revelation 14:10), and
- Our Role Model is Jesus Christ, "the Holy One” (Acts 3:14; cf. 4:30; Mark 1:24; 1 Peter 2:21–23).

In God’s school of holiness, everything we experience in life—its joys and sorrows, its fulfillments and disappointments, its hopes and despair—are all part of God’s curriculum to mold our character into conformity with the moral image of our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:5–11; Romans 8:28–39).

Therefore, when a Christian is described as holy, it means that he has enrolled in a school that is making him day by day to be Christlike. Instead of being absorbed with self, a holy person
seeks an attitude and lifestyle that imitates Jesus.

Walking "Be"

We may also describe holiness as a spiritual walk using two legs: Spirituality and Ethics. Without one of these legs, a person either limps in his spiritual walk or is crippled.

On the one hand, *spirituality* (or Christian piety) concerns itself with the things that encourage and enhance the development of a meaningful *relationship with Christ*. It includes such inward aspects of the Christian life as prayer, meditation, fasting, music, worship, devotional study of Scriptures, simplicity in life, etc.

*Ethics* (or Christian lifestyle), on the other hand, deals with the outward aspects of the Christian life that show a *commitment to Christ*. It concerns itself with delineating God’s moral standards, determining His revealed will, and the development and display of such divine qualities as truthfulness, honesty, integrity, self-control, compassion, purity, etc.

While ethics deals with the *what* of holiness, spirituality addresses the *how* of holiness. Ethics is *prescriptive*, concerning itself with the basis upon which human decisions and actions are judged as morally right or morally wrong. Spirituality is *descriptive*, exploring how to live a morally upright life in a sinful world.

Another way of saying this is that ethics is *lovingly doing God's will*. Spirituality is *appropriating God's provision* to restore us to harmony with Him; it is learning how to obey. Using the analogy of a tree, spirituality is sinking your roots down into the soil and *growing deep*; ethics is *growing tall*.

Without ethics, spirituality is corrupted into antinomianism, insensitivity, or a privatized religion that is more concerned with experiencing God’s presence than keeping His law. And without spirituality, ethics is corrupted into formalism, legalism, and pharisaical pride.

Crooked "Be"

In the ongoing civil war (or polarization) within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, each of the warring factions—the “liberal left” and the “independent right”—tends to emphasize one of these two aspects of holiness at the expense of the other.

On the one hand, the “liberal left” tends to emphasize “spirituality” (the code word is “relationship”). If you love Jesus you can drink alcohol, eat pork, shrimp, cockroaches, and other unclean things. Or they’ll say that if you have a “relationship” with Christ, you can wear jewelry and immodest clothing, go to nightclubs, and play rock music—even in the church. *This is spirituality without standards.*

In actual fact, such a “relationship” with Jesus is nothing more than a fuzzy, New Age, mystical, or psychic concept of spirituality. Even Madonna claims to be spiritual (she prays before going on the stage). Remember that Satan also has a relationship with Christ—he hates Christ! His “relationship” with Christ is adversarial. It is a relationship that does not serve God. It is a dead faith (James 2:19, 20).

So merely saying “I am spiritual” or “I have a relationship with Christ” or even to have “faith/belief in God” is not enough. The real issue is, What kind of relationship? The evidence of a true relationship with Christ is *commitment or loyalty* to Him.

On the other hand, the “independent right” tends to focus on “ethics” (the watchword is “standards”). These judge the quality of people’s Christianity by what they wear, eat, or do. For example, some think that anyone who does not go to church on the Sabbath or who is not a vegetarian or vegan is going to Hell. They believe so much in the standards that they give the impression that we are saved by diet or the day of worship, etc.

Such an unbalanced belief leads some to think that to be holy means to be mean-spirited and...
moody. The “ethics” or “standards” of such people is nothing more than self-righteous, legalistic, law keeping. They forget that we are not saved by diet, and that though the Israelites even ate heavenly vegan food (manna), not all of them made it to Canaan. Theirs is standards without spirituality.

**Upright "Be"**

True Bible-believing Adventists walk on both legs of holiness. They reject the unbalanced focuses of the liberal left and the independent right. Instead, as theological conservatives, they insist that the harmony between true spirituality and ethics should never be disturbed. (I say “conservatives” because the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a *theologically* conservative Protestant denomination. As such, we believe in the full inspiration, reliability, and trustworthiness of Scripture, virgin birth, miracles, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, ascension, heavenly ministry, and literal Second Coming of Christ—Christian doctrines that theological liberals deny.)

