Christmas Is Coming

The Sin of Licentiousness

Education and Redemption

What's Wrong With Perfection?

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Legalism: Myth and Reality, see page 8
TODAY WE hear the charismatic evangelical TV preachers using certain clichés concerning the Gospel. I listened to one yesterday who spoke of a large meeting held to raise funds for the poor, and said that hundreds were saved in the meeting.

Now, no Seventh-day Adventist preacher would make a statement exactly like that, but do we unconsciously make statements that bring our own people into the same ideas and beliefs? Be good, go to church, pay tithe, support the church programs and you are saved. These are many times spoken ideas, unconsciously received through policies, tradition, and attitudes. All these things we should do, but they do not save us. We cannot do anything to be saved, but if we do not do something we shall be lost. Because Christ died to save us, we have a spontaneous love relationship with God that produces loving obedience to all the requirements of the law.

The Evangelicals preach believe, only believe, and now many Seventh-day Adventists are coming very close to this philosophical preaching. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law," Romans 3:31

"Faith is not an opiate, but a stimulant. Looking to Calvary will not quiet your soul into non-performance of duty, but will create faith that will work, purifying the soul from all selfishness.

"The faith in Christ which saves the soul is not what it is represented to be by many. 'Believe, believe,' is their cry; 'only believe in Christ, and you will be saved. It is all you have to do.' While true faith trusts wholly in Christ for salvation, it will lead to perfect conformity to the law of God.

"There are two errors against which the children of God—particularly those who have just come to trust in His grace—especially need to guard. The first...is that of looking to their own works, trusting to anything they can do, to bring themselves into harmony with God. He who is trying to become holy by his own works in keeping the law, is attempting an impossibility. ...It is the grace of Christ alone, through faith, that can make us holy.

"The opposite and no less dangerous error is that belief in Christ releases men from keeping the law of God; that since by faith alone we become partakers of the grace of Christ, our works have nothing to do with our redemption.

"But notice here that obedience is not a mere outward compliance, but the service of love. The law of God is an expression of His very nature; it is an embodiment of the great principle of love, and hence is the foundation of His government in heaven and earth. ...Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience.

"As Jesus was in human nature, so God means His followers to be. In His strength we are to live the life of purity and nobility which the Saviour lived." The Faith I Live By, 93

We hear now from many of our pulpits that one cannot overcome sin, that striving to keep the Ten Commandments is legalism, that Jesus was so different from us that He took the nature of Adam before the fall. He, therefore, could keep the law perfectly, but we cannot be holy as He was holy, perfect as He was perfect. But let us review the words of inspiration: "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." 1 Peter 1:16; Matthew 5:48

Ellen White makes this inspired observation: "Christ came to the world to counteract Satan’s falsehood that God had made a law which men could not keep. Taking humanity upon Himself, He came to this earth, and by a life of obedience showed that God has not made a law that man cannot keep. He showed that it is possible for man perfectly to obey the law. Those who accept Christ as their Saviour, becoming partakers of His divine nature, are enabled to follow His example, living in obedience to every precept of the law. Through the merits of Christ, man is to show by his obedience that he could be trusted in heaven, that he would not rebel." The Faith I Live By, 114

We must understand that salvation is not offered to the

continued on 27
It is the mission of Hope International and the editors of Our Firm Foundation to give the straight testimony and to present Christ and Him crucified. The days that yet remain of this world are few, and what we do we must do quickly. We must boldly proclaim the truths that place us on so firm a foundation in the midst of this troubled world.—THE EDITORS

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Invitation to Writers

We are accepting article-length (1800-2800 words) manuscripts (preferably typewritten) for possible publication in Our Firm Foundation. We are not in a position to give consideration to longer submissions. When sending material for our consideration, please retain your original manuscript and send us a photo copy. If you desire notice of a decision in regard to your article, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Address all editorial correspondence to Managing Editor, Our Firm Foundation, P.O. Box 940, Eatonville, WA 98328
"CHRISTMAS is coming," is the note that is sounded throughout our world from East to West and from North to South. With youth, those of mature age, and even the aged, it is a period of general rejoicing, of great gladness. But what is Christmas, that it should demand so much attention? This day has been made much of for centuries. It is accepted by the unbelieving world, and by the Christian world generally, as the day on which Christ was born. When the world at large celebrate the day, they show no honor to Christ. They refuse to acknowledge Him as their Saviour, to honor Him by willing obedience to His service. They show preference to the day, but none to the One for whom the day is celebrated, Jesus Christ.

The twenty-fifth of December is supposed to be the day of the birth of Jesus Christ, and its observance has become customary and popular. But yet there is no certainty that we are keeping the veritable day of our Saviour's birth. History gives us no certain assurance of this. The Bible does not give us the precise time. Had the Lord deemed this knowledge essential to our salvation, He would have spoken through His prophets and apostles, that we might know all about the matter. But the silence of the Scriptures upon this point evidences to us that it is hidden from us for the wisest purposes. In His wisdom, the Lord concealed the place where he buried Moses. God buried him, and God resurrected him, and took him to heaven. This secrecy was to prevent idolatry. He against whom they rebelled while he was in active service, whom they provoked almost beyond human endurance, was almost worshiped as God after his separation from them by death. For the very same purpose He has concealed the precise day of Christ's birth; that the day should not receive the honor that should be given to Christ as the Redeemer of the world—One to be received, to be trusted, to be relied on as He who could save to the uttermost all who come unto

Ellen G. White
Him. The soul's adoration should be given to Jesus as the Son of the infinite God.

There is no divine sanctity resting upon the twenty-fifth of December; and it is not pleasing to God that anything that concerns the salvation of man through the infinite sacrifice made for them, should be so sadly perverted from its professed design. Christ should be the supreme object; but as Christmas has been observed, the glory is turned from Him to mortal man, whose sinful, defective character made it necessary for Him to come to our world. Jesus, the Majesty of heaven, the royal King of heaven, laid aside His royalty, left His throne of glory, His high command, and came into our world to bring to fallen man, weakened in moral power, and corrupted by sin, aid divine. He clothed His divinity with humanity, that He might reach to the very depths of human woe and misery, to lift up fallen man. By taking upon Himself man's nature, He raised humanity in the scale of moral value with God. These great themes are almost too high, too deep, too infinite, for the comprehension of finite minds.

Parents should keep these things before their children, and instruct them, line upon line, precept upon precept, in their obligation to God—not their obligation to each other, to honor and glorify one another by gifts and offerings. But they should be taught that Jesus is the world's Redeemer, the object of thought, of painstaking effort; that His work is the grand theme which should engage their attention; that they should bring to Him their gifts and offerings. Thus did the wise men and the shepherds.

As the twenty-fifth day of December is observed to commemorate the birth of Christ, as the children have been instructed by precept and example that this was indeed a day of gladness and rejoicing, you will find it a difficult matter to pass over this period without giving it some attention. It can be made to serve a very good purpose. The youth should be treated very carefully. They should not be left on Christmas to find their own amusement in vanity and pleasure-seeking, in amusements which will be detrimental to their spirituality. Parents can control this matter by turning the minds and the offerings of their children to God and His cause and the salvation of souls. The desire for amusement, instead of being quenched and arbitrarily ruled down, should be controlled and directed by painstaking effort upon the part of the parents. Their desire to make gifts may be turned into pure and holy channels, and made to result in good to our fellow men by supplying

is centered our hope of eternal life.

Youth cannot be made as sedate and grave as old age, the child as sober as the sire. While sinful amusements are condemned, as they should be, let parents, teachers, and guardians of youth provide in their stead innocent pleasures, which shall not taint or corrupt the morals. Do not bind down the young to rigid rules and restraints that will lead them to feel themselves oppressed and to break over and rush into paths of folly and destruction. With a firm, kindly, considerate hand, hold the lines of command, guiding and controlling their minds and purposes, yet so gently, so wisely, so lovingly, that they still will know that you have their best good in view. How many parents are lamenting the fact that they cannot keep their children at home, that they have no love for home. At an early age they have a desire for the company of strangers; and as soon as they are old enough, they break away from that which appears to them to be bondage and unreasonable restraint, and will neither heed a mother's prayers nor a father's counsels. Investigation would generally reveal that the sin lay at the door of the parents. They have not made home what it ought to be—attractive, pleasant, radiant with the sunshine of kind words, pleasant looks, and true love.

The secret of saving your children lies in making your home lovely and attractive. Indulgence in parents will not bind the children to God nor to home; but a firm, godly influence to properly train and educate the mind would save many children from ruin.

On Christmas, so soon to come, let not the parents take the position that an evergreen placed in the church for the amusement of the Sabbath-school scholars is a sin; for it may be made a great blessing. Keep before their minds benevolent objects. In no case should mere amusement be the
object of these gatherings. While there may be some who will turn these occasions into seasons of careless levity, and whose minds will not receive the divine impress, to other minds and characters these seasons will be highly beneficial. I am fully satisfied that innocent substitutes can be devised for many gatherings that demoralize.

Christmas is coming. May you all have wisdom to make it a precious season. Let the older church members unite, heart and soul, with their children in this innocent amusement and recreation, in devising ways and means to show true respect to Jesus by bringing to Him gifts and offerings. Let every one remember the claims of God. His cause cannot go forward without your aid. Let the gifts you have usually bestowed upon one another be placed in the Lord's treasury. I present before you, my brethren and sisters, an object, the European mission. In every church let your smaller offerings be placed upon your Christmas tree. Let the precious emblem, "evergreen," suggest the holy work of God and His beneficence to us; and the loving heart-work will be to save other souls who are in darkness. Let your works be in accordance with your faith. I heard Elder Butler read a touching letter a few days since from Elder Whitney, of Europe. The good work is going forward there, but it ought to have been done six years ago. Let not this work be hindered. Let it advance. If all, both old and young, will forgo giving presents to one another, and forgo the selfish outlay of means in these coming holidays, there would be in heaven a most precious record of self-denial for Christ's sake.

