I must be the bearer of some sad news. Our editor S. Lawrence Maxwell went to sleep in Jesus this past November. Throughout the past 22 years, Adventists Affirm has been blessed with excellent editors who have guided us as we’ve tackled the tough issues facing Adventism. Most recently, Lawrence provided his steady hand at the Adventists Affirm helm as editor. In fact, this was his second tour of duty, having worked with us previously in the capacity of editor from 2000-2004. He was also a frequent contributor through the years. Lawrence had an enticing approach to the Bible. His love for the Lord and desire to communicate profound bible truths in ways in an easily understandable manner greatly benefitted the Adventists Affirm reader and many who knew him personally. He will be deeply missed for now, but we have hope that we will see Lawrence again in the resurrection! We are dedicating this issue of Adventists Affirm in loving memory of S. Lawrence Maxwell.

Of all the subjects Adventists Affirm could possibly devote an issue to, I cannot think of a subject more important than sin and salvation. It is impossible to overstate how critical it is for each of us to have a crystal clear understanding of what sin is and what we must do to be saved. The intent of this second issue for 2009 is to reaffirm our understanding of sin and salvation as Seventh-day Adventists, inform the reader about current challenges to our historical positions, and to pique the reader's interest to engage into a deeper individual study.

Keith Phillips begins this issue by reminding us that we as Seventh-day Adventists should be the happiest people on the earth. Are we? I think after reading his article you’ll see that joy and our understanding of righteousness by faith are inextricably linked.

I think you’ll enjoy Kevin Paulson’s article on righteousness by faith as well. However, he approaches this topic from the perspective of the sanctuary doctrine and thoroughly demonstrates how an adoption of an evangelical salvation theology necessitates the rejection of this doctrinal pillar.

Karl Tsaltabasidis asks the question, “What is sin?” The answer to this question has vast implications on a correct understanding of salvation. He demonstrates that Ellen White’s definition of sin is consistent with the biblical record. However, Pastor Karl warns us that there is another definition of sin circling about that originates from a completely different paradigm of understanding. A fascinating read!

Richard O’Ffill contributes a primer in salvation, “Planning to Win.” It’s a loving reminder from the heart of a pastor that we need not lose sight of the basics of our salvation. What does it mean to be born again, and what does that look like? This is a practical message that you won’t want to miss!

Daniel Ferraz’s article, “The Humanity of Christ Is Everything to Us” tackles the subject of Christ’s
human nature. This has been and continues to be a volatile subject within Adventism, but it wasn’t always that way. What happened, and does our understanding of Christ’s human nature really matter?

Finally, we conclude this issue with the article, "Peril of Neglecting Salvation" from the pen of inspiration written in 1891. In a succinct and sobering way, Ellen White reminded us that there is an enemy tempting us to be careless with our redemption to the point of neglect. She beautifully outlined for us the completeness and perfection of the plan of salvation, and the great provision that has been provided for us. Read this one over and over again.

May this issue serve as a reminder to Adventists everywhere—God’s wonderful love is for each of us!
Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? (Hebrews 2:1-3, emphasis supplied)

INTRODUCTION

When searching for truth in the Word of God, the "great controversy theme," the original "war in heaven," the struggle between good the evil, the polemic between Christ and Satan (Revelation 12:7-9), must be the foundation and guide to our reasoning. This theme presents our implication in this conflict and our freedom to choose on whose side we want to be. Thus, we are confronted with two counter and opposite ideologies: God’s truth and the Devil’s lies. For example, the insinuations and arguments that the Devil used to convince a “third” (Revelation 12:4) of the angels that he was correct in accusing God of being arbitrary, and that the principles of His sovereign government were self-centred and wrong, must have been very convincing. But, as successful as his reasoning may have been, it was skewed, misrepresentative, wrong, and riddled with lies (John 8:44).

An irreconcilable division between two vastly different and opposite claims and ideologies still remains in the great controversy theme. It would be inconceivable, therefore, to claim that we need the Devil’s interpretation of events as to why he was expelled from heaven to arrive at a ‘balanced view’ of the truth or the ‘complete picture.’ Thus, it would be ludicrous, to try to combine the claims of the Devil with the claims of God and profess to have achieved a ‘reasonable view,’ proposing a reconciliation between the two camps, seeking to bring ‘unity’ from the ‘diversity’ of two contradictory and opposing claims and ideologies in some sort of amalgamated, new, middle-of-the-road, ‘unprejudiced’ conciliatory, but compromised and attempted solution!

To argue that opposing claims are merely different poles of the same truth does not fit the great controversy theme presented in the Bible. This reasoning is fallacious and must be discarded. So it is when we seek to discover the truth about sin and salvation or any other subject. We have what God says and what the Devil says, and we must faithfully adhere to what God has revealed. If approached humbly, He will reward us, aided by His Holy Spirit, with the ability to clearly distinguish between the two, even though the philosophical and contrary arguments may seem very compelling and reasonable.

Ultimately, and contrary to Greek philosophy and the prevailing opinion of the day, truth is absolute, belongs to God, and cannot be mixed with the half-truths and lies of the Devil. In our search for the truth about anything, we must recognise three things. First, there is ultimately only one source of truth, Jesus Christ, The Word of God. Second, the claims of God and His Word have been, are, and will constantly be under attack, and third, there will always seem to be a convincing counterfeit argument to the truth until the enemy of truth is finally destroyed (Revelation 20:10, 14).
THE SIN PROBLEM
Definitions of Sin

Sin is a broken relationship between man and God, a rupture of a face-to-face communion, and dependency upon the Lifegiver. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they chose to act against the plain directives of the Word of God and His law of love. As a result, sin and death entered and blighted the human experience (Genesis 3). Consequently, sin has fundamentally two components: 1) the weakening effect of Adam’s transgression, passed down to us through the law of heredity in a fallen, sinful, sin-prone human nature, of which none are guilty, and 2) our own sinful acts, for which we are responsible and liable. Scripture says that when we commit acts of sin, this is because we choose to respond to the pull and “lust of the flesh” of our own unregenerate, sin-polluted human heart (James 1:12-15, 27; Joshua 24:15; Psalm 119:11).

The Bible clearly defines sinful acts and their consequence, if unrepented of: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, emphasis supplied). “The wages of sin in death” (Romans 6:23). “Whatever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). We choose to sin. This occurs when we are deceived by a desire for short-lived, perverted, self-gratifying pleasure and disobey God’s law contained in His Word. Thus, we come under the influence and control of the Devil. Sinning feeds and strengthens the carnal nature and the lust of the fallen human sinful flesh. In and of ourselves we are powerless to overcome this vicious cycle unless we turn to Jesus Christ our sin substitute and example in the great controversy.

Original Sin
When we choose to break the law of God, it follows that we are guilty only of our own transgression. Therefore, the only thing we inherited from the fall of Adam, and as a consequence of his fall, is a weakened human nature, the fallen sinful flesh. However, in no way do we receive any guilt from, or deserve any punishment for, Adam’s sin. To believe this, would be contrary to the united testimony of Scripture and would necessitate accepting Roman Catholic, as well as the Protestant teaching of the dogma of “original sin.”

Subsequently, we would be compelled to believe in and practice the error of infant baptism or christening. But newborn babies cannot be guilty of Adam’s sin. Neither can they be condemned for his transgression. Moreover, they cannot be guilty and damned for that which they have had no knowledge.

Take for example the people of Israel. Because of their own sin, murmuring, disbelief, and rebellion, they were forbidden entry into the Promised Land. However, their innocent children were allowed entry because they were not able to decide, neither participate in their parents’ sin. “Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it” (Deuteronomy 1:39, emphasis supplied). Ellen G. White affirmed this in the following statement: “As the little infants come forth immortal from their dusty beds, they immediately wing their way to their mothers’ arms. They meet again nevermore to part. But many of the little ones have no mother there. We listen in vain for the rapturous song of triumph from the mother. The angels receive the motherless infants and conduct them to the tree of life.”

The Word of God nowhere mentions, neither does it teach “original sin.” It never teaches that anyone is guilty and deserves condemnation or death because of the sins or crimes committed by someone else (Ezekiel 18:2-4, 20; Jeremiah 31:29, 30; Romans 2:5, 6; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Galatians 6:7, 8; Revelation 20:12, 13; 21:8). This would be a monstrous and unjust portrayal of God and constitutes a position that not even the courts of earth would rightly uphold.