Bible-believing Adventists understand that true Biblical holiness is a steady walk using spirituality and ethics as its two legs, and is incapacitated the moment either leg is broken. They worship on the Sabbath, avoid unclean and harmful foods, are vegetarians and vegans, dress modestly, etc. They do so, not in order to earn their salvation by these works; instead they adopt and uphold these Biblical standards as evidence or fruit of their commitment to Christ. *It is spirituality with ethics.*

**Perfect "Be"**

Thus far, we have been explaining the meaning of the Christian walk by using different terms: holiness or sanctification. There is one final “Be ye” term we must briefly discuss. It is the word “perfection.”

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “Be ye perfect, even as your Father Which is in Heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). But what does it mean to be perfect?

Perfection simply means walking in the fear of God by living uprightly and avoiding evil. Throughout Bible times, God always expected those who worshipped Him to maintain this kind of walk with Him. If the person maintained such a steady walk with the Lord, the Bible describes that person as *perfect.*

For example, in Genesis 6:8, 9 we read: “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was a just and perfect [man] in his generations, and Noah walked with God.”

Observe that the reason why Noah was considered a just and perfect man was because he “walked with God.” Having found grace in the sight of the Lord (v. 8), he walked in the fear of the Lord.

Another example we can use is Abraham. In Genesis 17:1 we read: “And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me and be thou perfect.”

Notice once again that Christian perfection is linked with a steady “walk with God.” Being perfect does not mean that a person has necessarily arrived at the point of full maturity. Rather, it simply means that the individual, by the grace of God, has made a commitment to the Lord, and therefore is living daily up to the light God has revealed to him or her.

One noble example of a perfect man is Job. The Bible explains that the reason God considered Job to be “a perfect man” was because he walked in the fear of God, living an upright life and eschewing evil. He was willing to follow God no matter what (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3).

**Growing "Be"**

Rooted in Christ, we must grow like the small seed that germinates from the soil. When it...
begins to grow, there is first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. As long as the plant is responding to all the resources available for its development, it is considered perfect at each stage of its growth. Thus it is with the Christian life. Ellen White explains:

We cannot expect instantaneous sanctification, but we must grow like the grain, as represented by Christ—first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain—and thus perfect a Christian character. We must become intelligent and earnest to know what our duty is and then walk in obedience to God’s holy will.8

The growth of Christian character is gradual—like the advancement of the natural plant through its various stages of development. But nevertheless the progress is continual. As in nature, so it is in grace, the plant must either grow or die. Day by day the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God almost imperceptibly leads those who love the ways of truth toward the perfection of righteousness, till finally the soul is ripe for the harvest, the lifework is ended, God gathers in His grain. There is no period in the Christian life when there is no more to learn, no higher attainments to reach. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, then the ripening and the harvest; for when the fruit is perfect, it is ready for the sickle.9

And so, when the Bible describes a person as perfect, it does not mean that the person has arrived at a stage in his life where he cannot grow any further. Rather, it simply means that that individual walks in the fear of the Lord, living by all the light he knows. That person’s love for the Lord leads him to love righteousness and eschew evil. Such a person will serve God regardless of the trials that will come his way—whether it is loss, illness, or death.

**Let's "Be"**

**Be**-ing holy is not only our forgotten identity as Christians, for the Bible also invites us to “be holy” today because this is the preparation we need to meet our loving Lord. “Without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14, NIV):

Without holiness on Earth we shall never be prepared to enjoy Heaven. Heaven is a holy place. The Lord of Heaven is a holy Being. The angels are holy creatures. Holiness is written on everything in Heaven. . . . How shall we ever be at home and happy in Heaven if we die [permit me to add “live”] unholy?10

In view of the holy home God is preparing for us, we are invited to “be holy.” “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14; cf. Titus 2:11–14).

Through the justifying and sanctifying grace of God, we can experience His glory. We are assured: “We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). In view of these facts, let’s all strive to be! For being holy is what it means to be Christlike. **Be**-ing is our Christian identity. Let’s claim it as part of our self-description.

**NOTES**

1 Scripture uses several expressions to describe the Christian walk. For example, it is: walking “in newness of life” (Romans 6:4), “walking by faith” (2 Corinthians 5:7), “walking in Him [Christ]” (Colossians 2:6), “walking in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16), “walking in the light” (1 John 1:7), “walking in truth” (2 John 4), and “walking as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8).

2 Two sets of English words in the King James Version are used to translate a single word in the Old Testament Hebrew (*qadash*) and the New Testament Greek (*hagiazo*). The first is derived from the Germanic roots of our English. It includes the verb to “hallow, make holy,” the noun “holiness,” and the adjective “holy.” The other set of English terms comes from the Latin roots.
of English. It includes the verb “to sanctify,” the noun "sanctification,” and the adjective “sanctify.” Since both sets of English words are translated from the same term in the Biblical languages, the words “holiness” and “sanctification” may be viewed as equivalent terms.