Every tree in Satan's garden hangs laden with the fruits of vanity, pride, self-importance, evil desire, extravagance—all poisoned fruit, but very gratifying to the carnal heart. Let the several churches present to God Christmas trees in every church; and then let them hang thereon the fruits of beneficence and gratitude—offerings coming from willing hearts and hands, fruits that God will accept as an expression of our faith and our great love to Him for the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Let the evergreen be laden with fruit, rich, and pure, and holy, acceptable to God. Shall we not have such a Christmas as Heaven can approve? Thousands of dollars are needlessly spent every year in gifts to each other. That is means lost to God, lost to His cause. It pleases the vanity, encourages pride, creates all kinds of dissatisfaction, murmuring, and complaints, because perhaps the gifts are not just what was desired, not of the high value wanted or expected. Christmas is not observed eye shall not be single to the glory of God. Satan captivates and ensnares the mind. His infernal wisdom is continually exercised to mold and fashion the material with which he has to deal, to make God the least and the last object of devotion.

The various amusements of society have been the ruin of thousands who, but for these devices of Satan, might be servants of the living God. There are wrecks of character seen everywhere who have been destroyed by gilded, fashionable pleasure; and still the work is going forward. Thousands more will go to ruin who will not open their eyes to see and sense the fact that, although they are professed Christians, they are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

I entreat you, my brethren and sisters, to make this coming Christmas a blessing to yourselves and others

as its name implies it should be. Man has forsaken God in almost everything, and has turned the attention to self. He has left the pure springs of living water which flow from the throne of God, and hewn out to himself broken cisterns, which can hold no water. God gave man a probation that he might be fitted for heaven. He was to look upward to God, who was to be the soul's adoration; but talent, skill, and inventive powers are all exercised to make self the supreme object of attention. Man has withdrawn his gaze from Deity, and fastened his eyes upon the finite, the earthly, the corruptible.

Satan is in this work to put God out of the mind and interpose the world and self that the
school of the prophets, the palaces of kings, and appeared to the humble shepherds, guarding their flocks by night, upon Bethlehem's plains. One angel first appeared, clothed with the panoply of heaven; and so surprised and so terrified were the shepherds that they could only gaze upon the wondrous glory of the heavenly visitant with unutterable amazement. The angel of the Lord came to them, and said, "Fear not, for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you, Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." No sooner had their eyes become ac-

the shepherds the brightest picture mortal man had ever looked upon, and the blessed promise and assurance of the advent to our world of the Saviour of men, which filled their hearts with joy and gladness, mingled with faith and wondrous love to God. In simple trust, the shepherds hastened to follow the direction of the heavenly messengers, to find the royal Babe, not in a palace, not in even a common inn, but in a stable. They bowed in reverence to the infant King, committing no idolatry. But how certain is it that idolatry is committed by those who profess to be lovers of Jesus! Their attention, thought, and powers are devoted to poor, finite mortals. Relatives and friends come in for the worship which belongs to God alone.

Satan has had his way in managing these occasions to suit himself; now let us turn the current heavenward instead of earthward

customed to the glorious presence of the one angel, than, lo! the whole plain was lighted up with the wondrous glory of the multitude of angels that peopled the plains of Bethlehem. The angel quieted the fears of the shepherds before opening their eyes to behold the multitude of the heavenly host, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, peace, good will to men." Luke 2:10-12, 14

Then was the melody of heaven heard by mortal ears, and the heavenly choir swept back to heaven as they closed their evermemorable anthem. The light faded away and the shadows of the night once more fell on the hills and plains of Bethlehem; but there remained in the hearts of

I entreat my brethren and sisters to have a special object in view... The missionary work must go forward. Now, brethren, let us on Christmas make special efforts to come before the Lord with gifts and grateful offerings for the gift of Jesus Christ as a Redeemer to the world. Let nothing now be spent needlessly; but let every penny that can be spared be put out to the exchangers. Satan has had his way in managing these occasions to suit himself. Now let us turn the current heavenward instead of earthward. Let us show by our offerings that we appreciate the self-denial and sacrifice of Christ in our behalf. Let God be brought to remembrance by every child and parent; and let the offerings, both small and large, be brought to the storehouse of God.

You that have means, who have been in the habit of making donations to your relatives and friends until you are at a loss to know what to invent that will be new and interesting to them, seek to put your ingenuity to the test, as well as your influence, to see how much means you may gather to advance the work of the Lord. Let your skill and your capacities be employed to make the coming Christmas one of intense interest, paying your addresses to the God of heaven in willing, grateful offerings. Follow no longer the world's customs. Make a break here, and see if this Christmas cannot show thousands of dollars flowing into the treasury, that God's storehouse may not be empty. You may not be recompensed on earth, but you will be rewarded in the future life, and that abundantly. Let those who have so long planned for self now begin to plan for the cause of God, and you will certainly have increased wisdom. Let the conscience be enlightened, and the love of truth and of Christ take the place of idolatrous thoughts and love of self. Will you not arise, my Christian brethren and sisters, and gird yourselves for duty in the fear of God so arranging this matter that it shall not be dry and uninteresting, but full of innocent enjoyment that shall bear the signet of Heaven? I know the poorer class will respond to these suggestions. The most wealthy should also show an interest, and bestow their gifts and offerings proportionate to the means with which God has entrusted them. Let there be recorded in the heavenly books such a Christmas as has never yet been seen, because of the donations which shall be given for the sustaining of the work of God and the upbuilding of His kingdom.

Review and Herald, December 9, 1884
Legalism:
Myth and Reality

LEGALISM IS a common word in Adventist religious language. The term is generally used as a synonym for righteousness by works, pharisaism, or other attitudes seen as excesses of religious conservatism. Few can deny the relevance of this concern. A look at Adventist history finds a frequent encounter with these problems, with committed believers doing their best to stem the tide. At one point Ellen White declared, “As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa, that had neither dew nor rain.” Review and Herald, March 11, 1890

However, the supreme tragedy is how, in recent years, we have not been content with an inspired definition of the problem. Mrs. White wrote, “He who is trying to reach heaven by his own works in keeping the law, is attempting an impossibility... All that man can do without Christ is polluted with selfishness and sin; but that which is wrought through faith is acceptable to God.” (Selected Messages, Book 1, 364) But we, unfortunately, have taken it further. We want to say that everything man does, with or without Christ, is worthless. Even what is done in cooperation with God can never be part of salvation. The degree of faith in one’s experience is measured by how much work he must do to be saved. Salvation by grace requires not only that God give all the power; it means also that God does all the work. We thus devise a “let go and let God” approach to Christianity.

A careful study of the nature of legalism is long overdue. Perhaps this article will help clear away confusion.

The following four points will help, I believe, to offer a view of the problem more in step with inspired teaching.

1. Divine Appeasement

Ellen White states, “The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion.” (The Desire of Ages, 35) I suspect many readers have wondered about this. When most of us think of paganism we think of frivolity and moral looseness—not exactly the stereotype of legalism. How could salvation by works possibly be the root of heathenism?

The answer is simple: the notion of divine appeasement. Pagan religion abounds in the belief that angry gods need to be placated. Magnificent rituals, austere self-denial, even human sacrifices and military campaigns, become methods to alter the divine mood. The haunting fear of unpredictable deities—never quite satisfied—hangs over millions throughout the world. And not just in heathen lands.

Whenever Christians nurture
the idea that God is angry and must be appeased, they fall a prey to legalism. The Bible does say that God is angry because of sin, but His is a sorrowful anger, recoiling at the pain and sadness caused by our misdeeds. God rejoices at the removal of sin because it means the removal of pain and destruction. It is not a question of a ruffled divine Ego in need of soothing. How can anyone believe God’s hatred of sin means hatred of sinners? Sin must be expelled from our lives, not to restore a suspended divine

Paganism demands a decent show of devotion, not a change of mind

love, but to rescue ourselves and others from a ruinous, painful experience.

Many have debated the issue of whether God destroys the wicked. I find the matter easy to settle. When God says, “If you sin, you will die,” (Genesis 2:17) He doesn’t mean, “If you disobey Me, I’ll kill you.” He is merely saying that to reject His character and guidance causes suffering, torture, and finally death. How else can it be, since God is the Source of life? God gives sinners the chance, through His grace, to stop hurting themselves and others and accept His leading instead. But when they stubbornly refuse His offer following the ultimate display of contrast between good and evil in the last days, God must perform His “strange act.” (Isaiah 28:21) Though seeing the issues clearly and acknowledging their exclusion from heaven to be just, they still prefer sin over righteousness. God cannot risk any more misery and heartache among His creatures. Sin must go, and any who clinging to it will be destroyed in the process.

2. Superficiality

Another trait of paganism is surface commitment. No change of heart is required. History reveals how pagan communities can accommodate themselves to a host of beliefs by superficial assent. How often have captives and conquerors alike embraced religion out of convenience or necessity? The great Mongol emperor Kublai Khan practiced five different religions—Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism—all at once. The same spirit found acceptance in medieval Christianity, so that a French duke could tell a Huguenot officer in the days of Louis XIV, “No one demands a change in one’s mind; just a decent show of devotion to the king’s church. If the body is conveyed to the chapel, who cares the whereabouts of the mind?”

This is all very central to the legalism debate. When closely studied, the New Testament attack on justification by law has more to do with possessing the law than keeping it. The Jews thought biological descent from Abraham guaranteed salvation, that because God gave to them His law they were sure of His favor. John the Baptist denounced their complacency in this regard, declaring that God could raise descendants of Abraham out of stone. (Matthew 3:9) First-century Judaism could not reach the heart; it was all on the surface. Thus Jesus could condemn the Pharisees as whitewashed tombs full of dead men’s bones. Matthew 23:27

This is the real distinction between the two covenants. While the Hebrews at Sinai readily promised, “All that the Lord hath said we will do,” (Exodus 24:7) “the people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law.” (Patriarchs and Prophets, 371, 372) Their signal failure not long after was to be repeated throughout their history. The Sinaitic covenant failed simply because man didn’t take it to heart. The opportunity was there; God stated through Moses, “The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.” (Deuteronomy 30:14, RSV) Israel’s failure demanded a new covenant to restate this promise: “This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33, RSV)

And though the Jews through apostasy annulled their divine charter, God found no reason to make another covenant. The book of Hebrews, in reciting the Christian covenant (8:8-10), simply quotes Jeremiah.