The teaching of “original sin,” stemmed from Greek paganism, and was further channelled by the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, Augustine (AD 354-430)—himself greatly influenced by Greek philosophy—into the Roman Catholic Church and held by the majority of Protestants since the Augsburg Confession in AD 1530. Today, the dogma relies primarily on bad exegesis of Psalm 51:5 and inconsistent interpretation of Romans 5:12, 18, 19 (with the rest of the book of Romans) and with the complete witness of Scripture. Christians must follow divine revelation over and above the prevailing and pervasive Roman Catholic Church tradition and Greek philosophy.
Knowingly or not, it is the false belief in "original sin," and the presuppositions that derive from it, that logically require that Christ assume the human nature of man before the fall, to ostensibly free Him from the presumed guilt of "original sin." The next logical step, of course, is accepting the false belief of the immaculate conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus, so that He could receive a sinless human nature. If we accept this, then we must go further and accept that the Roman Catholics are correct in venerating Mary as the "mother of God," and even "co-redemptrix." But these are hardly positions that Bible believing Christians can substantiate. False belief about the nature of sin leads to false belief about the nature of salvation. False belief about the nature of salvation risks keeping people lost.

The dogma of "original sin" is anti-Christian, in that it goes against, and seeks to stand in the place of, the true teachings the Bible regarding the human nature of Christ. So, inevitably we must concede that whatever conclusion is reached regarding the effect of the fall of Adam (and the nature of the sin transmitted in that fall), will also logically determine our conclusions on the human nature of Jesus Christ.

GOD’S WORD SAYS CHRIST TOOK THE FALLEN HUMAN NATURE OF MAN

In the fullness of time: "The SON of man is come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11). "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1), "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14), was "made of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). He was "of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3), "but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16). He also "took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men . . . in fashion as a man" (Philippians 2:7, 8), "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3); thus, "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).17 What kind of flesh? Taken simply and as it reads, the Word of God gives a clear, unequivocal answer:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them...for verily He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren . . . For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:14-18, emphasis supplied)

Question: How "much" are the fallen children that Jesus came to save partakers of fallen human flesh and blood?
Answer: Completely.
Jesus "also, himself, likewise, took part of the same" fallen, weakened, sin-affected, sin-infected, human nature, that by total dependence and reliance upon the Father, He could kill sin’s power by paying sin’s wages, death on the cross in the human body of His sin-weakened, fallen human nature.

He became one of us in that he took on, at His incarnation (or "en-flesh-ment"), the same weakened, fallen, human raw material—"sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3) that we have as a result of the fall. Sinless human nature before the fall could not die, but sinful human flesh after the fall could die. That’s the kind of human nature, "sinful flesh," that the Bible teaches Jesus assumed at His incarnation and finally to His death on the cross.

This condescension toward us, and identification with His "converted brethren," is so amazing, that Paul has to repeat it: "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels [that is, of an un-fallen being], but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16, emphasis supplied). When did Abraham live? After the fall! And in case we still did not get it, Paul soars to a crescendo of repetition, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Hebrew 2:17, emphasis supplied). How many times do we have to say that Jesus took on sin-affected humanity, sinful human flesh, as it was after the fall, to make that truth clear?

This text does not infer that Jesus committed acts of sin. If this were so, He would not have been able—by taking flesh and blood (from His human mother Mary)—to “destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). Furthermore, the reality that Jesus "suffered being tempted" (Hebrews 2:18) underlines the fact that He refused and resisted, by the power of God, to commit any sinful act. This being indisputably the case, we are assured later in the epistle to the Hebrews that "we
have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities [of the flesh]; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15, emphasis supplied).

At His incarnation, Christ took on the fallen weakened nature of humanity, the “sinful flesh,” the same humanity of the men and women He came to save. That was the whole point of Him condescending to become a man. Biblically, it cannot be otherwise. It was this truth that prepared, and enabled Jesus Christ, “to save us unto the uttermost” (Hebrews 7:25), which means to save us completely from the power of our sinful flesh, and thus to cease from sin (2 Timothy 2:19).

Scripture says that, in our fallen human nature, if we daily surrender ourselves to the Lordship of Christ, we are converted Christians. We no longer are overcome by Satan through the weakness of our fallen human nature, but under the power of the Spirit through faith in Christ. We have been changed “from darkness to light,” we have been converted, changed from being under the power of Satan to the power of God (Acts 26:18). “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16, emphasis supplied).

This is the extent of God’s plan of salvation, which is how far and how low He was prepared to go in order to save us from the power of our fallen sinful nature. This is achieved because Jesus took on the same “sinful flesh” of the fallen human nature to which we are subjected and defeated the power of sin in that same fallen, human, sinful flesh. As Jesus relied on and received God’s strength to do all that He did,21 so we, can in complete surrender to Christ, experience victory and Salvation from sin:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,22 and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. (Romans 8:1-4, emphasis supplied).

We are to be transformed and transferred from the power of Satan (exercised through the flesh of our fallen human nature) to the power of Christ, in the spirit of the mind of the new man created in Christ. This is the true effect upon believers and the real nature of “so great salvation,” from God on those, “his brethren,” unto whom Jesus was not afraid to be made like.

CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIANS: FALLEN HUMAN NATURE OF CHRIST

All Christians acknowledge the concept that the Son of Man took on human nature, which is why He was called the son of MAN, as well as the Son of GOD. But the vital question is, what kind of human nature did Christ adopt at His incarnation? Did he adopt the pure, perfect sinless human nature God created before the fall (pre-lapsarian)? Or did Jesus assume the human nature of the humanity He was incarnated to save—the nature of man affected, weakened, and degraded by the fall (post-lapsarian)?

It may be surprising to many that the most eminent Protestant theologians of the second half of the twentieth century, such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, Oscar Cullmann, J. A. T. Robinson, etc., have openly declared Christ’s human nature to be that of man after the fall.23

Karl Barth, for example, after affirming that Jesus Christ is “truly God,” skilfully articulated the extent to which Christ’s human nature is like ours, affected by the fall of Adam:

He [Jesus] was not a sinful man. But inwardly and outwardly His situation was that of a sinful man. He did not commit the sin of Adam. But He lived the human life in the very condition to which it had been limited by the sin of Adam. Remaining guiltless, He took on the consequences of the guilt of Adam and the consequences of the guilt of us all. Freely He entered into solidarity and necessary association with our fallen and lost existence. This was the cost to be paid so there “could” be Divine revelation and reconciliation for us all.24

It is of critical importance to note that Barth arrived at and based such declarations on the Bible, the letters of Paul, especially the book of Hebrews. He used what God has revealed, to formulate his understanding, definition, and description of the human nature that Christ adopted at His incarnation. Having thus satisfactorily supported his conclusions, Barth added:

“Be it as it may [or, Whatever the case may be], one fact remains, that must be neither weakened, nor obscured: that is that the [human] nature taken on by God in Christ is identical to
our nature, that of men placed under the banner of the fall. If this were not the case, then how could Christ be like one of us? And in what way would He have been of interest to us? Therefore, the Son of God, not only took our nature, but He entered into the condition of our distress as men condemned, fallen and separated from God. The only way He differed from us all: is that He did not take part in the revolt against God; He was scarred by our guilt, but did not participate in the sin that caused it; and He was made sin, without having committed sin. All this however, should in no way prevent us from recognising, without restriction or reservation of any kind, that He was completely made one with us, and nothing that is human was foreign to Him.”

The manner in which these and other theologians state their case for the fallen human nature of Christ should not startle us and lead us to believe that they overstate their case, and thus err. It is easy to get this impression, given that we have had greater exposure to the now pervasive Roman Catholic Christology. It proliferates the pre-fallen human nature of Christ through astute and highly refined propaganda and communication modes that have infiltrated widely all levels of higher learning with their thought-systems.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF CONSISTENT ADVENTIST WITNESS

In his book, Touched With Our Feelings: A Historical Survey of Adventist Thought on the Human Nature of Christ (translated from the original title in French), the late Jean R. Zurcher, French-speaking Swiss scholar and church administrator, provided a unique and exhaustive record, from 1844 to 1994, a century and a half of official Adventist church documents and position statements on the human nature of Christ. During 100 years, 1852-1952, Adventists taught the postfall human nature of Jesus Christ as the undisputed official Adventist position.

Zurcher then revealed how the change took place, and the utter chaos and theological confusion that have crept into the SDA Church from 1952 to the present day through the changed, anti-biblical and essentially Roman Catholic teaching. Today, a majority of Protestants, and increasingly (for the most part, unwittingly) in the SDA Church today, have accepted that Christ took the human nature of Adam before the fall.

Consistent with the official Adventist position, the “holy flesh movement,” established between 1898 and 1899 in Adventist churches in the Indiana Conference and founded by Pastor/Evangelist S. S. Davis (and favoured by the entire Indiana Conference Committee), was rightly condemned by the General Conference leaders and Ellen G. White, as it wrongly “asserted that Christ had taken Adam’s pre-fall nature and that He therefore possessed ‘holy flesh.’”