4 *Seventh-day Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed, s.v. “Justification”, p. 635.


6 Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, p. 35.


8 *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 3, p. 68.

9 *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 244.

Who Falls More?

Floyd Patterson, nicknamed the Gentleman of Boxing, was the youngest man to ever win the American Heavyweight Boxing Championship. In a recent interview with boxing historian, Bert Sugar, Patterson was reminded by Mr. Sugar that he had been knocked down more than any other boxer in history. The great boxer humbly replied, “Yes, but I got up more times than anyone.”

He didn’t win the championship by not falling down; he won the championship by getting up.

And so it is for the Christian. The single secret to succeeding in the Christian walk is to keep getting up. Solomon understood this point, and articulated it with typical accuracy in Proverbs 24:16, “For a just man falls seven times, and rises up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.”

You will notice that both the righteous (“just”) and the wicked fall. So the difference between the righteous and the wicked is not that the righteous doesn’t fall, but that he gets up after he falls. But let’s take this a step further, shall we? According to this verse, who falls more? The answer is unavoidable, isn’t it? It’s the righteous man. The righteous man falls more precisely because he keeps getting up. It is axiomatic that you cannot fall down unless you were standing up. According to our verse, the wicked falls just once because when he falls he stays down. Unlike the righteous man, he doesn’t get back up.

Judas Versus Peter

Imagine if we traced the lives of Peter and of Judas from the time of the betrayal of Jesus in Gethsemane to the respective end of each of their lives. Who, over the course of his life, from Gethsemane on, fell more? Judas betrayed Jesus for a pittance and soon thereafter fell, dangling horribly at the end of a noosed rope. Peter fell, too; he denied his Lord thrice, then lived for many more years during which he fell again and again (see, for example, Galatians 2, where Peter reverts back to his bigoted ways in his relations with the Gentiles).

Peter had a lifetime to make mistakes, to sin, to fall. And to keep getting up. Judas fell that once, and didn’t get back up. So who fell more? Peter. Which will be saved? Peter.
So we repeat, with Solomon, “A righteous man falls seven times and rises up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.”

That the righteous falls more (again, because he keeps getting up) than the wicked in no way condones or excuses sin. Rather, it puts sin (falling) in perspective. To not fall is better, far better, of course. (No bipedal creature would argue this point!) And what’s more, in the power of God (and His power alone), not falling is a present possibility! Hear the words of Holy Scripture: “Now unto Him That is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 24, 25).

But the earlier point still stands: If (not when) you fall . . . get back up. Because sinning is not inevitable for the committed Christian, but getting back up must be!

**Proceed With the Process**

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone. This is not in dispute for the committed Protestant Christian. Justification is instantaneous—the moment a sinner accepts the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as his only hope, he is accounted as righteous. In the inimitable words of Ellen White in *Steps to Christ*, “If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned” (page 64).

No one would seriously deny that Paul of Tarsus was the consummate champion of the Good News (Gospel) of righteousness by faith. Paul’s advocacy of the evangel of faith included the notion that salvation involves an ongoing process. The following excerpts are representative, being some of the best known and best loved Pauline passages:

> For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. Romans 1:16, 17.

> But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18.

> For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16.

Notice the phrases: “from faith to faith,” “from glory to glory,” and “day by day.” What grammatical and theological function do these phrases serve in each of these respective passages? The answer is incontrovertible. They each communicate a process. For Paul, salvation involved a process. The dictionary defines process as “a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end.” Salvation involves steps. Doesn’t the name *Steps to Christ* make very good sense? Indeed, it does!

**The Christian Leap**

I have never heard anyone refer to it as the Christian leap. But frequently and colloquially we refer to it as the Christian walk. Think of it: Just how far could even the most athletic among us leap? Fifteen feet? Twenty feet? The current world record for the long jump is held by American Mike Powell, who jumped 29.363 feet (8.95 meters) at the World Track and Field
Championships in Tokyo, Japan, in 1991.

It is not easy to leap 29 feet. But it is quite easy for the average person to walk that distance. In fact, great distances can be covered by walking. I just recently finished a marvelous book called *The Places in Between*, in which author Rory Stewart documents part of his 6,000-mile walk across Asia. It took him 21 months.

The life of the believer is frequently and rightly called the Christian walk because it is just that—a walk. “For we walk by faith, not by sight,” said Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:7. Walking takes time, yes, but you can cover vast distances. So, too, with the walk of faith.

**Instant Lemonade**

There is such a thing as instant lemonade. And instant tea. And even instant coffee. But there is no such thing as instant sanctification. Sanctification is the Biblical, theological term for walking with God. It does happen—praise God for that—but it does not happen instantaneously. Not according to the Pauline passages cited above, and not according to Ellen White:

There is no such thing as instantaneous sanctification. True sanctification is a daily work, continuing as long as life shall last. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 116.