3. Focus on Eternal Reward

The Advent message is not a self-centered formula of how to get to heaven. Says Ellen White, “It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him.” (The Desire of Ages, 480) The Christian

To the legalist, the security of God’s government matters little

does not seek victory over sin for his own sake, but for God’s. “The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.” Ibid., 671

Legalism has no concern for this. All it desires is a ticket to glory. The security of God’s government matters little; only the believer’s security counts.
4. Independence of Divine Aid

In his last prayer before Israel, King David declared, "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." (1 Chronicles 29:14) Everything we possess is a gift from God. This fact is true even of the unfallen angels. (See Faith and Works, 23) In Manuscript 36, 1890, thought to be Mrs. White's definitive word on justification, we read:

"There has been too little educating in clear lines upon this point. The Lord has lent man His own goods in trust—means which He requires be handed back to Him when His providence signifies and the upbuilding of His cause demands it. The Lord gave the intellect. He gave the health and the ability to gather earthly gain. He created the things of earth. He manifests His divine power to develop all its riches. They are His fruits from His own husbandry. He gave the sun, the clouds, the showers of rain, to cause vegetation to flourish. As God's employed servants you gathered in His harvest to use what your wants required in an economical way and hold the rest for the call of God. You can say distinguishes a wealthy believer from a wealthy man of the world. The former acknowledges the true Source of success, the latter credits himself or luck. The exercise of the will, in God's service or elsewhere, is a pure gift of grace. To think we can serve God on our own is to indulge in absurdities. When we acknowledge how, because of the fall, man needs a further bestowment of power, it is not to imply that the power with which we were born is our own. We merely recognize that because of sin we have forfeited much of our God-given vitality, that only through His intervention can we find our way back.

Among the central issues in the faith/works discussion is, From whom do we take directions? The power to do God's will is found in His directions. "All His biddings are enablings." (Christ's Object Lessons, 333) Those depending on human ideas in place of God's Word lose access to His power. We read that the robe of Christ's righteousness contains "not one thread of human devising." It doesn't say, "not one thread of human striving." That isn't the issue. The question is who gives directions and who supplies the power.

The Evangelical Fallacy

In politics the extreme right is not far from the extreme left. Theology isn't much different. And nowhere is this truer than in the legalism debate.

Evangelical theology claims to have the answer to righteousness by works. It professes to exalt the divine love manifested in Jesus, thus drawing people away from self-dependence. Careful study, however, shows that it contains the same fundamental premises as old-fashioned legalism.

Each of the four points just described is found in evangelicalism. The necessity for God's appeasement is affirmed. While man is told his works cannot win God's favor, he is assured that God's favor has already been won—by the sacrifice of Jesus. It is a question of who appeases God, man or Christ. But the Bible nowhere says God has to be appeased by anyone. For a divine personage to placate another is as much a part of heathenism as for man to placate God. Heathen religion abounds in both, as any student of culture will acknowledge.

The evangelical gospel is superficial. It presents a salvation long ago and far away, a declarative act which changes lives only in part. Historic Adventism, because it gives sanctified obedience its rightful prominence, is

To think we can serve God on our own is to indulge in absurdities

with David, "For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." (1 Chronicles 29:14) So the satisfaction of creature merit cannot be in returning to the Lord His own, for it was always His own property to be used as He in His providence should direct." Ibid., 20, 21

That which distinguishes a legalist from a true Christian, smeared as a system of works. Would not Christ condemn such religion as He condemned pharisaism, as producing whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones? Matthew 23:27

As with stereotyped legalism, evangelical thought focuses on passage through the pearly gates rather than the vindication of God. Witnessing methods pose as the central question, "If you died tonight, would you go to heaven?" Self-consideration receives primary importance. How different from the experience of Job, who declared, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Job 13:15

And, yes, evangelicalism ignores the power of God. It may profess to claim it, but when biblical promises of victory are denied, when Christians speak of their sinful habits as the unfaithful spies spoke of the Canaanites ("they are stronger than we") Numbers 13:31, the power and the glory depart. God can never bless when human cowardice replaces divine courage.
Conclusion

Legalism is not a question of who does the work of salvation. It is a question of the divine character, of the depth of human commitment, of the focus of our experience and the source of our strength. We must cease to think of righteousness by faith as righteousness devoid of human effort.

Recognizing this truth will sharpen our understanding of Scripture. The Bible plainly declares human works to be a part of salvation, not merely its result. “For not the hearers of the law are just before God” (Romans 2:13) “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12, 13, RSV) “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” (James 2:24, RSV) Ellen White declares:

“The work of gaining salvation is one of copartnership; a joint operation. . . . Human effort of itself is not sufficient. Without the aid of divine power it avails nothing. God works and man works.” Acts of the Apostles, 482

“Man must work with his human power aided by the divine power of Christ, to resist and conquer at any cost to himself. In short, man must overcome as Christ overcame. . . . This could not be the case if Christ alone did all the overcoming. Man must do his part; he must be victor on his own account.” Testimonies, vol. 4, 32, 33

The real problem in all this is our definition of salvation. Superficial thinking sees salvation as primarily a ticket to heaven. Going to heaven will be wonderful and we all look forward to it, but biblical salvation is much deeper. It means the expulsion of sin and the resulting vindication of God from the charges of Satan. The first reference to salvation in the New Testament reads, “You shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21, RSV

A proper view of legalism will take the shackles from God’s spokesmen who fear that if they call sin by its right name and uphold divine standards of conduct, they fall prey to works-righteousness. How well I remember a teen-age experience when, at a major camp meeting, a veteran evangelist preached a sermon on Christian standards only to be accosted after the service for daring to preach behavior when he ought to be preaching Christ. Once we understand the true nature of law, it will help us expose the nature of legalism. We pay lip service to the belief that the law is the transcript of God’s character. But do we really know what that means? Doctrinal truths and standards of behavior are God’s instruments of self-disclosure, for revealing to man what He is like. Merely accepting these on the surface will avail nothing, but taking them to heart settles the problem. Not only is legalism averted, but every other counterfeited by Satan to derail the church of God.
Colin D. Standish

Education and Redemption

When we arrived at Avondale College as immature sixteen-year-olds in 1950 our vocational options were scanty. Basically the college offered courses in Secretarial Science, Accounting, Building Construction, Teaching, and Ministry. None of the first three appealed to us, so we selected teaching because we knew that we were not "good enough" to be ministers. How limited was our understanding then of the sacredness of the high calling of those who wish to be the educators of the children of God's people!

One of the most striking statements concerning education by Ellen White is her declaration: "In the highest sense, the work of education and the work of redemption are one." (Education, 30) This statement forces the Christian to re-evaluate all his cherished definitions of education. It translates educational aims out of the confines of the immediate into the realm of eternal verities. This truth does not mean that Christian education has nothing to offer for the immediate, for to place education in the realm of the eternal is indeed to greatly enhance the meaning and significance of that which is taking place in the present. It does, however, reduce progressive, social-reconstruction and humanistic concepts of education to the realm of the redundant—totally inadequate for the education of the child of God.

One of the authors once had a professor who, after detailing a sampling of the various definitions of education, claimed that in presenting his own definition, he was giving the broadest definition possible. He then defined education as "the total experience of man from conception to death." This definition pointedly illustrates the limitations of secular concepts of education. How vastly greater in its scope is true God-centered education!

"Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world, and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come." Education, 13

Seventh-day Adventists are among the most education conscious group in society and this is how it should be. We believe that the talents entrusted to us are a gift from God to be used and multiplied. Yet we must ever be reminded that they are to be used for His glory and for a witness to mankind. It is thus not surprising that, though most Adventists or their forebears accepted the Advent faith while in humble circumstances, today the members of the Seventh-day Adventist church stand high in social status and educational achievement. Thus there is a danger of regressing to worldly evaluation of education. We have sometimes been guilty of worshiping at the altar of the degree and have seen this goal as the ultimate of higher education. But God allows no such definition.

"Higher education is an experimental knowledge of the plan of salvation, and this knowledge is secured by earnest and diligent study of the Scriptures. Such an
education will renew the mind and transform the character, restoring the image of God in the soul. It will fortify the mind against the deceptive whisperings of the adversary, and enable us to understand the voice of God. It will teach the learner to become a coworker with Jesus Christ, to dispel the moral darkness about him, and bring light and knowledge to men. It is the simplicity of true godliness—our passport from the preparatory school of earth to the higher school above.

“There is no education to be gained higher than that given to the early disciples, and which is

The great principles of education are unchanged

revealed to us through the Word of God. To gain the higher education means to follow this Word implicitly; it means to walk in the footsteps of Christ, to practice His virtues. It means to give up selfishness, and to devote the life to the service of God. Higher education calls for something greater, something more divine, than the knowledge to be obtained merely from books. It means a personal, experimental knowledge of Christ; it means emancipation from ideas, from habits and practices, that have been gained in the school of the prince of darkness, and which are opposed to loyalty to God. It means to overcome stubbornness, pride, selfishness, worldly ambition, and unbelief. It is the message of deliverance from sin.” Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, 11, 12

Such a definition means that higher education is not limited to any age group or any prescribed academic level. It is the education that must be given to the babe in his mother’s arms; to the preschool child as he works with his parents and as he learns at their knees; to the elementary school child as he masters not only the skills of formal education but learns also of the One who is the Source of all wisdom and true knowledge; to the high school pupil who seeks to discover God’s unique calling in his life; to the college student as he earnestly makes special preparation for his life-calling; to the young married adults as they allow Christ to establish a home where the pure principles of Christian love prevail; to the middle-aged as they seek to channel their experience into avenues of more fruitful ministries and to the aged as they utilize their retiring years for their ministry of faith and love. Indeed, this will be the education that it will be our privilege to continue to enjoy throughout eternity.

The Power Coaching College of Sydney, Australia, some years ago, used as its slogan Knowledge is Power. But such an unqualified slogan is hardly acceptable to the Christian in the light of Eden, where added knowledge brought terrible impotency to earth’s first inhabitants. At the turn of the century the well-known British educator, Findlay, proclaimed, Knowledge is power when it is used. While an improvement, even this definition is inadequate, for we have seen knowledge of drugs and certain lifestyles lead to the ruination of many of our fellow humans. Ellen White, however, places the issue in the spiritual sphere: “Knowledge is power, when united with true piety.” (Testimonies, vol. 4, 427) Only the true Christian can discern truth, discriminate between knowledge of real value and useless knowledge and understand how to translate that knowledge into the principles of righteousness and service. Only the committed Christian is taught by the true Teacher—the Holy Spirit. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (John 14:26)

True education elicits a motivation that turns away from man’s achievement to the glory of God: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16) “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” (John 15:8) “Let all your behavior be such as even pagans can recognize as good, and then, whereas they malign you as criminals now, they will come to see for themselves that you live good lives, and will give glory to God on the day when He comes to hold assize.” (1 Peter 2:12, NEB) “Be ambitious, for the Master’s glory.” Messages to Young People, 100

Therefore, the Christian seeks an education for himself and his children of a different order from that of the world. The goals are different, the teachers are different, the curriculum is different, methodology is different, the context is different and therefore the product is different.