SPIRIT OF PROPHECY: THE CHRISTOLOGY OF ELLEN G. WHITE

The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. This is the Golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; He gave proof of His humility in becoming a man. Yet He was God in the flesh. When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth.

In Christ were united the human and the divine. His mission was to reconcile God to man, to unite the finite with the infinite. This was the only way in which fallen men could be partakers of the divine nature. Taking human nature fitted Christ to understand man’s trials and sorrows, and all the temptations wherewith he is beset. Angels who were unacquainted with sin could not sympathize with man in his particular trials. Christ condescended to take man’s nature and was tempted on all points like as we, that He might know how to succor all who should be tempted.

The great work of redemption could be carried out only by the redeemer taking the place of fallen Adam. With the sins of the world laid upon Him, He would go over the ground where Adam stumbled. He would bear the test which Adam failed to endure, and which would be almost infinitely more severe than that brought to bear upon Adam. He would overcome on man’s account, and conquer the tempter, that through His obedience, His purity of character and steadfast integrity, His righteousness might be
imputed to man, that through His name man might overcome the foe on his own account.

What love! What amazing condescension! The King of glory proposed to humble Himself to fallen humanity! He would place His feet in Adam’s steps. He would take man’s fallen nature and engage to cope with the strong foe who triumphed over Adam. He would overcome Satan, and in thus doing He would open the way for the redemption of those who would believe on Him from the disgrace of Adam’s failure and fall.

(1874), Review & Herald, Feb. 24, emphasis supplied. The point of these statements, referring to Christ’s humility in assuming fallen humanity is consistent with Scripture:

1. To clearly emphasize that in His saving work for mankind, Jesus needed to reach man in his fallen status, so that He could be both our substitute and example, thus showing man the way to gain victory over sin.
2. To clearly emphasize that as a man, Jesus had no advantage over us—the same divine power to overcome sin that was available to Him is also available to us because it has the same source—that of His and our loving heavenly Father. He proved this, by taking our same fallen, sinful flesh.

Ellen G. White remained consistent with Scripture by maintaining that even as a human baby and child, Jesus still had no advantage over us:

Even the babe in its mother’s arms may dwell as under the shadow of the Almighty, through the faith of the praying mother. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth. If we live in communion with God, we too may expect the divine Spirit to mold our little ones, even from their earliest moments.

Jesus was placed where His character would be tested. It was necessary for Him to be constantly on guard in order to preserve His purity. He was subject to all the conflicts which we have to meet, that He might be an example to us in childhood, youth, and manhood.

In studying E. G. White statements on any topic, it is important to realize that “depending on the circumstances and the specific point under consideration, the same concepts are sometimes presented so differently that they sometimes may appear contradictory.” So, as in basic sound exegesis, context is vital, and we must “avoid the temptation to rely on isolated statements.”

Misuse of the unpublished personal “Baker Letter” (written in 1895 and discovered in 1955) to ensure that he not give the impression that Christ partook in sin itself, is a case in point. This letter is frequently quoted with the following valuable statement omitted: “The exact time when humanity blended with divinity, it is not necessary for us to know. We are to keep our feet on the Rock, Christ Jesus, as God revealed in humanity.”

It should be remembered and is well stated by David Qualls: “That a few paragraphs from the unpublished, handwritten letter to an individual, of whom little is known regarding his teachings in this area, when stacked up against her voluminous, undeniably clear statements in well-publicized works such as The Desire of Ages [her complete and published explanation of Christ and His life], provide little reason to change the course of history in the Adventist teaching on this subject. Nevertheless, that is what happened.”

SHIFT IN ADVENTIST TEACHING

Preparing the Way
To shift the Seventh-day Adventist Church from its consistently held official position from 1852 to 1952 on the fallen human nature of Christ represented a formidable task. Herbert Douglass, eye witness to the events and experienced theologian calls it, the colliding of “two Tectonic Plates,” and an attempt to merge two theologies (Calvinism and the Adventist form of Arminianism) that had a “Grand Canyon between” them. The impossible was being attempted.

In 1957, the events that led to open propagation of the Questions on Doctrine (QOD), the counter-Adventist interpretation on Christ’s human nature, are clearly stated but not so widely known in Adventism today. They had remained somewhat secluded in a few historic, yet revealing Adventist books of 1957 and 1970.
One of the strongest and most active proponents of this "theological earthquake," of the new anti-Adventist interpretation, proposing the pre-fall human nature of Christ, was LeRoy Edwin Froom. Froom has recorded these leading events in some detail. Indeed, he admits these initial movements "led the way in corrective undertaking," in an attempt lift from us the handicap of certain early published and unrepudiated statements concerning the Eternal Verities. Froom was referring to statements in Adventist literature such as Bible Readings for the Home, which taught the official Adventist position on the fallen human nature of Christ. This position, Froom refers to as a "misconception," a "last standing vestige of Arianism," something "regrettable" and that needed "expunging." As if the truth, which was gained at high cost and held so long, should now be squashed under foot as if it were some loathsome insect!

In January 1955, in an editorial note in Our Hope, Dr. E. Schuyler English stated that Seventh-day Adventists are a church that "disparages the work and person of Christ." The basis for this "misconception," Froom stated, was that Dr. English understood Adventists to hold that Christ, during his incarnation, "partook of our sinful fallen nature.' In this expression he was clearly alluding to the then oft-cited note in the old edition of Bible Readings.

This supposedly "infamous" note quoted in Bible Readings for the Home Circle, I can read from my own, 1915 Stanborough Press, Limited, Watford, Hertfordshire, (England) edition. Under the heading, "A Sinless Life," on pages 173, and 174. The first four questions establish that Christ committed no sin though He was tempted just as we are as indicated in the following questions and answers:

5. In His humanity, of what nature did Christ partake?
   "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil." Heb. 2:14.

6. How fully did Christ share our common humanity?
   "Wherefore in all things it behoved 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." Verse 17. [Now, here comes the note!]
   NOTE. – In His humanity Christ partook of our sinful, fallen nature. If not, then He was not "made like unto His brethren," and was not "in all points tempted like as we are," did not overcome as we have to overcome, and is not, therefore, the complete and perfect Saviour man needs and must have to be saved. The idea that Christ was born of an immaculate or sinless mother, inherited no tendencies to sin, and for this reason did not sin, removes from Him the realm of a fallen world, and from the very place where help is needed. On his human side, Christ inherited just what every child of Adam inherits,—a sinful nature. On the divine side, from His very conception He was begotten and born of the Spirit. And all this was done to place mankind on vantage-ground, and to demonstrate that in the same way everyone who is "born of the Spirit" may gain like victories over sin in his own sinful flesh. Thus each one is to overcome as Christ overcame. Rev. 3:21. Without this birth there can be no victory over temptation, and no salvation from sin. John 3:3-7.

7. Where did God, in Christ, condemn sin, and gain the victory for us over temptation and sin?
   "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. 8:3.
   NOTE.—God, in Christ, condemned sin, not by pronouncing against it merely as a judge sitting on the judgement-seat, but by coming and living in the flesh, in sinful flesh, and yet without sinning. In Christ, He demonstrated that it is possible, by His grace and power, to resist temptation, overcome sin, and live a sinless life in sinful flesh.

The official Adventist position on the human nature of Christ, presented above, and in other Adventist literature, does not rely on "regrettable statements still lingering in a few of our books" as Froom and others would have us believe. But it was, and is based, as has always been the case, upon solid biblical evidence and sound Christian doctrine. Nevertheless, this beautiful section of Bible Readings came under the knife to remove "Christ partook of our sinful, fallen nature," and even the key Bible reference of the "sinful flesh" in Romans 8:3.
In 1957, the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* was printed. This book, "easily qualifies as the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history. A book published largely to help bring peace between Adventism and conservative Protestantism, its release brought prolonged alienation and separation to the Adventist factions that grew up around it."

The events that led to the "whole QOD dance" were intriguing to say the least. In 1949, Toby E. Unruh, president of the East Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, listened to a radio broadcast by Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, and was so impressed by his presentation of "Righteousness by Faith", that Unruh wrote Barnhouse a letter telling him so (November 28, 1949). Dr. Barnhouse was surprised that Unruh, a Seventh-day Adventist, should find his presentation such a blessing, as Barnhouse knew the Adventist understanding of righteousness by faith to be different from his Calvinistic evangelical perception. So Barnhouse offered to meet Unruh for lunch. As a basis for their discussion, Unruh sent Barnhouse a copy of *Steps to Christ*. After reading the book, Barnhouse wrote in an *Eternity* article: with respect to Righteousness by Faith, this book is "false in all its parts," bearing the "mark of a counterfeit" it promoted "universalism...half truths and Satanic error..." With that, Unruh decided not to respond.