Let us be growing Christians. We are not to stand still. We are to be in advance today of what we were yesterday; every day learning to be more trustful, more fully relying upon Jesus. Thus we are to grow up. You do not at one bound [leap] reach perfection; sanctification is the work of a lifetime. *Selected Messages*, bk. 3, p. 193.


Not surprisingly for Seventh-day Adventists, Ellen White’s view of the processes involved in salvation squares perfectly with the apostle Paul’s.

Christianity does not take place in one fell swoop, one grand leap. Do yourself a favor and disabuse your mind of that un-Biblical notion. The Christian walk is just that, a walk. And walking great distances—like from unholiness to holiness—takes time.

And if you fall while walking, what to do? Simple: Get back up.

**With a Trembling Hand**

I cannot tell you how many times I have utterly failed—utterly let myself, my Lord, and my family down. It is too many to count—not that I’d want to even if I could. You know how it is: You’ve blown it. You said the wrong thing. Or you looked at that Web site that you swore you never would do again. Or you gossiped, after promising yourself you wouldn’t do it again. Or you . . . (fill in the blank).

It can be difficult at such times to believe that forgiveness is still there, still waiting for us to ask for it, still ready to be bestowed by two nail-scarred hands. There have been many times when, with trembling hand, I’ve opened the Bible hoping that it was still there. I arrive at 1 John chapter 1 half expecting verse 9 to be gone. I’m just sure that it’s going to skip right from verse 8 to verse 10...

But it’s always there. Every time.
Every time.

And if it’s there, then I can still claim it. And I do! The one time that verse won’t be there for me is the time I don’t go there to claim it, to read it, to believe it. Praise God for verse 9!

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Read it. Believe it. Claim it. Live it.

And as if that weren’t enough, chapter 2, verse 1 is always there to encourage me along:

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.”

I hear John saying, “In the unlikely event that one of you sins, Jesus is there for you. He is your Advocate. He is your Helping Hand. He is your Saviour. He’ll help you to get back up again.” Remember, not falling is better—far better—than falling and then getting back up! On your own you could never do it, “but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

And with God what is possible becomes probable. And what is probable becomes certain. “I can do all things through Christ Which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13). “For it is God Which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (2:13).

**Learning to Hate**

God hates sin. I don’t entirely, yet. But I want to. And God wants me to. Each time I get back up and confess my sin and turn to Jesus, I am giving God permission to do something miraculous in my life. I am giving Him permission to supernaturally, through the power of His indwelling Spirit, create in me a God-given repugnancy for sin. I cannot manufacture a revulsion for sin. Naturally, every fiber and nerve in my body craves sin—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Only God can put an enmity for sin inside of me. And every time I get up and look with disgust at the vomit I’ve just been wallowing in, God is putting that enmity inside me by His Spirit. He’s helping me, teaching me, to hate what He hates, to loathe what He loathes.

Because sin killed Jesus. Don’t forget it. Sin isn’t cute. It isn’t funny. It isn’t small.

Sin is the most deadly cancer in the universe. A cancer so powerful that it killed God when it was placed squarely on His shoulders amidst Gethsemane’s olive groves. He limped painfully, barely making it to Calvary because of the terrible weight on His back. And it wasn’t the *patibulum* (Latin for crossbar). It was sin. The weight of the sin of the world.

The Bible says that Jesus hated sin. “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows” (Hebrews 1:9).

Part of getting up is asking God to give you power, grace, strength, and poise to not fall down again. To hate sin. To loathe the vomit of iniquity. To hate what God hates. To hate what pierced your Lord and King.

Because if you keep putting your faith in Jesus Christ, one of these times you’re going to fall for that sin (you know which one) for the last time. You’ll get up from it, and, in the power and grace of God, walk away from it. Forever.

**Welch’s Is the Good Stuff**

In In Luke 5, Jesus told a series of three parables in which He made the case for the danger and illogic of mingling the old and the new.
“And He spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.” Luke 5:36–39.

Scholars are generally agreed that Jesus is here speaking of the transition from a pre-Messianic to a post-Messianic economy in the Judaism of His day. The scribes and Pharisees could not fit the new wine of Jesus’ Messianic identity and teachings into the old wine of their narrow misinterpretation of the Jewish religion.

But there is also a very real sense in which Jesus is here speaking of the transition from old life to new life, old man to new man, in a personal, experiential sense. These parables are metaphors for the transition from old to new in the life of the believer.

Notice that Jesus is appealing to our common sense in each of the parables. He introduces each of them by saying, “No man” does such and such. The message is simple: Think about it; no one does this. Use your noggin, Jesus is saying.