“True education is the inculcation of those ideas that will impress the mind and heart with the knowledge of God the Creator and Jesus Christ the Redeemer. Such an education will renew the mind and transform the character. It will strengthen and fortify the mind against the deceptive whisperings of the adversary of souls, and enable us to understand the voice of God. It will fit the learned to become a coworker with Christ.” Fundamentals of Christian Education, 543
What's Wrong With PERFECTION?

Dennis Priebe

PERFECTION seems to be a troublesome word these days. What does it really mean? The first thing we should say is that perfection is the end result of righteousness by faith. It is not the method and it is not the foundation of righteousness by faith. It is the conclusion of the process of justification and sanctification.

Let's analyze the word perfection. There are at least four definitions of perfection that are relevant here. The first is absolute perfection. Sometimes it is said that we as human beings can never be absolutely perfect. This is correct, for absolute perfection—a perfection which has no limit nor the possibility of future failure—describes God Himself. There is no other absolute perfection. Thus absolute perfection is never possible for created beings, not for human beings and not for angels. “Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden.” Our High Calling, 45

When Lucifer first began to suggest that God was unjust, nearly half of the angelic host listened to him and thought that he might be right. (Story of Redemption, 18) Then God held a heavenly council in which He set forth the truth about Jesus Christ being fully God, thus showing Lucifer’s challenge to be unfounded. (Patriarchs and Prophets, 36) After that council, approximately one third of the angels sided with Lucifer and were cast out of heaven. (Testimonies, vol. 3, 115) This means that a significant number of the angels who had listened to Lucifer and had thought he might be right changed their minds. Therefore, we cannot use the term absolute perfection to describe these angels who changed their minds about God and Lucifer. In fact, the angels were not fully convinced that God was right and Satan was wrong until the cross. Only then was Satan fully removed from their affections. (The Desire of Ages, 758-761) Surely then, it is fair to say that absolute perfection is not a term we can apply in discussing righteousness by faith, since it does not even apply to angels, but only to God.

The second definition of perfection is nature perfection. Our sinful nature will be removed only at the second coming of Christ, after which there will be no more sinful promptings from within. Thus, nature perfection, which involves removal of temptation from within, will occur only at the second coming of Christ. We cannot experience nature perfection before then.

However, if our definitions of sin and sinlessness focus on character, then we can discuss meanings of perfection that are possible for us today. There are at least two aspects of character which can be described by the word perfect, or perfection. First is character surrender. This occurs at the moment of conversion when we surrender our lives completely to Christ. At that moment we are accounted perfect in Christ. Our perfection is complete at that time, but we're just beginning the walk of Christ. We are fully surrendered to the degree that we understand ourselves and God. God will accept the full surrender of all that we know about ourselves at that time. Thus our character surrender is perfect, because God counts it perfect.

But there is another concept that we must examine—character maturity. If we believe that sin is on the basis of choice, then we must also believe that we can choose not to sin. Character maturity is simply the ripening of the harvest in the individual life. We are becoming mature in Christ when we are no longer choosing to sin against God. We choose not to rebel, and that choice can occur at any time. If Jesus Christ does live within us He controls our lives, and we do not sin because Christ does not sin. Christ does nothing that is out of harmony with His will. When we sin, we are choosing...
Satan's control. We are choosing to let Satan operate in our lives.

This concept can be expressed in a rather simple but clear way. Christ in—sin out. Sin in—Christ out. We cannot have Christ and sin reigning on the throne of the life at the same time. Christ will not accept a divided heart. In a mature character Christ is controlling totally and therefore we are not making rebellious choices. We are choosing not to rebel against God in thought, in word, or in action. What we are doing here is focusing on what God can do, not what I can't do. We can talk for hours about the impossibilities of fallen man, but why not speak of the possibilities of God? Why can't we talk about what is possible?

In regard to our definitions, the definitions that are most important for our study are those categories over which we exercise control. If we believe that sin is by choice, then we will also believe that we can choose to obey. We can choose to surrender and we can choose to grow into maturity. Because Christ provides the power for victory, a sinless character is possible for all surrendered Christians. Thus, perfection, carefully defined, is a reality. It is not an impossibility.

The new birth brings perfection in Christ, which is always sufficient for salvation. We are saved on the basis of that surrender. The problem is that we interrupt our surrender to Christ. The power of Christ who dwells in us does not change, but our surrender to Christ is not constant. It is the interruptions that can and should cease, for we should let Christ control us totally at all times. The variable factor is the constancy of our surrender. The power of Christ is constant, but our relationship wavers at times.

By nature we will always be sinful until Christ comes. But we can decide to make no choices against God's will. We can actually have a sinless character in sinful nature. Here we see the vital importance of a correct understanding of Christ's nature. If Christ—overcame the promptings of His sinful nature by the Holy Spirit's control, then the same methodology is available to us. However, if Christ did not have our nature, then the methodology is unclear. It is important to be reminded at this point that guilt is not imputed because of our nature, but only because of choices made and character developed.

Jude 24 expresses a very important truth about what Christ can do. "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Is Christ able to keep us from falling? Jude says "Yes." Thus falling is not an inevitable reality of our lives. Christ is able to keep us from falling. Philippians 4:13 is another text that we must look at seriously. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Are all things possible through Jesus Christ? Is it really true that victory over sin is possible?

2 Peter 2:9 says, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." Then it is not necessary for us to yield to temptation, because He can deliver us from temptation. We can not deliver ourselves from temptation, but God can. He will provide a way of escape if we're willing. 1 Corinthians 10:13 adds, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it." God has promised that He will not let any temptation come to us that is too strong for us, which would make our fall inevitable. This promise means that a way of escape is available for every temptation. There is not one temptation which comes to us that makes sin inevitable. God has promised that if we will trust in Him, He will show us the way out of every temptation.

1 Peter 2:21, 22 says, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." We know that Christ lived a life without sin, but sometimes we don't want to recognize the fact that He is also our Example, asking us to follow in His steps. Of course, this assumes that Christ was born the way we are born, feeling our temptations, and experiencing our desires. If all that was true for Him, and He did not sin, then He can be an example for us.

We find a magnificent statement in Revelation 3:21, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." The model of overcoming is Jesus Christ, and we are to overcome even as He overcame. Certainly we must depend on His strength and power, but it remains true that we will overcome as He overcame.

Another classic statement is found in 2 Corinthians 10:5: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." God's ideal for us is that

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Where Are The Standard-Bearers?

Ron Spear

In my early morning study recently, the Lord directed me to Volume 8 of the Testimonies. Reading pages 41-78, I was overwhelmed as I realized how we have tragically neglected to follow God’s counsel to us. God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and all the angels of heaven grieve over our neglect and almost total disregard for the Testimonies to the church. Sister White tells us that to disregard them is to reject them.

"It is not alone those who openly reject the Testimonies, or who cherish doubt concerning them, that are on dangerous ground. To disregard light is to reject it." Testimonies, vol. 5, 680

While we hold up Ellen White as our prophet, we reject her messages from God for the church in this crisis hour.

Have we not depended on our own wisdom to guide the local church boards, the conference, union, and General Conference committees? Does God lead men and women in committees and church boards to violate His explicit counsels? Yet we are forced to admit that we are not following His counsels in health reform, dress, and almost everything else. Our churches are being filled with a constituency who eat and dress like the world and are enamored with the world’s amusements. Television has become the god of Ekron to many Seventh-day Adventists.

Let us look at these words of inspiration: "The controlling power of appetite will prove the ruin of thousands, when, if they had conquered on this point, they would have had moral power to gain the victory over every other temptation of Satan. But those who are slaves to appetite will fail in perfecting Christian character. The continual transgression of man for six thousand years has brought sickness, pain, and death as its fruits. And as we near the close of time, Satan’s temptation to indulge appetite will be more powerful and more difficult to overcome." Testimonies, vol. 3, 491, 492

"As we near the close of time, we might rise higher and still higher upon the question of health reform and Christian temperance, presenting it in a more positive and decided manner." Ibid., vol. 6, 112

"One of the highest attainments in the Christian life is to control appetite, and . . . without this victory all hope of heaven is vain." Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene, 206

"The gospel of health has able advocates, but their work has been made very hard because so many ministers, presidents of conferences, and others in positions of influence have failed to give the question of health reform its proper attention." Testimonies, vol. 6, 327

"Those who digress occasionally to gratify the taste in eating a fattened turkey or other flesh meats, pervert their appetites. . . . They are controlled by taste, not by principle. . . . The lack of stability in regard to the principles of health reform, is a true index of their character and spiritual strength." Ibid., vol. 2, 487

When we as a people begin to realize the importance of what goes into our refrigerators, onto our tables and into our stomachs, we will have a closer walk with Jesus. The reason the church is too torpid and paralyzed to carry out the Gospel Commission is that we refuse to accept the counsel of God through the spirit of prophecy. Let us remember we cannot eat our way into heaven, but we can surely eat our way out. "The lack of stability in regard to the principles of health reform is a true index of their character and their spiritual strength. They are deficient in thoroughness in their Christian experience. Conscience
is not regarded." Ibid.; see vol. 6, 369-379

When we violate health principles the conscience becomes seared and compromise with sin becomes a way of life. It will not be the big sins that bar the gates of the eternal city from the majority of Seventh-day Adventists, but the lack of desire to live the truth in every detail. See Testimonies, vol. 5, 136; vol. 8, 41; Testimonies to Ministers, 506-508

Would that every minister might show the courage that Elijah showed!