Enter, Walter Martin, evangelical specialist in non-Christian cults. He was putting the final touches on his book, *The Rise of the Cults*, in which he categorised Seventh-day Adventists as one of the "Big Five": Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Mormons, Un[versalism]ity, and Seventh-day Adventists. But as he felt he needed more research on the Seventh-day Adventists, he asked Unruh for a meeting with Froom and top Adventist leaders in Washington, D.C. The rest is history.

A few pertinent facts need to be highlighted at this juncture. In the early stages, Froom conducted a poll of where Adventist leaders stood on the human nature of Christ; "nearly all of them" agreed with the biblical and Spirit of Prophecy teaching that Jesus took on fallen, sinful flesh at the incarnation, but Froom ignored the poll and pressed ahead.

The "Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders and Bible Teachers and Editors," by which QOD was claimed to be prepared, comprised, "the QOD trio": L. E. Froom, W. E. Reed, R. A. Anderson. Though respected and capable men, they were not trained theologians, and M. L. Andreasen was excluded. Although retired, he was one of Adventism's leading systematic theologians and experts on the book of Hebrews and biblical atonement.

The four points of doctrinal contention that the Evangelicals had with Adventists were:

1) that the atonement of Christ is not completed at the Cross; 2) that salvation is the result of grace and works of the law; 3) that the Lord Jesus Christ was a created being, and not from all eternity; and 4) that Jesus partook of man's sinful fallen nature at the Incarnation.

Basically, the Evangelicals were saying that if any denomination believed any of the above points, they would be classified as a cult. It has to be said that QOD had a lot of Adventist truth in it, and consequently, the second and third points were adequately rebuffed. QOD, however, woefully compromised and watered down the first point, as it related to Christ's high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and "final atonement." The fourth point was contradicted.

When Barnhouse and Martin discussed with the QOD Trio "the problem of the Incarnation" over the 18 conferences between 1955 and 1956, Martin attested they were assured that "The majority of the denomination [SDA], has always held (the nature of Christ while in the flesh) to be sinless, holy, and perfect, despite the fact that certain of their writers have occasionally gotten into print with contrary views completely repugnant to the church at large." Compounding the blatant, complete inaccuracy and slander of the above claim was the equally libellous assertion "declared" by the Adventists that "they had among their members a certain number of the 'lunatic fringe,' even as there are similar wild-eyed irresponsibles in every field of fundamental Christianity."

In seeking to constrain (in one swoop) the meaning of hundreds of Ellen G. White statements on the human nature of Jesus, R. A. Anderson declared, "In only three or four places in all these inspired counsels have we found such expressions as 'fallen nature' and 'sinful nature.'" But he seems to ignore the fact there are copious statements, which clearly convey the meaning he denies, in just one book, *The Desire of Ages*. Even in the limitations of this article, we have demonstrated Anderson's glaring claim
to be incorrect.

Apparently, QOD did not significantly improve Barnhouse's perception of Seventh-day Adventists. He is reported to have said:

All I am saying is that the Adventists are Christians. I still think their doctrines are about the screwiest of any group of Christians in the world. I believe this beyond any question. In fact, the doctrine of the Investigative Judgement is the most blatant face-saving proposition that ever existed to cover up the debacle of the failure of Christ to come in 1844 as they said.68

There has been consistent, constant resistance—consternation, warnings, and solid opposition—levelled at the compromises on the atonement, the remnant, and the human nature of Christ in QOD. These have been voiced by, Francis Nichol,69 M. L. Andreasen (cf. his Letters to the Churches), the inimitable Raymond Cottrell,70 Kenneth Wood, and Herbert Douglass, just to name a few. The brief was ignored and was not presented to the delegates.

As laudable as seeking to draw leaders in other denominations to accept Seventh-day Adventists as "mainline" Christians (in their estimation) might seem, the process and goal of "Changing the Impaired Image of Adventism"71 that led to compromise and the watering down of biblical truth, was an exercise in theology travesty and a repudiation of true and essential biblical Christology. This was a part played by some of the subject matter of Questions on Doctrine, which shifted Seventh-day Adventist belief on key doctrinal counts.72

An example of the extent of the reaction to QOD is clearly shown by the following "supporting brief" prepared by lawyers for a proposed resolution to be presented to delegates of the 1958 General Conference Session in Cleveland, Ohio:

Let it be resolved, that in view of the evidence presented, the book Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine does not represent the faith and belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and is hereby repudiated on the following five points:

1) It contains specimens of scholastic and intellectual dishonesty.
2) It contains duplicity.
3) It is inadequate.
4) It contains error.
5) It is Satan's masterpiece of strategy to defeat the purpose of God for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.73

Being "accepted" by other denominations, to which we have been commissioned to proclaim the three angels' messages of Revelation 14, has never been a divine mandate of God's remnant people viciously under attack (Revelation 12:17). Preaching the extent of the love of God in present truth—that of "the everlasting gospel" (Revelation 14:6), warning that "Babylon...is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils" (Revelation 18:2, emphasis supplied) and proclaiming the voice of God calling, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4, emphasis supplied)74—however, is God's mandate.

The "tectonic shift" in Adventism was openly admitted and boldly presented as "corrective." But this was done through questionable means and methods. There was no sound biblical substantiation for the change, and it leaned upon the skewed presentation of Ellen White quotations, which were couched in some tendentious headings and absence of biblical references.75

It was driven chiefly by the reluctance to being called a cult, and the false sense of security and satisfaction that come from "being accepted." Even if, all of this were a worthy pursuit, the aim was not achieved, as we have seen, and the consequences to God's remnant church have been unimaginable. So the whole so-called "corrective undertaking"76 intended for QOD, and all that surrounded it, was useless, reprehensible, and itself, is worthy of repudiation, but it certainly is not worthy of republication after a so-called, 40-year hiatus.

Kenneth Wood, former editor of the Review and Herald and chair of the Ellen G. White Estate Board of Trustees demonstrated the depth of the implications in his perceptive comment:
CONCLUSION

The Bible says, God’s “so great salvation” and solution for the great predicament of sin is superior to the problem itself: the divine Son of God condescended to be born into the fallen human race, lived a sinless life in “sinful flesh,” and died an undeserving death on the cross to “condemn sin in the flesh” and set us free from the power of sin in our mortal body.

The Bible teaches that we inherited the effect, and not the guilt of, Adam’s sin. Adam transmitted “sinful flesh” to us, a weakened, fallen, human nature, with an inclination to sin. In this we had no choice, but sinning is our own choice. Rightly understanding these elements of sin will help us understand the nature of Christ’s humanity, which will then give us the biblical understanding of what salvation from sin really is and the workings of conversion. Therefore, the question: "Was Jesus only our substitute for sin, or was He also our example in victory over sin?" will be answered correctly.

To find the truth to these questions, we have fundamentally, two basic theological systems upon which to build. There is the Roman Catholic/Calvinistic/Evangelical grid, whose predominant claims are: the Augustinian sovereignty of God, we are all born sinners, need infant baptism, will continue sinning until the Lord returns, and never gain complete victory over our sins. Romans 7 describes a converted man; Jesus is only our substitute; salvation is not really our choice but God’s; Jesus was born with a sinless human nature like Adam’s before the fall; His human nature was not like ours; He had an advantage over us; Mary, the mother of Jesus, had to be immaculately conceived.

Therefore, the crucial descriptions of salvation, the “new birth,” being “born of the spirit,” being a "new creation," "partaking of the divine nature," having Christ “dwell” in us, “righteousness by faith,” being "holy" as our “father in heaven is holy,” are incapable of being rightly understood, and consequently, the danger lingers that we remain in our sins.

Then there is the Adventist form of Arminianism, which maintains that we were all born with a tendency toward sin; however, if we live completely surrendered and dependent on God as Christ was, we can experience salvation "from" our sins now. Romans 7 describes a legalist and, therefore, an unconverted man, “Christ in you, [is] the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Jesus is our substitute and our example of victorious living. Salvation depends on our choice; Jesus was born with a fallen human nature like Adam’s after the fall; His human nature was like ours; He had no advantages over us; Mary was not immaculately conceived.

Thus, crucial descriptions of conversion can be rightly understood, the whole Bible takes on a new depth of meaning. The study of the humanity of the Son of God is everything to us, and it will bring us the deep reward of understanding and experiencing the vital workings of salvation from sin.