Now look particularly at the last verse. Jesus uses the key word, “straightway.” The NKJV translates this as “immediately.”

A drunk can come to love Welch’s Grape Juice, but it doesn’t happen immediately. It takes time. It involves a process. (Sounds just like Paul and Ellen White!) The old wine represents the old life, the old ways, the old movies, the old Web sites, the old parties, the old drugs, the old sensuality, the old . . . (fill in the blank).

Jesus says that the man accustomed to the old alcoholic wine can grow to love the new and the fresh and loathe the old, but it takes time. It doesn’t happen “immediately.” But it does happen. It does.

I know. Because I am living it. And hopefully you are, too. Out with old (by God’s grace), and in with new (also by God’s grace).

Does Often Mean Often?

The book Steps to Christ has saved my spiritual life more than once. How can a book so small and so simple be so completely amazing? I don’t know, but it is.

I make an effort to read this book at least once a year (sometimes it’s closer to ten times in a given year!). It is just that powerful, and valuable. And simple.

Here is one of my favorite excerpts from this power-packed minivolume:

There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such I would say, Do not draw back in despair. We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God.
No; Christ is at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John, “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.” 1 John 2:1.—Page 64.

Read it again. And again, until these words pierce right into your heart. Believe them. They are true. And they are for you.

“Often.”

“Do not draw back in despair.”

“We are not to be discouraged.”

“We are not cast off.”

“[We are] not forsaken and rejected by God.”

“No.”

The message is clear. (Could it be any clearer?) Even if you fall and fail (especially when you fall and fail!), go to the cross—to the Christ of the cross. Bow down. Ask for forgiveness. Trust Jesus. Take His hand. Get up. Repeat as often as necessary. Keep getting up. Just like Floyd.
Most people claim to be Christians, but are they?
It's been said that you can't tell a book by its cover.
Grandma used to remind us that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Would you like to know how to tell if you're really a Christian?

If someone asked me what my favorite fruit is, I would probably say apples. What would yours be? Madison Avenue believes most people like fruit, because they invest large amounts of money advertising all kinds of fruit-flavored or fruit-scented products, from yogurt to furniture polish.

While there’s fruit, as in apples, bananas, and mangoes, we also use the word “fruit” when we mean the product or result of some effort or condition. For instance, it might be said that your new car is “the fruit of your labors,” meaning the result of your hard work. Or you might give up on a plan that didn’t seem to work, explaining, “It wasn’t very fruitful.”

But the fruit I am referring to is not the fruit we eat; it’s the result or product of something—in this case, it is the fruit of the Spirit that is the result of having the Holy Spirit in our life. We often speak of being like Jesus. We don’t need to wonder what that means. The fruit of the Spirit in the life is what it means to be like Jesus.

The fruit of the Spirit is not to be confused with good habits, such as parents attempt to instill in their children. It is not conformity to authority. Rather, the fruit of the Spirit is the result of a work performed in a person’s life by a direct act of God: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit” (John 3:6).

Most have had the experience of having someone ask whether we have the Holy Spirit. What they usually mean is, Do we speak in tongues?

My dad used to say that a person shouldn’t even begin to think of the gifts of the Spirit until he has dealt with the significance of the fruit of the Spirit. It could almost be said that the gifts of the Spirit can be counterfeited or, as some might say, bought on the black market. On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit in the life is a work of grace and is something the Holy Spirit does for us at the level of our innermost person.
The most familiar Bible passage about the fruit of the Spirit was written by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22, 23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (NKJV).

This list is indivisible. Notice that the text doesn’t refer to the *fruits* of the Spirit but the *fruit* of the Spirit. A person, then, cannot say, “I’ll want some kindness and gentleness please, but I’ll come by for patience later on. The fruit of the Spirit is one, it is a something that God does in our hearts and which is not an option.

**The fruit reveals the tree.** As we begin our investigation into the fruit of the Spirit, we need to keep four points keep in mind. The first point is obvious yet very important, and it is that we can tell what kind of tree we have by the fruit that grows on it.

This reminds me of a story a man told on himself. Well, actually he told it on his brother, too. He confessed that every now and then when he was a youngster, he and his brother would be sent to their room when they had been naughty. But this punishment wasn’t very effective, because the boys figured out a way to escape.

There just happened to be a big, old fruit tree right outside their bedroom window. So when they had misbehaved and were sent to their room, which was on the second floor above the back porch, they would climb out the window, onto the branches of the old fruit tree, and down the trunk to the ground. From there, they would run across the backyard, over the fence, and into the fields, where they would play ball for a while. Then they would come back over the fence, across the backyard, up the tree, onto the roof, and in the window; and no one ever knew they were gone, or so they thought.