Let us examine another area that is bringing much concern to the faithful and loyal Seventh-day Adventists on Sabbath mornings. In some churches we see make-up, jewelry of all description, from earrings and pierced ears on the young to necklaces and rings. The wedding ring is now fashionable. In many places people are told to take it off at the baptismal font, but they put it back on when the service is over. In past history as the church went into apostasy, which was most of the time, the people began to put on the ornaments of the heathen, and when they repented and were again converted, God required that their worldly jewelry be stripped off as a sign of their conversion. Listen to God speak to us in this crisis hour:

"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." 1 Peter 3: 3, 4

"Obedience to fashion is pervading our Seventh-day Adventist churches, and is doing more than any other power to separate our people from God. I have been shown that our church rules are very deficient. All exhibitions of pride in dress, which is forbidden in the Word of God, should be sufficient reason for church discipline." Testimonies, vol. 4, 647

"Souls are going to ruin because of their love of dress and display. The life of nine tenths of those who are devotees of fashion is a living lie... Noble of soul, gentleness, generosity are bartered away to gratify the lust after evil things... the changing fashions of the world should call forth an army of reformers." Messages to Young People, 359

It is a sad fact that even many who officiate, and many others who sit in the pews on Sabbath morning, are wearing jewelry and dressed like the world.

"Would that every minister might realize the sacredness of his office and the holiness of his work, and show the courage that Elijah showed!... God calls for men like Elijah, Nathan, and John the Baptist—men who will bear His message with faithfulness, regardless of the consequences; men who will speak the truth bravely though it call for the sacrifice of all they have." Prophets and Kings, 142

Will our local churches, pastors, and conference leaders now take a stand against the worldliness that is pervading almost every assembly of believers?

How much longer can we disregard the orders of God without receiving the retribution of God's judgments? The ancient church was not exempt. The history of Jerusalem and of Battle Creek was written for our admonition. Their history will be repeated in our day if we continue to disregard God's orders. Destruction will come if we do not seek revival and reformation with all our hearts. See Christ's Object Lessons, 304, 305; The Desire of Ages, 36, 611, 612; Selected Messages, Book 1, 122-128, 406; Testimonies, vol. 5, 70-82; vol. 8, 67, 68

Only those who weep and cry between the porch and the altar for the sins of the church will go through those pearly gates of the New Jerusalem.

"Who are standing in the counsel of God at this time? Is it those who virtually excuse wrongs among the professes people of God and who murmur in their hearts, if not openly, against those who would reprove sin? Is it those who take their stand against and sympathize with those who commit wrong? No, indeed! Unless they repent and leave the work of Satan in oppressing those who have the burden of the work and in holding up the hands of sinners in Zion, they will never receive the mark of God's sealing approval. They will fall in the general destruction of the wicked, represented by the work of the five men bearing slaughter weapons. Mark this point with care: Those who receive the pure mark of truth, wrought in them by the power of the Holy Ghost, represented by a mark by the man in linen, are those 'that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done' in the church. Their love for purity and honor and glory of God is such, and they have so clear a view of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, that they are represented as being in agony, even sighing and crying. Read the ninth chapter of Ezekiel." Testimonies, vol. 3, 267

"The class who do not feel grieved over their own spiritual declension, nor mourn over the sins of others, will be left without the seal of God." Ibid., vol. 5, 211

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"If any will not be purified through obeying the truth, and overcome their selfishness, their pride, and evil passions, the angels of God have the charge: 'They are joined to their idols, let them alone,' and they pass on to their work, leaving these with their sinful traits unsubdued, to the control of evil angels. Those who come up to every point, and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation." Ibid., vol. 1, 187

Does the rejection of the testimony given by the true witness, Jesus Himself, have relationship to the judgment of the living? The sealing angel will never place the seal of God upon any man, woman or child who is practicing known sin or neglecting known duty. See The Faith I Live By, 114; Selected Messages, Book 1, 366

"These sighing, crying ones, had been holding forth the words of life; they had reprieved, counseled, and entreated. Some who had been dishonoring God repented and humbled their hearts before Him. But the glory of the Lord had departed from Israel, although many still continued the forms of religion. His power and counsel and orders of God in the spirit of prophecy.

"So men who should be standing as faithful guardians of God's law have argued, till policy has taken the place of faithfulness, and sin is allowed to go unrebuked. When will the voice of faithful rebuke be heard once more in the church?" Prophets and Kings, 141

"Today there is need of the voice of stern rebuke; for grievous sins have separated the people from God. Infidelity is fast becoming fashionable. 'We will not have this man to reign over us,' is the language of thousands. (Luke 19:14) The smooth sermons so often preached make no lasting impression; the trumpet does not give a certain sound. Men are not cut to the heart by the plain, sharp truths of God's Word." Ibid., 140

Careful examination of these inspired statements leads us to ask, Will God be forced to raise up new leaders, pastors, and laity who will obey His counsels? See Isaiah 9:16; Counsels on Health, 395; The Great Controversy, 44, 45, 606-609; Prophets and Kings, 140-142; Testimonies, vol. 2, 440-445; vol. 3, 260-269; vol. 5, 70-82, 94, 160, 208-217, 234, 235; vol. 8, 250-251; vol. 9, 96; Testimonies to Ministers, 362

"The watchmen are responsible for the condition of the people. While you open the door to pride, envy, doubt, and other sins, there will be strife, hatred, and every evil work. Jesus, the meek and lowly One, asks an entrance as your guest; but you are afraid to bid Him enter. He has spoken to us in both the Old and the New Testament; He is speaking to us still by His Spirit and His providences. His instructions are designed to make men true to God and true to themselves." Testimonies, vol. 5, 235

"Christ longs to work mightily by His Spirit for the conviction and conversion of sinners. But, according to His divine plan, the work must be performed through the instrumentality of His church; and her members have so far departed from Him that He cannot accomplish His will through them. He chooses to work by means, yet the means employed must be in harmony with His character." Ibid., 189

God's remnant church, Seventh-day Adventists, will go through to the end, but their number will soon be purified, and only those who are living up to every detail of truth by the power of the Holy Spirit will be used of God to finish the work.

His instructions are designed to make men true to God and true to themselves

Then let the character of Enoch be ours now as we face the closing moments of our church history.

"By faith Enoch 'was translated that he should not see death;... for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.' Hebrews 11:5. In the midst of a world by its iniquity doomed to destruction, Enoch lived a life of such close communion with God that he was not permitted to fall under the power of death. The godly character of this prophet represents the state of holiness which must be attained by those who shall be 'redeemed from the earth' (Revelation 14:3) at the time of Christ's second advent." Patriarchs and Prophets, 88, 89

May God help His leaders, pastors and laity to reach this great standard of righteousness now that God's power may come, the longed-for latter rain may fall upon His remnant church, and the work soon be finished, so that Jesus may come.

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The watchmen are responsible for the condition of the people

presence were lacking." Testimonies, vol. 5, 210

Who is responsible for this deplorable condition that is running rampant through almost every church? Let us all remember that God will never speak through a man or a committee which makes policies or rules violating the
The Sin of Licentiousness

Ellen G. White

"FOR THIS is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." [Hebrews 8:10]

When the law of God is written in the heart it will be exhibited in a pure and holy life. The commandments of God are no dead letter. They are spirit and life, bringing the imaginations and even the thoughts into subjection to the will of Christ. The heart in which they are written will be kept with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. All who love Jesus and keep the commandments will seek to avoid the very appearance of evil; not because they are constrained thus to do, but because they are copying a pure model, and feel averse to everything contrary to the law written in their hearts. They will not feel self-sufficient, but their trust will be in God, who alone is able to keep them from sin and impurity. The atmosphere surrounding them is pure; they will not corrupt their own souls or the souls of others. It is their pleasure to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God.

The danger that lies before those living in these last days, is the absence of pure religion, the absence of heart holiness. The converting power of God has not wrought in transforming their characters. They profess to believe sacred truths as did the Jewish nation; but in their failing to practice the truth, they are ignorant both of the Scriptures and the power of God. The power and influence of God's law are around about, but not within the soul, renewing it in true holiness. Therefore the Lord sends His appeals to them to urge upon them the practice of what is right. The appeals of His Spirit are neglected and rejected. The barriers are broken down, and the soul weak, and for want of moral force to overcome, is polluted and debased. They are binding themselves in bundles as fagots, ready to be consumed at the last day.

The Jewish priests were required to be in person all that was symmetrical and well proportioned, that they might reflect a great truth. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." [Isaiah 52:11] The Lord required not only a well-proportioned mind and symmetrical body of the Jews' ministry in holy office, but He required also pure and uncorrupted minds. And He requires no less of us, in this dispensation, in the ministry of the gospel. His called and chosen are to show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. The same Bible that contains the privileges of God's people, and His promises to them, contains also the sacred duties and the solemn obligations He requires of the shepherd who has charge of the flock of God, so that the people can see by comparing the living preacher with the divine picture whether he has credentials from Heaven in likeness of character to Him who is the Chief Shepherd. God designs that the teacher of the Bible should in his character and home life be a specimen of the principles of the truth which He is teaching to his fellowmen.

What a man is has a greater influence than what he says. The quiet, consistent, godly life is a living epistle, known and read of all men. A man may speak and write like an angel, but his practices may resemble those of a fallen fiend. God will have the believers of the truth zealous to maintain good works. As they occupy high positions, they will be tested by a higher standard. They will be sifted; defects and vices will be searched out; for if such exist, they will be developed in words and deportment. True character is not something shaped from without, or put on, but it is something radiating from within. If true goodness, purity, meekness, lowliness, and equity are dwelling in the heart, that fact will be reflected in the character; and such a character is full of power.

The officers who were sent to take Jesus reported that never man spake like this Man. But the reason of this was, that never man lived like this Man; for if He had not so lived, He could not so have spoken. His words bore with them a convincing power, because they came from a heart pure, holy, burdened with love and sympathy, beneficence and truth. How rejoiced are those who hate God's law, to find spot and stain of character in one who stands in defense of that law! They are only too glad to cast a reproach upon all the loyal and true, because of the faults and impure practices of a few. There is eloquence in the quiet and consistent life of a pure, true, undulterated Christian. We shall have temptations as long as we are in this world. But instead of injuring us
they will only be turned to our advantage, if resisted. The bounds are placed where Satan cannot pass. He may prepare the furnace that consumes the dross, but instead of injury, it can only bring forth the gold of the character, purer, upon higher vantage ground than before the trial.

The crime that brought the judgments of God upon Israel was that of licentiousness. The forwardness of women to entrap souls did not end at Baal-peor. Notwithstanding the punishment that followed the sinners in Israel, the same crime was repeated many times. Satan was most active in seeking to make Israel’s overthrow complete. Balak by the advice of Balaam laid the snare. Israel would have bravely met their enemies in battle, and resisted them, and come off conquerors; but when women invited their attention and sought their company and beguiled them by their charms, they did not resist temptations. They were invited to idolatrous feasts, and their indulgence in wine further clouded their dazed minds.