The context of E. G. White's personal letter to Pastor W. L. H. Baker needs to be understood and not used to displace her clear consistent statements that Christ assumed our human nature weakened by the fall, as presented in The Desire of Ages. Confusion in the debate over the human nature of Christ arises when we are captivated and confused by the sophistication of human philosophising, and do not keep to what the Scripture clearly teaches. The issue, is not the divinity of Christ, it is His humanity. Attempting to resolve the debate over Christ’s human nature cannot be done by amalgamation of the pre-fall and post-fall interpretations. It is a question of one or the other.

QOD was the ultimate Trojan horse that “officially” opened the floodgates of Catholic and Calvinistic theology into the divinely established Seventh-day Adventist belief system. This book effectively seeks to reverse a hundred years of official Adventist teaching on the fallen human nature of Christ and mute our witness on the investigative judgement, and the remnant. If ever there were a "neutering of Adventism," this is it! And all this was intended to "help bring peace between Adventism and conservative Protestantism"? But the price is too high, God's Truth cannot be contradicted or altered without impunity (Revelation 22:18, 19)!
As Adventists today, we desperately need to know the truth about this part of our church history and the changes made to distinctly Adventist teaching that have crept in as a result (Jude 4). This will help us understand the internal disunity regarding our Christian standards, our remnant identity, our prophetic mission and message, the reasons for the delay of Christ's second coming, and help us take a clear stand for true Adventism, with all of its interrelated teachings, and thus be ready for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and Christ's soon return.

Finally, QOD has been the catalyst for an ingeniously established, untenable, destructive, quick-spirited persecution of those who seek to keep "the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Those Seventh-day Adventists of your church and my church, who in Christlike manner teach and follow the teachings of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White (especially with regard to holy living, Christian perfection, and the heath message) too often have persecution levelled at them, in the form of ridicule, which is consistent with and akin to the "officially" accepted and established precedent of "lunatic fringe," "wide-eyed irresponsibles" and a collection of similar disparaging terms. This abhorrent behaviour needs to be repented of and the justification for it repudiated. How the Devil has waged his war! (Revelation 12:17).

The stakes are extremely high as Zurcher pointed out:

If we are mistaken about the human nature of Jesus, we risk being mistaken about every aspect of the plan of salvation. We may fail to understand the redemptive reality of the grace bestowed upon humans by Jesus to set humanity free from the power of sin.

Ellen White, stresses this fundamental truth: “Christ’s overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity.”

The Bible says, “And every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” (Hebrews 2:2, 3, emphasis supplied).

REFERENCES

2. All Scriptural references and quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the King James Version.
3. To deceive the sons and daughters of God, the Devil has mastered the art of 1) challenging what God has said and insinuating doubt (Genesis 3:1, 4), and 2) deception that relies upon the use of truth mixed with error (Genesis 3:4, 5).
4. He will, "abide with you for ever" (John 14:16); "he shall teach you all things" (John 14:26); and "the Spirit of truth...will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).
5. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6, emphasis supplied). Jesus also said, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37, emphasis supplied).
6. Notice also, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).
8. “Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression” (Romans 5:14).
9. The Roman Catholic Church teaches we are born sinners, and that “original sin...is universal. Every child is therefore defiled at its birth with the taint of Adam’s disobedience. ... Hence baptism, which washes away original sin, is as essential for the infant as for the full grown man, in order to attain the kingdom of heaven.” Cardinal James Gibbons, Faith of Our Fathers (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1891), 311 (emphasis supplied), see also, 303-319. Likewise, “original sin,” has been believed by the majority of Protestants since the Augsburg
Confession of Protestant Princes on June 25, AD 1530. It reads: "Article II Confesses Original Sin. Since the fall of Adam, all men descending from him in ordinary generation are born in sin, which places under condemnation and brings eternal death to all who are not born again by baptism [infant baptism] and the Holy Ghost." (J. A. Wylie, The History of Protestantism, Part 1 (Mourne Missionary Trust, Church Road, Carginagh, Kilkeel, Co. Down. N. Ireland), 597 (emphasis supplied).

10. God considered the guilty parents' babies innocent, and so they were to go into the Promised Land, which is a figure of our promised future inheritance. Note, also, that Jesus in no way refers to babies and little ones as being guilty at birth, or at any time, for Adam's transgression or anyone else's (Matthew 18:2-4, 5, 10, 14; 19:14).


12. "The popular view [of Greek philosophy] was that guilt was inherited, that is, that the children are punished for their fathers' sins." S. H. Butcher, Some Aspects of the Greek Genius, 123 (London, England: Macmillan, 1904). This "popular view," though repudiated by Scripture, was brought into Catholicism by Augustine, who was greatly influenced by Greek pagan ideas. From Catholicism it was passed on to the majority of today's Protestant denominations.

13. The Augustinian notion has often been repeated, that if Jesus were born in fallen, sinful flesh, "then He himself would have needed a Saviour " (R. A. Anderson, Ministry, September 1956, 13). But this presupposes guilt at the moment of birth, that is, "Original Sin," which is contrary to the clear and unified testimony of Scripture.


16. "Son of man" was Christ's favourite title.

17. All emphasis in this section was supplied by the author.

18. "Us" here is meant in the biblical sense; those converted by the indwelling power of Jesus Christ.

19. After the beloved disciple John wrote of the converted, "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of [Greek: ek—"out of"] God," that he then pronounces with a [kai --"and" explicative] "and the word was made flesh, and dwell among us" (John 1:13, 14).

20. Abraham is one of the "converted brethren"—"converted children" that "are partakers of flesh and blood," of whom Jesus was not ashamed to be called a brother (Hebrews 2:11).

21. Jesus said, "I can of Mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30); "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works" (John 14:10, emphasis supplied).

22. Note: Scripture says Christ took, "sinful [human] flesh," which we all have inherited from Adam after his fall. God's Word does not say Jesus took, sinless [human] flesh, such as Adam had before the fall.


25. Ibid. (emphasis supplied).

26. The Roman Catholic Encyclopedia states, "In the Constitution Ineffabilis Deus of 8 December, 1854, Pius IX pronounced and defined that the Blessed Virgin Mary ‘in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin’" (emphasis supplied). This false premise then, according to Roman Catholic dogma, logically attributes and holds Jesus to, a pre-fall human nature. See also, J.A.T. Robinson, The Body, a Study in Pauline Theology (London: SCM Press, LTD, 1952), 37, 38.


Association, 1869), 201 (emphasis supplied).
31. Selected Messages, Book 1, 267, 268 (emphasis supplied).
32. Desire of Ages, 71.
34. For example, Questions on Doctrine, 1957, 62.
35. Selected Messages, Book 1, 267, 268 (emphasis supplied).
37. Herbert Douglass, member of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Committee at the time, worked in the General Conference offices in Washington D.C., adjacent to where the QOD trio met.
40. General Conference Seventh-day Adventists ministerial director, 1941–1950; professor emeritus of historical theology, Andrews University; and author.
41. Movement of Destiny, 465-475.
42. Ibid., 468 (emphasis supplied).
43. Froom, himself stated, "Previously we had been handicapped," ibid., 467 (emphasis supplied).
44. Ibid. (emphasis supplied).
45. Ibid., 465, 469 (emphasis supplied).
46. This claim by Froom is as inaccurate as it is shocking. Arianism denies the divinity of Christ, stemming from the belief that Jesus Christ was the first created being; this has never been widely held or ever been the official Adventist position!
47. Ibid., 465 (emphasis supplied).
48. Ibid., 469.
50. All emphasis is original.
51. Movement of Destiny, 467 (emphasis supplied).
52. Touched With Our Feelings, 154, 155.
54. A Fork in the Road, 16.
55. This letter, and that it should be sent to Barnhouse, was, Douglass recalls, a "mystery to many of us in Washington during the 1950’s..." Ministry, August 2004, 16.
56. Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Spiritual Discernment, or How to Read Religious Books," Eternity (June 1950), as quoted in, A Fork in the Road, 16.
57. Walter R. Martin, The Rise of the Cults (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1955), 12, as quoted in, A Fork in the Road, 17.
58. For further details and implications see: Chapter 10, "Adventism’s New Milestone," Touched With Our Feelings, 153-166; A Fork in the Road, 17-21. Also, Norman McNulty’s lectures, "The History of Questions on Doctrine," and "The Desmond Ford Apostasy," available on www.audioverse.org. These sources are vital to anyone interested in knowing why there is a loss of identity and mission, along with theological disagreement at all levels within the Seventh-day Adventist Church today.
60. QOD, 1957, front inside page.
61. Ibid., xv.