One day they overheard Dad say to Mom, “Mary, the old fruit tree out back hasn’t borne fruit in years. Tomorrow morning I’m going to cut it down.”

Needless to say, the boys were undone. Their avenue of escape was about to disappear. They needed a plan, and they came up with one, as only young, mischievous boys will.

That night, somewhat earlier than usual, they ostensibly went to bed, only to get up after a short time. They gathered together all the money they had saved, went out the window, down the tree, and into town, where they bought all the apples they could find and some black cotton string. When they returned home, they took the string and tied the apples onto every branch they could reach. The old tree looked absolutely fruitful! Then they went to bed and waited for the morning.

The next day Father woke up and went outside to chop down the old fruit tree. But he soon came back in, excitedly calling out, “Mary! Mary! It’s the most incredible thing I’ve ever seen! That old tree that hasn’t borne fruit in years is covered with apples! You’ve got to come see this; it’s absolutely covered with big, red apples! I don’t believe it! And it’s a pear tree!”

Of course, apples grow on apple trees and pears grow on pear trees. Isn’t it fair to assume, then, that others will know what kind of person you are by your fruit? And they’ll be able to tell whether you’re genuine or if you’re trying to tie good fruit onto a bad life.

**Growth is gradual.** The second point to consider is that real fruit trees grow slowly but surely. You can buy a beautiful plastic tree that looks like the real thing, and it will sit on your patio forever just as pretty as you please. But it’s as fake as fake can be. On the other hand, when you buy a living, healthy fruit tree, you expect it to mature and grow. The point is: If want to grow real fruit in our lives, we can expect that the process will take time.

We live in a world of instant solutions. There is practically no aspect of life that has not been boiled down to a handful of quick, easy steps and published in a paperback manual. This mentality has even invaded our approach to living simply as human beings. It’s common to
find books entitled, “How to Improve Your Personality in Ten Easy Steps,” or “How to Change Your Life in Only One Hour.” Becoming new men and women, they say, is simple. Just follow these six easy steps and—presto!

If you’ve visited a nursery that sells plants, you’ll see foliage at all stages. There are mature plants, seedlings, and cuttings that are just getting started. People are like that, too. In the Christian life, not everyone is at the same stage at the same time. Some may be in the bud stage. Others may have opened up into beautiful, fragrant blossoms. Still others are like hard, unripe fruit that, over time, will grow and develop to full maturity.

But each stage of growth, although it may be as yet incomplete, can be perfect. And we can expect the fruit of the Spirit to grow slowly but surely over your entire lifetime.

Real fruit grows; counterfeit fruit just sits there. Real fruit nourishes and gives life; counterfeit fruit is strictly for looks. Real fruit will be served at the banquet table in Heaven; counterfeit fruit will be burned with the stubble of this earth.

Remember the nurture effect. The third point is what I call the nurture effect. In order to have a good crop of apples, there must be the right mix of good weather, an adequate amount of water, and, of course, some fertilizer.

If there’s not enough sun, too little water, and no fertilizer, you can expect a poor crop. A scorching sun, too much water, and fertilizer burn will also result in a poor crop and may even kill the plant. Proper nurture and protection is a must in growing apples, and it’s the same in growing a Christian character.

A good horticulturist knows how to make the best of the stresses his plants are exposed to. He prunes and mulches the stock so that the stems will harden and develop resistance to the freezing weather that is sure to come. On the other hand, I’ve been told that oranges will be even sweeter if they’re exposed to a light frost just around harvest time.

You will discover that as the fruit of the Spirit grows in your life, your character will be sweeter and more resistant to evil—not in spite of the trials and tribulations that come your way, but because of them.

Stay connected. The fourth point is the most important of all, because without it there can be no fruit at all. Here it is. A branch that breaks off from the stem will not bear fruit. Jesus said this plainly in John 15:4, 5: “Dwell in Me, as I in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself, but only if it remains united with the vine; no more can you bear fruit, unless you remain united with Me. I am the Vine and you are the branches. He who dwells in Me, as I dwell in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (NEB).

So then, the four points to keep in mind as we consider the fruit of the Spirit are: 1) Just as you can tell a tree by its fruit, so you can tell Christians by the kind of persons they are. 2) Real trees will grow. In the same way, growing a Christian character is an ongoing process. 3) Fruit will come as we employ the nurture factor. We must feed and protect the Christian life. And finally, 4) We will grow and produce the fruit of the Spirit only if we stay connected to Jesus.

And how do we do that? The answer, friend, is by talking to Him in prayer and by letting Him talk to us when reading His Word.