The very same Satan is now working to the very same end, to weaken and destroy the people who claim to be keeping the commandments of God now in which to work, and he will work with tremendous power to ensnare the people of God upon their weak points of character. There will be women who will become tempters, and who will do their best to attract, and win the attention of men to themselves. First, they will seek to win their sympathy, next their affection, and then to induce them to break God’s holy law. Those who have dishonored their minds and affections by placing themselves where God’s Word forbids, will not scruple to dishonor God by various species of idolatry. God will leave them to their vile affections. It is necessary to guard the thoughts; to fence the soul about with the injunctions of God’s Word; and to be very careful in every thought, word, and action not to be betrayed into sin. It is necessary to guard against the cultivation of the indulgence of the lower passions. This is not the fruit of sanctified thoughts or hearts.

It is now the duty of God’s commandment-keeping people to watch and pray, to search the Scriptures diligently, to hide the Word of God in the heart, lest they sin against Him in idolatrous thoughts and debasing practices, and thus the church of God become demoralized like the fallen churches whom prophecy represents as being filled with every unclean and hateful bird. With the Hebrews, God’s judgment fell upon them at once. A plague immediately broke out. The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and the plague visited those who were most guilty. But “the wages of sin is death,” [Romans 6:23] and for their hidden licentious indulgences God poured upon them His wrath. “If
any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” [1 Corinthians 3:17] The ringleaders in this demoralizing work, which was so degrading, so corrupting to Israel, so insulting to God, were ordered to be put to death by the hand of public justice, which was the only way to turn the wrath of God from the congregation of Israel. The command came from the Lord, to take the heads of the people who went out of the camp to associate with Moab, and hang them up before the sun as sacrifices to God’s justice, and as a terror to the rest of the people. The command was executed. They were first slain, then their bodies were hung up in sight of all Israel for a terror to the congregation of Israel, that they seeing their leaders and their princes so severely punished for their licentiousness and idolatry, without regard to wealth, or station, or what they had been, might have a deep sense of the abhorrence of God for sin, and a terror of God’s wrath against them. And the men who have great light, and to whom one would look for an example, are in the sight of God very great sinners, if they transgress His law or deliberately lower the standard of His law to minister unto lust.

Never was vice more bold, stubborn, or daring than it was in Zimri, a prince of the chief house in the tribe of Simeon. Such an exhibition of effrontery toward God was almost too great for belief. He publicly appeared before the people leading a Midian- itish harlot, one of high standing, a daughter of a chief house in Midian, in the sight of Moses and the congregation. He thus showed open contempt of God. He gloried in his shame; for wine had perverted his senses. He openly declared his sin as that of Sodom. The position he had occupied had been one of influence. Moses and the people who had taken no part in this great departure from God’s law, were weeping and lamenting at the door of the tabernacle for the sins of the people, and the plague that had begun. But amid all this demonstration of sorrow, this prince defied the judges to molest him if they dared. The priests were weeping between the porch and the altar, crying, “Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach.” [Joel 2:17] Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, and rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin, and went after the man of Israel into the tent, and killed them both. This stayed the plague.

With this history before the peculiar people of God in these last days, there is no excuse for any one who will follow the example of ancient Israel in sin. But Satan will work in this special temptation to make void the law of God, and make light of God’s special injunctions and warnings. The point to be marked is that Moses’ prayers were not heard, neither his weeping nor the sorrow and prayers of those who had maintained their integrity, until justice was executed upon that demoralized, God-defying prince. God says of Phinehas, He “hath turned away my wrath from the children of Israel.” [Numbers 25:11] It was the greatest mercy that Phinehas could do to Israel, to deal promptly and decidedly with the guilty, and thus be instrumental in turning the wrath of God from the congregation of Israel. Nothing besides prayers and tears are needed in a time when reproach and peril are hanging over God’s people. The wicked works must be brought to an end. The very work of justice done by Phinehas was an atonement for Israel.

Review and Herald, May 17, 1887

A Duty of the Church

The people of God must see their wrongs and arouse to zealous repentance and a putting away of those sins which have brought them into such a deplorable condition of poverty, blindness, wretchedness, and fearful deception. I was shown that the pointed testimony must live in the church. This alone will answer to the message to the Laodiceans. Wrongs must be reproved, sin must be called sin, and iniquity must be met promptly and decidedly, and put away from us as a people. Testimonies, vol. 3, 260

I have been shown that God here [in His instruction to Joshua concerning the wrongdoing of Achan] illustrates how He regards sin among those who profess to be His commandment—keeping people. Those whom He has specially honored with witnessing the remarkable exhibitions of His power, as did ancient Israel, and who will even then venture to disregard His express directions, will be subjects of His wrath. He would teach His people that disobedience and sin are exceedingly offensive to Him and are not to be lightly regarded. He shows us that when His people are found in sin they should at once take decided measures to put that sin from them, that His frown may not rest upon them all. But if the sins of the people are passed over by those in responsible positions, His frown will be upon them, and the people of God, as a body, will be held responsible for those sins. In His dealings with His people in the past the Lord shows the necessity of purifying the church from wrongs. One sinner may diffuse darkness that will exclude the light of God from the entire congregation. When the people realize that darkness is settling upon them, and they do not know the cause, they should seek God earnestly, in great humility and self-abasement, until the wrongs which grieve His Spirit are searched out and put away. Testimonies, vol. 3, 265

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Perfection, from 15

we bring every thought into captivity so that He controls all of our thoughts and all our attitudes. Galatians 5:16 adds, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” If the Holy Spirit is controlling, we will not succumb to

The purpose of character perfection is not so that we can be saved

the desires of our natures. We need not fall and fail constantly, over and over again. The promise of Scripture is that we can overcome, and that we can gain continual victories in the battle against the flesh.

As we might expect, Ellen White also speaks clearly and powerfully on the subject of growth to maturity: “The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.” (The Desire of Ages, 671) We now have come to an extremely important principle in our consideration of the subject of perfection. Why is perfection important? What does it prove?

“The honor of Christ must stand complete in the perfection of the character of His chosen people.” Signs of the Times, November 25, 1897

“If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world.” Testimonies, vol. 5, 746

“How is the world to be enlightened, save by the lives of Christ’s followers? . . . God’s people are to reflect to the world the bright rays of His glory. . . .

God has plainly stated that He expects us to be perfect, and because He expects this, He has made provision for us to be partakers of the divine nature.” Review and Herald, January 28, 1904

The purpose of character perfection is not so that we can be saved. Salvation has already been accomplished by character surrender at the time of justification. Perfection has to do with the credibility of God’s word. God has said that His law is reasonable and can be obeyed. Satan has challenged this claim, and the final decision has not been rendered. God’s remnant people will have a role to play in the vindication of the credibility of God’s word. In fact, God will vindicate His own name by providing His people with the divine power necessary to obey His law perfectly. Thus the perfect character developed by God’s people is crucially important to the final resolution of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

The question many seem to be asking today is, Has anyone ever

So has anyone achieved this type of perfection of character?

achieved this perfection of character? Who among us is perfect? Ellen White responds, “The godly character of this prophet [Enoch] represents the state of holiness which must be attained by those who shall be ‘redeemed from the earth’ at the time of Christ’s second advent.” (Patriarchs and Prophets, 88, 89) She describes Enoch as finding it necessary to live in a time when moral pollution was teeming all around him, but his mind was upon God and heavenly things. His face was lighted up with the light that shines in the face of Jesus. The atmosphere he breathed was tainted with sin and corruption, yet he lived a life of holiness and was unsullied with the prevailing sins of the age. See Testimonies, vol. 2, 122.

Apparently Enoch chose not to sin. He chose to put his life in harmony with Christ’s life at a time when things were as bad as they have ever been in this world’s history.

“Some few in every generation from Adam resisted his every artifice and stood forth as noble representatives of what it was in the power of man to do and to be. . . . Enoch and Elijah are the correct representatives of what the race might be through faith in Jesus Christ if they chose to be. Satan was greatly disturbed because these noble, holy men stood untainted amid the moral pollution surrounding them, perfected righteous characters, and were accounted worthy for translation to heaven. As they had stood forth in moral power in noble uprightness, overcoming Satan’s temptations, he could not bring them under the dominion of death. He triumphed that he had power to overcome Moses with his temptations, and that he could mar his illustrious character and lead him to the sin of taking glory to himself before the people which belonged to God.” Review and Herald, March 3, 1874

Apparently there was something special about the characters developed by Enoch and Elijah before their translation. They did, in fact, choose to resist sin by the power of God. Then we find this beautiful statement, “And there are Enochs in this our day.” (Christ’s Object Lessons, 332) So has anyone achieved this type of perfection of character? The answer seems obvious.

If we really believe that there is a close of probation and that God is demonstrating something special after that time, then it seems that we must believe also in full character maturity, which means living without yielding to sinful desires. After the close of probation, “there will be no Priest in the sanctuary to offer
their sacrifices, their confessions, and their prayers before the Father's throne." "Early Writings, 48

"I also saw that many do not realize what they must be in order to live in the sight of the Lord without a high priest in the

sanctuary through the time of trouble. Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully. There will be no time then to do it and no Mediator to plead their cause before the Father." Ibid., 71

"Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil." "The Great Controversy, 425

There will be a difference in heaven after the close of probation, in that there will be no priestly ministry by Jesus. There will be no Intercessor, no Mediator, pleading the cause of sinners before the Father. Now this does not imply that the enabling power of Jesus dwelling within His people on earth will be removed. But the priestly ministry of forgiveness comes to an end at the close of probation. "In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor." (The Great Controversy, 614) "After the close of Jesus' mediation, the saints were living in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor." "Story of Redemption, 403

The ending of Christ's work of intercession means that there will be no more forgiveness of sins after the close of probation. If the ministry of forgiving sins will have ceased, then it seems imperative that there be no sinning on the part of those who are sealed to God after the close of probation. We can only be forgiven if Jesus is interceding for us and forgiving our sins.

I believe that the primary reason for a short delay before Christ's coming during which there is no Mediator is to dramatize before the watching universe the reality of God's complete power over sin in the lives of those whose wills are totally and forever united to His own. The very people who formerly betrayed their sacred trust by agreeing with Satan that it was impossible to obey God's law will finally demonstrate that there really is no excuse for sin. The close of probation will play an important part in the final demonstration that God is making before His universe; that, indeed, it is possible for fallen man to obey God's law, which is righteous and good and holy.