Telephone conversation on May 16, 1958, between Al Hudson (Adventist printer and first elder) and Dr. Barnhouse, as quoted in, A Fork in the Road, 79.

A Fork in the Road, 37.

Ibid., 36.

L.E. Froom, Movement of Destiny, 465-475.

These have caused disunity and confusion in Adventist soteriology, and have seriously diminished Adventism’s divinely established system of doctrine, and it’s clear and unified understanding of its remnant identity, mission, and the proclamation of the angels’ messages in Revelation chapters 14 and 18.

A Fork in the Road, 79.

The whole of Revelation 18:2-4, needs to be read to appreciate the abhorrent characteristics of Babylon that God denounces and that He wants His people to leave.

QOD, 1957, 647-660.

Movement of Destiny, 468.

Touched With Our Feelings, 19.

Reason for This Article:

There are many who find satisfaction in identifying themselves with false doctrines, that there may be no disturbance or difference between themselves and the world; but the children of God must bear testimony to the truth, not only by pen and voice but by spirit and character.¹

As I visit and talk with many in our churches today, there is something that concerns me more and more. The concern has to do with why many of us are so depressed, angry, and frustrated—so much so that many have become victims in their own minds. Their frustration manifests itself as: “If only the church would do this or that, I would find happiness.” The natural course of these feelings leads to the next logical step and reasoning: “Maybe I am in the wrong church. Maybe we are not the remnant because if we were, then I would not feel this way.”

I am not saying that there aren’t times of pain, hurt feelings, discouragement and, yes, even suffering. But they are no longer merely occasional or out of the norm for the church these days; rather, they seem to be the rule and almost an expected part of everyday life—and I emphasize every day of life.

It is my belief that Seventh-day Adventists should be some of the happiest people walking the face of the earth. After all, we have a message that has been laboriously and sacrificially worked out, and besides, we have the Spirit of Prophecy.

So, What Is the Problem?

Could it be that many do not understand righteousness by faith? Are we caught hanging by a thread on either side of the rope and cannot understand why we are having a problem of getting a grip, or solid hold, on our faith? On one side we have those who push law, and on the other those advocating grace. Those at either extreme don’t realize that we can’t have one without the other, and that they both mean absolutely nothing without Jesus. He is the focal point of the law and the grace that each and every human being needs.

One of the most powerful quotes that I have been blessed to read concerning righteousness by faith is:

Paul had ever exalted the divine law. He had shown that in the law there is no power to save men from the penalty of disobedience. Wrongdoers must repent of their sins and humble themselves before God, Whose just wrath they have incurred by breaking His law, and they must also exercise faith in the blood of Christ as their only means of pardon. The Son of God had died as their sacrifice and had ascended to Heaven to stand before the Father as their Advocate. By repentance and faith they might be freed from the condemnation of sin and through the grace of Christ be enabled henceforth to render obedience to the law of God.²

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. (Proverbs 3:13, emphasis supplied)
Next, let us review the three steps to righteousness by faith.

1. **We must repent.**
   
   "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14, 15).
   
   - Repentance: if it is genuine, it will enable the individual to find the peace of forgiveness through Christ our Righteousness. He can find justification through the Justifier.
   - Why is this so important? "God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul." Repentance is the understanding that God is right and we are wrong, and it will lead us to feel our need of Him for our purification.

2. **We must exercise faith in the blood of Christ as our only means of pardon.**
   
   “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3).
   
   “In order for man to be justified by faith, faith must reach a point where it will control the affections and impulses of the heart; and it is by obedience that faith itself is made perfect.”

   - Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
   - A. Do I really believe that the blood of Jesus Christ can atone for my sins?
   - B. Do I really believe that the blood of Jesus Christ has covered my sins?

3. **Grace will enable us to render obedience to the law of God.**
   
   Without the grace of Christ, the sinner is in a hopeless condition; nothing can be done for him; but through divine grace, supernatural power is imparted to the man and works in mind and heart and character.5
   
   - “Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20).
   - “The Lord requires at this time just what He required of Adam and Eve—perfect obedience to the law of God.6 This is only possible as God imparts His righteousness to us.
   - C. “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Proverbs 29:18, emphasis supplied).

Understanding how these three elements work in our lives is central to our happiness.

The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account.7 Praise God!

Great peace have they that love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them. (Psalm 119:165)

After people repent and by faith learn to trust that Christ’s atonement for us is sufficient, God will impart His grace to give them the power to obey His law. We cannot keep God’s law with joy unless we have followed the first three steps previously mentioned. Could this be the reason why so many people struggle with the joy of salvation, struggle to have peace with God and His church and His people?

**What About Luther?**

Martin Luther struggled with this joy-in-salvation issue. Until he discovered the text: “The just shall live by faith,” this great Reformer, who helped so many others to strengthen their hold on faith, had a perpetual battle with his own faith. He had no peace. No matter what he did, there was no rest for his
"The content of the depressions was always the same, the loss of faith that God is good and that He is good to me." 8

"His concern was all the more intense because he was a physician of souls; and if the medicine which he had prescribed for himself and for them was actually poison, how frightful was his responsibility. The problem for him was not to know where his depressions came from, but to know how to overcome them." 9 He did not realize that he must understand both where his depressions came from and how to overcome them.

Like many today, "Luther felt that his depressions were necessary. At the same time they were dreadful and by all means and in every way to be avoided and overcome." 10 This is another problem for those who do not have a clear understanding of righteousness by faith.

A. Many today do not realize that we need to understand that Jesus Christ is the only means by which we can overcome . . .
B. We also need to know where the depression comes from. This knowledge usually comes when we understand that we can add nothing to what He has done already. It is by faith in Him, not ourselves.
C. Some have even come to the conclusion that unless they suffer or go around depressed about something, they have not afflicted the soul enough. See what happened to Martin Luther:

One day, among others, wishing to obtain an indulgence promised by the pope to all who should ascend on their knees what is called Pilate's Staircase, the poor Saxon monk was humbly creeping up those steps, which he was told had been miraculously transported from Jerusalem to Rome. But while he was performing this meritorious act, he thought he heard a voice of thunder crying from the bottom of his heart, as at Wittenberg and Bologna, "The just shall live by faith." 11

There are many who make promises just like the popes of old and of now. If accepted, such promises will lead precious souls down the path of frustration and despair.

From the pulpits of today the words are uttered: "Believe, only believe. Have faith in Christ; you have nothing to do with the old law, only trust in Christ." How different is this from the words of the apostle who declares that faith without works is dead. He says, "But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1: 22). We must have that faith that works by love and purifies the soul. Many seek to substitute a superficial faith for uprightness of life and think through this to obtain salvation. 12

Through all the battles Luther faced—the self-inflicted abuse whether beating himself, climbing Pilate's Staircase on his knees, or the withholding of all worldly comforts, no sacrifice could add anything to the price Christ paid. That is why Luther could not find peace while trying to accumulate favor with God. It was faith in what Christ had done that finally gave Luther the peace he so much craved.

There are still many churches today that will give their people tools or methods by which they are supposed to find pardon. Yet no peace comes, nor can it come, with anything other than simple faith in Christ.

This righteousness is heavenly and passive: which we have not of ourselves, but receive it from Heaven: which we work not, but apprehend it by faith. . . 13

In that righteousness and life [of Christ] I have no sin, no sting of conscience, no care of death. . . I have another righteousness and life above this life, which is Christ the Son of God, Who knoweth no sin nor death, but is righteousness and life eternal. 14

What About Our History?
The 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session was a meeting of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It is regarded as a landmark event in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Key participants were Alonzo T. Jones, Ellet J. Waggoner, and Ellen G. White, who were pitted against G. I. Butler, Uriah Smith, and others. The session discussed crucial theological issues such as the meaning of “righteousness by faith” and the relationship between law and grace.
Let us now take a look at that pivotal time in our church history concerning the topic of righteousness by faith.

Prior to 1888, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones challenged the church’s understanding of righteousness by faith. Not surprisingly, Sister White eventually would be drawn into the discussion, as well.

Ellen White tried valiantly to counteract the tendency of Adventists to flatter themselves on their good moral character and obedience to God’s laws. “We must renounce our own righteousness,” she wrote in an article prepared for the 1882 camp meetings, “and plead for the righteousness of Christ to be imputed to us. We must depend wholly upon Christ for our strength. Self must die. We must acknowledge that all we have is from the exceeding riches of divine grace.” As Ellen saw it, faith in Christ’s sacrifice and merits should be followed by love, “and love by obedience.” Then the Holy Spirit would provide the power to transform the believer into “the divine image.” Sadly Mrs. White expressed the belief that “this experience is understood by but few who profess the truth.”