“Those who, having heard the Word, keep it, will bring forth fruit in obedience. The Word of God, received into the soul, will be manifest in good works. Its results will be seen in a Christlike character and life. Christ said of Himself, ‘I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.’ Psalm 40:8.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 60.

The fruit of the Spirit is like a precious jewel with many facets. Each facet is a characteristic of
Jesus and represents a quality that He wants to see reproduced in our lives.

Learning how the fruit of the Spirit grows is another way of understanding how to develop a Christlike character. We want to be like Jesus from the inside out. Contrary to what the two young brothers thought, a pear tree doesn’t produce apples.

Jesus died for us, not only to forgive our sins but also to make it possible for us to be changed from the inside out. It’s exciting to realize that we don’t have to pretend to be like Christ. We can be really, from the heart, like Him as we live and walk with Him day by day. And the first ones to see the difference will be the members of our family.

“By believing in Christ, the fallen race He has redeemed may obtain that faith which works by love and purifies the soul from all defilement. Then Christlike attributes appear: for by beholding Christ men become changed into the same image from glory to glory, from character to character. Good fruit is produced. The character is fashioned after the divine similitude, and integrity, uprightness, and true benevolence are manifested toward the sinful race.”—White, My Life Today, p. 54.

As we live and grow in Christ through prayer and His Word, a total transformation will take place that will make us deep-down, from-the-heart Christians. Unless, of course, we think tying on plastic fruit is good enough. But we can’t fool the Master Gardener, or anyone else, for that matter.
Suppose you were able to take all the nutritional elements provided for in food with the exception of vitamin B12. How long would you live? What about if you received all the amino acids, minerals, and vitamins, except for vitamin C. What would be the result? The answer is obvious. Complications would result that would eventually end in death. All the nutritional elements are essential. Megadoses of one element will not negate the need of the others, though the amount needed be ever so small.

The Gospel of God is the same. It has all the necessary ingredients, but one or any number of the elements of salvation cannot substitute or do away with the need of the others. As humans, we tend to dissect and isolate those factors that contribute to making our comfort level acceptable. For example there are those who console themselves in having a Saviour, but not a Lord. There are others who claim to demonstrate their Christian walk by faith apart from works, while the apostle James declares, “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18). “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” verse 17).

God works in packages, not isolated items. Every aspect of God’s revelation constitutes the ingredients essential for salvation. And while it may be true that there may be exceptions, God is the only One to make them.

I met a man unwilling to be baptized. When I questioned him concerning baptism, he told me it was not essential. In any event, even if it were, he had already been baptized as a baby. When presented with the prerequisites for baptism—repentance, belief, conversion, acceptance of Christ, and confession, he switched to another argument. “The thief on the cross was not baptized, yet Christ promised him the kingdom,” he retorted. I then made mention that the thief was not able to get off that cross and be baptized. Therefore, God in mercy made an exception. I then suggested that if he wanted to be part of God’s exceptions, then he should be placed in the same extraordinary circumstances as the thief. He was not very interested in becoming a special example. Turning to the Scriptures, I read to him the words of Christ: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Then in response to Nicodemus’s ironical retort, Jesus answered again, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God” (verse 5). Fortunately, my friend saw the light and was baptized, for he died three months later.
To Christ, baptism is one of those essential elements to salvation. In His instruction to His disciples He declared: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). And Peter wrote under inspiration, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). One can very quickly see that the omission of one element can be dangerous.

This danger is also true concerning Christ’s ministry. There are some who declare, “Christ did it all on the cross.” However, there is a serious problem with this claim. It can be truly stated that Christ paid the full price on the cross—nothing can be added to His sacrifice. But there is a great difference between paying the ultimate price and doing a complete work solely on the cross. Not only His death, but also all of the different aspects of Christ’s life and ministry are essential elements to our salvation. “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Timothy 3:16). Notice that Paul does not isolate one element, but rather speaks in inclusive language.

First let’s consider the Lord’s preexistence. Without Christ’s preexistence, there would be no life, death, burial, resurrection, or anything else of Him. It was for us that the whole plan of salvation was devised with Christ at the center. Had there been no preexistence of Christ, there would have been no cross. The Bible declares, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5–8).

Paul also wrote, “God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express Image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:1–3). The cross would have no significance if a mere man hung on it. It had to be a divine Being paying for man’s sins that made the cross momentous.

**His miraculous birth** (called the Incarnation) also played a monumental role in our salvation. His condescension in transforming Himself from divinity to humanity brought hope to the world. It was the expectation of a Saviour from the first Gospel promise in Genesis 3:15 that prompted Old Testament women to want babies. They knew that Earth’s only hope was in the coming Deliverer. Two chapters in the Gospels are dedicated to this essential event. Christ must be born! Without His birth, there would be no death.