If we take seriously the biblical admonitions to overcome, the reality of the close of probation, and the challenge of the 144,000, then we must also take seriously the truth of living without sinning. However, we must remem-

ber when we are discussing perfection, we are talking about the goal—the end result. Our focus needs to be on justification and sanctification, because this is the method of receiving salvation. Jesus forgives us of our sins. He comes into our lives with power and victory. As the runner focuses on the next few yards while remembering the tape that is at the end of the race, so the Christian focuses on His relationship with Christ today while remembering that there is a goal at the end of the race.

Can we accept this challenge? "Christ took humanity and bore the world's hatred that He might show men and women that they could live without sin, that their words, actions, and spirit, might be sanctioned to God. We can be perfect Christians if we will manifest this power in our lives." (Upward Look, 303, emphasis supplied) God has promised that He can give victory over all sin. Because of this promise, biblical perfection should never be a discouraging topic, but the most glorious prospect ever set before God's people. God, in fact, is able to keep us from falling.

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FIRM FOUNDATION CONFERENCES

These conferences, featuring speakers such as Colin Standish, Warren Peters, Gayle Wilson, John Goley, Tom and Margaret Davis, Dennis Priebe, Ralph Larson, George Burnside, and Ron Spear, have been held from California to Maine in the United States, and more recently in England and Australia. Focusing on the distinctive truths given of God to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these meetings have blessed thousands. To organize a conference for your area, make arrangements with Dr. Colin Standish at Hartland College, Box 1, Rapidan, VA 22733 (703) 672-3100
When Thou Doest Thine Alms

Ellen G. White

"TAKE HEED that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou dost thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly." [Matthew 6:1-4]

It was the custom of the Jews to do their deeds of charity in a conspicuous manner. They performed their almsgiving in public; and before doing this, often a proclamation was made, heralding their generosity. Thus many gave large sums of money, in order to have their names extolled by men, and that they might be thought liberal and righteous.

When Christ gave His instruction in regard to almsgiving, there was in the crowd a pitiable object soliciting charity. One of the Pharisees, with great display, gave a small sum to the applicant, at the same time commending his own benevolence. The people looked on with admiration, and praised the apparently liberal act. But this man's character was not merciful. He did not pity the suffering and the needy. He had no experience in deeds of love. His object in giving was merely to rid himself of a troublesome applicant, and to call attention to his own benevolence.

Jesus read the motive of the giver. He saw that his act was altogether for the occasion, and this furnished a lesson for the heavenly Teacher. Christ laid bare the motives of the hypocrite. He showed that this act was a counterfeit of benevolence, and would weigh against the door in the day of God. Turning to His disciples, He cautioned them against giving merely for the honor and praise they might thus receive. The motive was wrong. If they had no higher motive than this, they would have no higher reward. He showed that those who bestow their gifts that they may receive the praise of men, will have no reward in heaven. They have their reward in worldly honor and applause. They give that they may obtain this, and this is all they receive.

Frequently the gifts bestowed on the poor only confirm them in indolent, reckless pauperism. Money is given, but not instruction. We do not bring ourselves to the task of employing and teaching the poor and ignorant, thus
helping them to help themselves. Such aid is often the most useful that can be given.

Let us not disdain to touch the applicant. When Christ healed the sick, He laid His hands upon them; and we must come near to those whom we wish to help. Let us realize that, as Christ's, we have nothing of our own. Everything that we have has come from God. Let us therefore impart judiciously to those less favored.

Their attention was diverted by the loud voice of prayer

From their abundance the great men of the world often give large sums of money to colleges and societies, that their names may be exalted; while close to their stately mansions the widow and the fatherless are destitute of food and clothing. Christ teaches that our gifts should be made quietly and unobtrusively, from a heart of pitying tenderness for the unfortunate and the suffering. We should give kindly words with our gifts. Hearts are drawn together by words of kindly sympathy and genuine sorrow for the sufferer. There was no virtue in the gift of the Pharisee. Through it no blessing came to the heart of the receiver. He had given because he desired to be praised for his benevolence.

Self-sacrifice is an essential element of true Christian character. In His life on earth, Jesus has given His followers an example of this. It was love for the souls of men that brought Christ from a world of purity; and He reached to the very depths of wretchedness and woe, in order that He might help the suffering and the perishing. And the servant of Christ must follow in the footsteps of His Master if he would reach to the perfection of this wonderful, glorious Pattern.

While Jesus was giving this instruction, the attention of the people was diverted by the loud voice of prayer. The Pharisee had been reproved by the close, practical teachings of Christ. He felt angry that his sins had been made so apparent, although no word had been directly addressed to him. Feeling condemned before the people, he made an effort to hide the deformity of his character under a pretense of piety and devotion.

"And when thou prayest," Jesus continued, "thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." [Matthew 6:5]

There is an expressed humility, an external appearance, which is born of pride and self-exaltation. Often there are those who parade their humility before others, that they may hear their piety extolled. They seek to impress others with the greatness of their humility. But such men are deceived. In their efforts to prove themselves possessors of this desirable quality, they show that it is not theirs. Those who really possess this grace are ignorant of the fact.

Judging the Pharisee by his hypocritical prayer, many of that company believed him to be a humble, devoted man. But Christ shows such zeal and fervor to be no sign of righteousness. God does not regard such prayers. The approval of men is all the reward those who thus parade their devotion will receive.

When Christ taught the people, He did not devote the time to prayer. He did not enforce upon His hearers, as did the Pharisees, long, tedious ceremonies and prayers. He taught His disciples how to pray: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore, like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." [Matthew 6:6-8]

We would not discourage prayer; for there is far too little praying and watching thereunto; and there is still less praying with the spirit and the understanding also. Fervent and effectual prayer is always in place, and will never weary. It is impossible for the soul to flourish while prayer is neglected. Family or public prayer alone in not sufficient. In secret prayer the soul should be laid bare to the inspecting eye of God; here every motive should be criticized.

How precious is secret prayer—the soul communing with God! Secret prayer is to be heard only by the prayer-hearing God. No curious ear is to receive the burden of petitions. Calmly, yet fervently, the soul is to reach out after God; and sweet and abiding

The approval of men is all the reward they will receive

will be the influence emanating from Him who sees in secret, whose ear is open to the prayer arising from the heart. He who in simple faith holds communion with God will gather to himself divine rays of light to strengthen and sustain him in the conflict with Satan.

The Youth's Instructor, November 3, 1898

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For more than a century there has been a recognition among the leaders of God’s cause that the final resolution of the church’s work on earth will come only with widespread revival and reformation throughout her ranks. As watchmen on Zion’s walls they have often sounded the call for renewed consecration, heartfelt repentance, and a turning from sin. We believe those calls—so true in their day—deserve to be heard again in 1985.

—EDITORS

"As I have of late looked around to find the humble followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, my mind has been much exercised. Many who profess to be looking for the speedy coming of Christ are becoming confirmed to this world and seek more earnestly the applause of those around them than the approbation of God. They are cold and formal, like the nominal churches from which they but a short time since separated. The words addressed to the Laodicean church describe their present condition perfectly." (See Revelation 3:14-20) Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, June 10, 1852

"A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work." Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, March 22, 1887

"God calls for a spiritual revival and a spiritual reformation. . . . Revival without reformation leads only to sentimental change of feeling, which naturally reverts to the old level." Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, February 25, 1902

"It has never been experienced by us. What a sad fact. . . . The fault was with the church. We have been heedful of the message." A. G. Daniells (former General Conference President), Review and Herald, January 10, 1924

"Many weary years we have waited for the fullness of power, for the outpouring of the latter rain. . . . We can only say with sorrow that there must be some fatal hindrance holding back or restraining the fullness of the Holy Spirit promised by the Lord to His people and due today." J. S. Washburn, Review and Herald, October 18, 1934

"There is setting in on this people a tide of worldliness to which we are surrendering. I do not mean to imply that we are not resisting these influences at all; but I believe that the measure of resistance that we are putting forth is not holding us. We are gradually being swept backward, and should be alarmed about it. . . . our resistance of worldly influences is seriously diminishing. . . . I am troubled by the direction that our educational and training work is definitely taking. I am concerned by the more and more obvious fact that in the education and training of our workers we are inquiring more of the world and less of God than formerly. I am grieved because we are allowing the erroneous belief that the highest in standards is reached by the ways of the world rather than by the ways of God." Elder C. H. Watson (former General Conference President), Review and Herald, November 2, 1935

"We have more to fear from within than without. The hindrances to strength and success are far greater from the church itself than from the world." [E. G. White] Our greatest danger today is the attitude taken by so many of our people of accepting with apparent satisfaction their present low spiritual condition and not being very much concerned about it. . . . The time has come for a thorough reformation to take place. What we need today is a people revived with new spiritual power, a church reformed and turned away from the world. . . . There has come into the church a listlessness, a carelessness that is deplorable." J. L. McElhany (former General Conference President), Review and Herald, December 3, 1936

"Before the coming of the Lord His church will experience a great revival and reformation. . . . Is not this revival due now?" F. M. Wilcox (former Editor of Review and Herald), Review and Herald, June 26, 1947

"We are not so faithful and zealous for God and the Truth as we once were, and the end of the world is just upon us. . . . We need that revival now. It is the greatest of all our needs." W. H. Branson (former General Conference President), Review and Herald, December 16, 1950

"What we lack is power—yet it does not come. Should we not diagnose the true situation in which we find ourselves, and no longer remain in a disappointing expectancy of something that does not appear? . . . Why is the Spirit being withheld? . . . Must
we with shamefacedness confess that we have been afraid honestly and sincerely to face, find, and follow His divine guidance? Have we feared to face the issue in our lives?” L. K. Dickson (former General Vice President of the General Conference), Review and Herald, July 16, 1953

“Why hasn’t the work been finished? Why hasn’t Jesus come, and why aren’t the saints in the kingdom? Today we are still in the land of the enemy. It is a matter of character development, some say. Others declare the great commission has not been fulfilled—the Advent message has not as yet been proclaimed as a witness to all nations. Still others contend that the church has not fully accepted the message of righteousness by faith as presented at the 1888 General Conference session held in Minneapolis; hence the loud cry has not sounded, the work is not finished, and we are still here. All of these explanations may be contributing factors, but I want to give you another thought worth pursuing, worth your prayerful consideration when you wonder about the delay in the Lord’s return.