Because of this unfortunate misunderstanding and pride in their own righteousness, many were not experiencing the joy, the true fruitage of love. Might it not be the same in our day? Do we claim, as our forefathers did, to be a good, moral people without the humility to give God all the credit? Have we really renounced all of our righteousness? Look how the church treated the modern prophet, and let us see if the same problem concerning Ellen White is as relevant today as it was then.

If church leaders could not hear, Ellen White would go directly to the people. But first she would make one more attempt to reach those at the top. Thus the month following the conference saw her in Battle Creek, where others had arrived before her. Their reports, along with letters from Minneapolis, confirmed Elder Butler’s prejudices and suspicions. Ellen White tried to impress Butler with her desire for unity, that all she desired was “to see the matter as it is, and make things straight”; but she felt he virtually ignored her. . . . Others in Battle Creek also treated Mrs. White coolly. Always before when in this city, so long her home, she had been urged to speak in the tabernacle. Now, although the customary invitation was given, two of the local elders called to inquire what her topic would be. The hint was not very subtle, and Ellen White firmly told them that this was a matter best left between her and the Lord. She also urged them to invite A. T. Jones to speak in the tabernacle. They hedged, saying they would need to check first with Uriah Smith. Then do so quickly, Ellen urged, because Elder Jones has a message from God for the people. Jones did get to preach, and many were benefited.

I believe that today we have the same problem in the church as we did at that time. Because of our misunderstanding of righteousness by faith, many have been led to question our doctrine and the legitimacy and precision of the prophet.

We sometimes also present truth in a wrong spirit. In the spring of 1887, Ellen White sent a letter of censure to all the major participants in the 1886 debate. She reproved Waggoner and Jones for “their overconfident attitude and for publicly agitating matters.” She wanted them to show a united front before the world. “Butler and Smith were reminded that they were not infallible.”

Now let us to see what can happen when a person truly understands righteousness by faith.

Ellen White was especially burdened for Elder Uriah Smith and made several appeals to him. “These, coupled with her moving Week of Prayer call for church members to truly repent and really come to Christ, had a deep effect on Uriah Smith. Only a few days later he requested a personal interview with Mrs. White, during which she noted a much different attitude on Smith’s part. This was followed by his meeting with a small group of church leaders two days later to confess his wrong attitudes and mistaken opposition to the messages presented in 1888. . . . Ellen White rejoiced that Elder Smith had “fallen on the Rock and was broken.”

Oh, how I believe many of us need to fall once again on that same Rock and be broken. Pride, conflict, strife, power struggles, and discord in the church have not only led to hatred amongst members but also have taken many innocent casualties in the process.
A matter that all need to understand is that we can experience real joy in our salvation:

1. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2; emphasis supplied).
2. “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10; emphasis supplied).
3. “Repentance is associated with faith and is urged in the Gospel as essential to salvation... This repentance has in it nothing of the nature of merit, but it prepares the heart for the acceptance of Christ as the only Saviour, the only hope of the lost sinner.”
4. “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit” (Psalm 51:7–12; emphasis supplied).

One of the key indicators, then, that we have salvation is joy, or peace.

In verse 13, we see the results of being forgiven and having faith that His blood is sufficient. The Bible says, “Then.” “Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee” (emphasis supplied).

Another clear indicator is that after we have repented and accepted Christ’s atonement for our sins by faith, we will, according to Psalm 51:13, teach others of that salvation. But we must remember that we can only be truly happy when we are at one with our God and that loyalty is the fruit of that love. Remember what we read from The Acts of the Apostles, page 393: “By repentance and faith they [mankind] might be freed from the condemnation [count it all joy to us!] of sin and through the grace of Christ be enabled henceforth to render obedience to the law of God.”

Conclusion
From all that we have considered thus far, it is clear that we struggle when we do not understand righteousness by faith. We struggle with doubt, frustrated with all the efforts of keeping the law and yet still coming short of where we know we should be. Salvation under such conditions is not a joy, and if we are not careful, the next logical place we find ourselves is in doubting our message—doubting the very church that God has set up to shine forth amongst all the false churches in the world.

Under this dark cloud of doubt, we may even come to the place where we start questioning the Spirit of Prophecy, then the Bible: Are they really inspired? Next might come a move to Sunday worship, then perhaps even blaming God Himself for our backsliding.

Beloved, it all leads to Sunday. If we would fall in love with Christ we will see and find love in keeping His fourth commandment. Then by faith—righteousness by faith—we may believe that His blood does cover our sins, that He died specifically for each of us. Here is where we really find the “joy in thy salvation” of Psalm 51:12.

Why Our People Must Understand Righteousness by Faith

The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken.

REFERENCES
3. Faith and Works, 100.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 89.
7. Ibid., 101.
9. Ibid., 283.
10. Ibid.
12. Faith and Works, 89.
14. Ibid., 105, 106.
16. Ibid., 190, 191.
17. Ibid., 186.
18. Ibid., 193.
I once heard someone say that the trouble with taking a walk is that you don’t know when you get there! For some people the Christian life may seem that way or even worse. They may not know where they are going. Or perhaps they have a long view that says, “I am going to heaven someday, I hope—that is, if I can hold on that long.” Many, even members of the church, don’t have a clear idea of what the Christian life is supposed to be, and if they have a faint inkling they are not always sure how to get there.

The Christian life is not supposed to be a walk to nowhere or anywhere, but to somewhere. The Christian life is life with a purpose. It’s not just a walk we take, but a journey that has a destination, and there are signs along the way to let us know how far along we have traveled. The Apostle Paul knew from personal experience what the Christian life was all about. He knew where he was going, and he could tell you or anybody else how to get there.

Although Paul had a past, for him the Christian life wasn’t about the past—it was about the present and the future. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13, 14). The current modality is to solve your problems by looking back. To Paul the Christian life was about planning to win. He had a past, but he did not waste time looking backward.

I don’t know if you are aware of it or not, but we tend to move in the direction we are looking. As we drive, if we spend our time looking back, we will go off the road. It stands to reason that a person who spends a lot of time looking at his or her past life will sooner or later end up going backward. When a person really understands what the Christian life is all about, there is no reason to look back.

Some are giving more attention to how to get out of trouble than to how to stay out of trouble. They seem to be focusing more on what to do when they run off the road than on how to keep their Christian lives on track.

This could be because in our walk with the Lord, we see ourselves as losers rather than winners. There is no doubt we are weak and have a greater natural propensity to sin than to overcome. Yet we need to understand that the Christian life is based on the new birth. A newborn baby is just starting its life, and so the concept for the Christian is that when we are born again we get a new start. The apostle Paul said it best: "The former things are passed away, and behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

I suspect that the reason so many are having heavy-duty problems in their lives is because, when we came to Jesus rather than being born again, we seem to have just taken up where we left off. I am not suggesting that being a Christian means we won’t have problems anymore. Reality is that, not only will we have problems, but we may have even more problems than we had before we came to Jesus. Jesus Himself said that in this world we would have trouble (John 16:23).
Therefore, the goal is not that a Christian will have no problems, but instead of being a loser to their problems, as they grow in grace, they will more and more become a winner. After all, the Word promises that there is no trial that has come or will come to us but that God will get us through it somehow if we want it that way (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Could it be that many of us have not yet experienced what Jesus called being born again? We often go to Him with an enormous amount of baggage, and instead of leaving the baggage in the past, we take it on board. Some actually seem to enjoy rummaging through the old stuff. Many go to the Lord with their past lives full of mistakes and failures and, believe it or not, continue to do the same type of things although now in a different context.

The Christian life is not supposed to be a junkyard where we scrounge around for used pieces to try to get our lives back together. Rather it is a place where we start all over again. We must acknowledge that when a person is born again, he or she may not change his or her spouse and children, but the experience will definitely change the person himself, and that is for the better and not the worse.

For our part, the first step when we respond to the call of the Holy Spirit is to repent. This is because the first work of the Holy Spirit is the call to repentance (John 16:9). Unless we repent from the heart, we will, in spite of our profession of faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and no matter that we say He did it all for us on the cross, we will remain with the same problems we had before we went to Jesus. We might even end up worse than before because the Scripture says that people who know to do right and don’t do it are worse off than if they hadn’t gone to the Lord in the first place (James 2:10).

We are not hearing sermons about repentance because it’s not affirming and accepting. I don’t know if you have thought about it or not, but the idea of always affirming each other can very well become a disincentive to change. The gospel is about change. If we are persuaded that I’m OK and you’re OK, we tend to perpetuate our weaknesses, or we try to build a new life on top of the old. Jesus said we have to be born again (John 3:7). The labor pain of the new birth is repentance.