Said the angel, “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:31–33). “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing Which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (verse 35). Concerning the prophetic significance of this crucial reality, Paul wrote, “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law” Galatians 4:4).

If Christ had not been incarnated, there would be no hopefulness for the human race that is made of flesh. That is why John was inspired to write, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). To the Hebrews the consolation was, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same” (Hebrews 2:14). If there had been no Incarnation, there would be no cross!

**His earthly life:** “In Him was life; and the Life was the Light of men” (John 1:4). Without
Christ’s life on Earth, man would never have had a living example of a victorious life. Christ’s conquering the Devil as a human being brings salvation to mankind. In Jesus we can see how it is possible to live above sin. It is said of Him, “Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17, 18).

In dealing with the challenges and temptations of Earth and overcoming them our Lord gives us the assurance of victory. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Jesus had to dwell among us. It was on this turf that a pure life had to be lived out. Without His victory over the Devil’s harassments, trials, and temptations, the cross would be inconsequential. If the cross was the only essential, then He could have skipped over everything else, descend to the earth, hang on the cross, and die. But then there would never be any proof that man could ever overcome.

**His death:** In the letter to the Philippians we have this statement: “And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). Without His death there would be no redemption price for lost sinners. Only His perfect spotless life could atone for man. “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

By means of His death we are justified and reconciled to God. “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Romans 5:8, 9). “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprovable in His sight” (Colossians 1:21, 22). “And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Ephesians 2:16). His death also plays an integral part in our salvation.

**His resurrection:** “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Romans 5:8–10). “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46, 47). “For since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:21).

And, Paul declares that without His resurrection there is no hope. “And if Christ be not raised,” he wrote, “your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:17–19). Christians that argue that Jesus did it all on the cross would find it impossible to convince Paul that the resurrection was not essential to our salvation. There had to be victory over death and the grave.

**His ascension:** Christ promised, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John14:1–3).

The astrophysicist Stephen Hawkins warned: “I fear that since the evolutionary process has worked through the dialectic of determinism and aggression, our long-term survival and any hope of our species is in question. However, if we can keep from destroying each other for next one hundred years, sufficient technology will have been developed to distribute humanity to various planets, and then no one tragedy or atrocity will eradicate us all at the same time.” Unwittingly, even science is confirming the reality of Christ’s words. We must get off this decaying planet. Jesus’ ascension gives reality to this truth! There is a route of escape for
God’s children. Because a Divine Being has been able to demonstrate entrance and exit from this planet, then through His ascension the death on the cross makes the escape a reality.

The concerned disciples were consoled when the angels said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus, Which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven” (Acts 1:11). The efficacious nature of the cross could not have become a reality without Jesus’ ascension to sit on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in Heaven. Nor could the promised trip to Heaven be a reality for the waiting saints. By taking a “multitude of captives” (see Ephesians 4:7–10) on His ascension He removed all doubt that man could be eternally safe.

**His heavenly ministry:** “And for this cause He is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15). The Scriptures refer to Christ as the only “Mediator between God and man” (1 Timothy 2:5), and as the Advocate in the event that we commit future sins. (See 1 John 2:1). To the Romans Paul wrote, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ That died, yea rather, That is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:34).

In his Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul makes the argument that just as prior to the cross Jesus was a Mediator of the first covenant, so “now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). This language of Paul places Christ’s active mediation, not pre-cross, but post-cross. The cross necessitates a Mediator. Just as the blood of bulls and goats needed a mediator, so without the mediation of Christ in the heavens, the cross once more loses its great significance.

“It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the Heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:23, 24).

**His Second Coming:** Finally, if He does not return to gather what He died for, then His sacrifice would be in vain. In His promise to His bewildered disciples who had just heard Him announce His soon departure from Earth, He said: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3). From this statement we know that the disciples would remain here on the earth until His promise would be realized.

That is why the aged apostle Paul could write with such certainty, “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).

In conclusion, let us make sure that we are getting all the spiritual ingredients the Lord has provided for our salvation. God did not place them in the Bible just to take up writing space. All of the different aspects of Christ’s ministry are essential to our salvation. That is why the final warning is registered in the Bible: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the Holy City, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18, 19).

In this last book of the Bible are included every phase of Christ’s ministry: His preexistence
(1:8, 11; 3:14). His activity in Creation (4:11; 10:6; 14:6, 7), His life on Earth (1:5; 5:5; 12:4, 5), His death (5:6, 9), His resurrection (1:18; 2:8), His ascension (12:5), His mediation in Heaven (1:12-17; 3:5; 8:2–4), His Second Coming (1:7; 19:11–22; 22:12), and the establishment of His kingdom (2:26; 3:21; 7:14–17; 11:15).