“Read these words of God’s last-day prophet thoughtfully. They were written in the year 1901: ‘We may have to remain many more years, as did the children of Israel; but for Christ’s sake, His people should not add sin to sin by charging God with the consequence of their own wrong course of action.’ Evangelism, 696 (emphasis supplied)

“Insubordination is disregard for authority—in this instance disregard for the authority of the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy—disregard for the counsel God has so clearly and so graciously given His last-day people.

‘Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. . . . They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.’ Proverbs 1:24, 30” Elder R. H. Pierson (former General Conference President), Review and Herald, December 13, 1973

Editorial, from 2. human race for being good. It is God’s gift to everyone who desires to be holy as Jesus is holy. The soul that seeks for righteousness with all his heart and soul, mind and body, and is so sorry for sinning that he covenants with God every day to no longer transgress His law by the power of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 7:9, 10; Jeremiah 29:13) receives daily justification and sanctification.

Again Sister White speaks: “Will man take hold of divine power, and with determination and perseverance resist Satan, as Christ has given him example in His conflict with the foe in the wilderness of temptation? God cannot save man against his will from the power of Satan’s artifices. Man must work with his human power, aided by the divine power of Christ, to resist and to conquer at any cost to himself. In short, man must overcome as Christ overcame. And then, through the victory that it is his privilege to gain by the all-powerful name of Jesus, he may become an heir of God and joint-heir with Jesus Christ. This could not be the case if Christ alone did all the overcoming. Man must do his part; he must be victor on his own account, through the strength and grace that Christ gives him. Man must be a co-worker with Christ in the labor of overcoming, and then he will be partaker with Christ in His glory.” Sons and Daughters of God, 136

Let us remember at this crisis moment that the devil has come down to the Seventh-day Adventist church with great wrath because he knows he has but a short time. See Revelation 12:12; 1 Peter 5:8

He roars through the Adventist churches like a lion, but too often we do not recognize the enticement of his false gospel that will cause the majority of our leaders, pastors and laity to join the ranks of the enemy. (See Testimonies, vol. 1, 608, 609; vol. 5, 80, 81, 136, 463, 477; vol. 8, 41; The Great Controversy, 608) His false gospel comes weekly from many of our pulpits, and those who raise their voice against it are accused by many as divisive and fanatical.

The prophet of the Lord says: “Unsanctified ministers arearraying themselves against God. They are praising Christ and the God of this world in the same breath. While professedly they receive Christ, they embrace Barabbas and by their actions say, ‘Not this Man, but Barabbas.’ Let all who read these lines, take heed. Satan has made his boast of what he can do. He thinks to dissolve the unity which Christ prayed might exist in His church. He says, ‘I will go forth and be a lying spirit to deceive those that I can, to criticize and condemn, and falsify.’ Let the son of deceit and false witness be entertained by a church that has had great light, great evidence, and that church will discard the message the Lord has sent, and receive the most unreasonable assertions and false suppositions and false theories. Satan laughs at their folly, for he knows what truth is.

“Many will stand in our pulpits with the torch of false prophecy in their hands, kindled from the hellish torch of Satan. If doubts and unbelief are cherished the faithful ministers will be removed from the people who think they know so much. ‘If thou hadst known,’ said Christ, ‘even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.’ ” Testimonies to Ministers, 409, 410

May God help us now in this final moment of our salvation to strive with all our hearts to be like Jesus every moment of the day. We can, we must, we will have victory over every inherited and cultivated weakness to sin. (See Education, 257) Let us remember the devil’s greatest fear: “There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out His Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation.” Selected Messages, Book 1, 124

RON SPEAR—EDITOR

December 1986 Our Firm Foundation
Food for Thought
Amy Reich

Upon being born again, we feel compelled to direct all our energies toward the Lord’s work. To do something more for God is always the Christian’s desire. But then we are faced with questions. Questions which keep coming back as we walk the narrow path before us.

How can we work for God? What line of service must we enter to be of service to our King? Are we confined within the precincts of a medical, educational or theological profession? And what of those who have no such opportunity or desire for these professions?

Some years ago I carefully nurtured my kindergarten class in a missionary theme. At the end of the quarter each child was to address the congregation and state which line of service he or she wished to take up. Pride and satisfaction were evident as each one gave his answer, which invariably fell into one of the three above-mentioned professions. Did I say invariably? There was one small boy who stood his ground. He was determined to serve God as a garbage man. No amount of nudging from sister, or laughter from the congregation, could deter his purpose. The years have passed, but the memory has never left me.

Can we serve the Lord in such menial tasks in as great a degree as the professional? Indeed. “It requires much more grace and stern discipline of character to work for God in the capacity of mechanic, merchant, lawyer, or farmer, carrying the precepts of Christianity into the ordinary business of life, than to labor as an acknowledged missionary in the open field, where one’s position is understood and half its difficulties obviated by that very fact.” Child Guidance, 358

The story is told of one Harlan Page who, though only a humble working man, never lost an opportunity to witness for his Saviour. “By letters, by conversation, by tracts, by prayers, by appeals and warnings, as well as by a holy and earnest example, did he try to reclaim the wandering, or edify the believer... His life is a speaking comment on the words, ‘God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are.’” Testimonies to Ministers, 172

We may have envisioned ourselves before kings and courts, answering for our faith, for we are told that time is shortly coming. We may have felt that when the time does arrive, we will surely recognize our grand opportunity, and give a thrilling witness for our faith and love for God. But our characters are being formed each day by our habits, and we cannot produce something which we do not already possess. If we have not that burning zeal for God now, we certainly will not possess it when trembling before courts. If we have been wavering in our firmness to God’s principles at this time, we will never have the fortitude to stand firm when threatened with punishment.

Faithfulness to God does not begin in the courts. It does not begin when we obtain a call to labor overseas. It does not begin at the door of our offices or clinics. The act of faithfulness begins upon our arising each morning to the Lord’s invitation to meet with Him, and in making those conscious choices each day, each hour, as to what to eat, and how much, how to dress, to get proper air, exercise, and rest. We must not end at such physical things as these, but bring our fidelity to God to the center of inward attitudes, motives and dispositions, letting Him do such a work on us, in us, and through us that we are purged from sin and transformed into His image. This is the truly “great work.”

“The Lord is testing and proving us, to see what sort of timbers, or attributes, we are bringing into the character-building. If we are listless and indifferent, negligent and careless, in the small everyday duties, we shall never be fitted for any other service for God. He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in much. He that is unfaithful in that which is least, would certainly repeat this unfaithfulness if placed in higher positions of trust and given larger responsibilities.” The Youth’s Instructor, April 14, 1898

Practical godliness takes God’s Word, not only in theory, but also in practical application—godliness goes as deep as the very common events of life. Our education may give us an array of information, and perhaps opportunity to instruct others, but unless our instruction be by “precept and example” it will not
be with that power God intended it to have. We put the lie to our profession when we willingly neglect any of its aspects.

It need not be open rebellion against God which condemns us. It need only be that simple negligence, that indifference which imperceptibly settles itself within the soul. We may feel secure in the belief that we are walking in His way, and doing a great work for God, but unless we are conscientiously faithful in "that which is least," we are classed as unfaithful stewards. "Untrue to principle in little things, he fails of doing God's will in things greater. He acts on the principles to which he has accustomed himself." Testimonies, vol. 7, 1909

In the present opportunities and privileges we have to make our profession known, we prove our fidelity to God by practicing that profession.

Friends, we may believe that time is short. We may know that circumstances are soon to close around us. We may even feel the urgency of the times, and feel ready to go forward to give the trumpet a certain sound. But unless we are striving to practice that which we know to be right, unless we rouse from our negligence in the little duties, we will find ourselves unprepared for the future events.

Do you wish to do a great work for God? The whole key is letting God do a great work in you by changing your heart, and making you willing to obey in all the littles of life, whether in matters of exercise, rest, speech, diet or dress.

The 144,000 will have learned what it means to love God supremely and to obey Him perfectly. They will have perfected characters and will stand blameless before God without an Intercessor. They will not have evaded the least duty, neglected the least counsel, disregarded the minutest warning, but will ever have striven to be faithful "in that which is least." And in so doing, they will be found to have done a great work for God.

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Education, from 13

"It is the privilege of every student to take the life and teachings of Christ as his daily study. Christian education means the acceptance, in sentiment and principle, of the teachings of the Saviour. It includes a daily, conscientious walking in the footsteps of Christ, who consented to come to the world in the form of humanity, that He might give to the human race a power that they could gain by no other means. What was that power? The power to take the teachings of Christ and follow them to the letter." Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, 36

"The life on earth is the beginning of the life in heaven; education on earth is an initiation into the principles of heaven; the lifework here is a training for the lifework there. What we now are, in character and holy service, is the sure foreshadowing of what we shall be." Education, 307

"The true higher education is what makes students acquainted with God and His Word, and fits them for eternal life." Fundamentals of Christian Education, 431

It will be seen that the development of character is the most essential object of education, for by this is determined the understanding of every great choice in life—from a life calling to a life partner. Indeed, upon it hinges the eternal destiny of every human soul. Thus God’s education lifts man from the lowlands of his own imprisoning egocentricity to the freedom to develop and use his talents for the service of God and his fellowman. A life of usefulness is inevitably a fulfilled life. “If students are led to understand that the object of their creation is to honor God and to bless their fellow men; if they recognize the tender love which the Father in heaven has manifested toward them, and the high destiny for which the discipline of this life is to prepare them—the dignity and honor of becoming the sons of God—thousands will turn from the low and selfish aims and the frivolous pleasures which have hitherto engrossed them.” (Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, 21)

"To bring man back into harmony with God, so to elevate and ennoble his moral nature that he may again reflect the image of the Creator, is the great purpose of all the education and discipline of life." (Ibid., 49) Therefore, Christian education requires a revival of the initial education given to man. “Under changed conditions, true education is still conformed to the Creator’s plan, the plan of the Eden school.” (Education, 30) "The great principles of education are unchanged. They stand fast forever and ever; for they are the principles of the character of God.” (Ibid., 30) Such an education is perfectly calculated to prepare a people to proclaim the everlasting gospel to every corner of the earth and to educate a people who will inhabit God’s eternal kingdom.

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