Returning to the matter of the new birth, we know what a newborn baby is like. It is helpless and 100 percent dependent on someone else to take care of it. On the other hand, being born again in the spiritual sense is different from the natural sense because when a baby is born and develops and along the way, it progresses from complete dependence increasingly toward independence. In the spiritual sense, the new birth is just the opposite. After we are born again, we progress from independence to complete and total dependence on Jesus through the Holy Spirit. That is what it means when the Bible says, “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

These days we hear a lot about having a relationship with God. But a person who is born again will have more than a relationship with Jesus; they will have made a commitment. A commitment is a relationship, but a relationship is not necessarily a commitment. In this life we have all types of relationships, but we don’t make many commitments. This generation doesn’t mind having a relationship, but it refuses to make a commitment. Someone suggested that we take it even a step further, and that is to define commitment as surrender. I like that. That fits the commitment that Jesus had with the heavenly Father when He said, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

The bottom line of the born-again Christian life is obedience, and that doesn’t mean just in the things where we happen to agree. The life of faith is doing what God has asked us to do whether we happen to agree or understand all the implications. People who are into sports take seriously what the coach has to say. The people who win the medals in the Olympics are the people who have trainers, and the trainers are the ones who call the shots.

Some have decided that in the area of faith and morals, our way, your way, or any way is okay as long as we are sincere. But winners are not only sincere, they are committed, and they are disciplined. It is amazing that in the Christian life that so many would have trouble with the one word that makes us winners. Whether it be in a military campaign or in a play-off game, the winning word is obedience.

A soldier shared with me that in the army they are really hard on you when it comes to the matter of obedience. They will discipline anyone for walking on the grass when the sign says, “Keep off the grass.”
I asked the young man why he thought they are that way, and he explained that when we are in a battle, his life and the lives of the others depend on obeying orders. So their training is not only about learning certain skills, but underlying it all is the discipline of obedience.

One of the primary reasons many people are more into losing than into winning in the Christian life is that they have somehow become hostile to the concept of obedience. Imagine how ridiculous it would be in military training if, when the first sergeant was telling the soldiers how absolutely necessary it was for them to obey orders, an enlisted man would raise his hand and say, “Sir, but that is legalism.” The next thing the recruit would learn would be how to do 100 push-ups.

There is no area of life where obedience is not a necessary element, and the Christian life is no exception. Somehow a ridiculous and impossible notion has become accepted by many that obedience is unnecessary if you are a Christian. Nothing could be further from reality.

If we are going win in this life and be prepared for the life to come, we are going to have to start having the mind-set of winners and not losers. Winners are not afraid of words like “overcoming sin.” They don’t feel intimidated when people talk about holiness or the victorious Christian life. Here at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a repentant, bornagain, committed Christian is one who is aware that the signs are telling us the coming of Jesus is near. They know that before this happens, probation will close, and those who are not winning when that happens will be permanent losers.

One day Jesus will say, He that is holy let him be holy still and he that is unholy will have to stay that way (Revelation 22:11, author’s paraphrase). While we are aware that where sin abounds, grace much more abounds (Romans 5:20); at the same time, we must not be presumptuous because the Word also says that God’s Spirit will not always strive with men and women (Genesis 6:3).

The current mindset doesn’t want to hear about repentance because it makes them feel guilty. Yet the first work of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin (John 16:8). Nevertheless, guilt is seen by many as the cause of all our problems. Supposing a man and woman start an adulterous relationship. Of course, the natural thing is to feel guilty, so they go to see a counselor. The contemporary counselor will probably not tell them to break off the adultery but rather to stop feeling guilty.

On the other hand, a born-again Christian will not avoid the importance of guilt. It is as necessary for me to feel guilty when I do something wrong as it is for my finger to hurt when I put it on a hot iron. Contrary to popular belief, guilt is not our problem—sin is our problem. Guilt is God’s way of alerting us that something is not right.

I appreciate guilt as I grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Guilt is what tells me when I have missed the mark. Now I realize there is such a thing as toxic guilt. If guilt is the gauge God has given to tell us when something is wrong, it would not be out of the character of things if the gauge went bad once in a while. Our guilt gauge must be kept calibrated by the Word of God (Psalm 119:9).

So I am thankful for the guilt that keeps me on track. Guilt will tell us when we are off the road before we actually hit something and do permanent damage to our lives or the life of someone else. If we would value guilt and heed its warnings, we wouldn’t be hurting nearly as much as we are.

It is the feeling of guilt that sends me to my knees. How thankful I am that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Sometimes when I miss the mark and I know I have not glorified God, I ask Him to forgive me, and then I say, “Lord, let’s try that again. Give me another go at it!” If you are into affirming, let me warn you. Guilt is not affirming; it is humiliating. But humility in the Christian life is not a put-down. It is the way to let God put you back on track.

Take into account these texts: Matthew 18:4—"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 23:12—"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.” Here are more: James 4:6—"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the
humble.” And finally, James 4:10—“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

In the Christian life humility is actually the way that we grow. It could be put this way—Christians do not grow up, they actually grow down. The more we are humbled before God the closer to Him we become.

The old spiritual was right when it said that everyone who was talking about going to heaven wouldn’t be going there. Though we may be talking about winning a crown someday, what many are doing in the here and now will result in anything but a crown. If we plan to win the crown, we must take steps here that will make it possible for us to win. Salvation is not a civil right. Jesus paid a price for our salvation and so must we. Being saved is not the easiest thing we will ever do; rather, it will be that for which we had to pay a price. And that price is, we had to die to the old life and be born again to a new one in Christ Jesus. Although being saved is not easy, thank God it is possible for all who undertake it with their whole heart. The Word says we will find Him if we search for Him with all our hearts (Jeremiah 29:13, author’s paraphrase).

Heaven is for winners. Those who don’t make heaven will be those who copped out of the race. Everyone who runs the race of salvation and stays in the race will win. But we have to stay in the race.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:1-4).

Have you ever been impressed when you see someone able to do something well? We use the expression that it seems to come natural to that person. There is no doubt that we are all born with certain talents, but we should make no mistake that those who do something particularly well are those who have taken their talents and employed them to the best of their ability.

One of my college professors was an expert in biblical languages. He made it clear to us he was not happy to hear people say that languages come naturally to him. He said he had spent his whole life studying and applying himself to learn these languages. It was by no means something that came naturally.

The growing Christian life is not natural either. It is a mixture of the supernatural with a serious commitment on the part of the person who has been born again. I like what I heard someone ask one time and have repeated it often: which is most important, being born or staying alive?

How many Christians have had the miracle of the new birth, but then have made no effort to move forward and grow in grace? I know there are some who say we don’t need to make an effort, only “let go and let God.”

In Florida where I live, I try to keep some variety of flowers growing most of the year. I don’t make the flowers grow, God does. But how I care for them is a big factor in how they grow and if they survive. "Let go and let God" is to understate what the Christian life is all about. It would be like saying when you want to grow petunias, just stick them in the ground and you don’t have to do anything more. Just a word here about what I call living the Christian life by adrenaline. Using the gardening illustration again, the water that gives life to a plant can also drown it, and the sun that makes the plant function can also scorch it, and the fertilizer that can contribute to its growth can also kill it.

There is a tendency on the part of some to try to force feed the Christian life. As in nature this is not expedient. A man who had been a Christian about six months called me on the telephone. He was full of zeal. Fortunately, his family was encouraging him in his new-birth experience. His question to me, if I remember rightly, was whether or not he should quit his job and move to the country. He was completely immersed in his new faith and wanted to make sure he lived it to the smallest degree. You may not agree with my counsel, but I suggested he slow down and let his life catch up with his heart and mind. We must not forget that the new life in Christ must be nourished. We must put our roots
down deep. Often there are some serious spiritual amputations that must take place, and these will often take time to heal.

A baby may be born in a day, but it doesn’t grow up in a day. There was a time when evangelistic meetings where conducted over a period of months. By the time the person took the big step to be baptized and become a member of the church they had gone a ways down the road toward a new lifestyle and the change of culture that is necessarily required. Unfortunately, we now have much shorter campaigns, sometimes lasting only three weekends. A person who tries to go from zero to sixty in three weeks will often not have enough speed to get their new lives off the ground and one of two things happens: they either become spiritually disabled, or simply the old life never drops away and what should be a new life in Christ becomes an extension of the old life but now in a religious context.

Let us keep “looking to Him, who is the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Let us remember that we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us (Romans 12:2), and that He that is in us is stronger than he that is in the world. Let’s make plans to win!