

# *One Pulse of Harmony*

Sin Is No More



*In Honor and Memory of  
Kay Priebe*

Dennis Priebe



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### **About the Author**

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He has presented over 1,000 seminars in churches and schools around the United States and has written several books and booklets, with many audio and video tapes on the topic of righteousness by faith and related present truth subjects. His one desire is to prepare people for what he believes to be the very soon return of Jesus to this world.

## Introduction

With all the issues churning in the church today, there is one subject that often gets eclipsed. Yet it is the most crucial spiritual subject that underlies all others. What is it? Salvation and the plan of redemption.

This booklet will focus on three foundational aspects of this important subject—the great theme that will lead us in our journey from sinful planet Earth to the glorious New Earth. What are these three issues, and how do they relate to each other and the overall success of the remnant church?

1. **Personal Salvation.** Personal salvation is what determines whether we will individually be part of God's restorative plan or whether we will be found on the outside of God's eternal city. This is the practical, personal experience which transcends all intellectual discussions about God, sin, church, and values. Personal salvation comes through saving faith, which is developed by a loving relationship with God, even when we may not understand everything about doctrines or the great controversy.
2. **The Gospel.** This is where Satan most effectively confuses us about our personal salvation.

The gospel is the good news about God and of how He intends to take those who have been rebellious sinners to His home with the full assurance that they will fit in with His society. God has outlined basic steps in His plan of redemption which will prepare us for a universe without sin of any kind.

At the same time, Satan knows that if he can substitute another “gospel,” a counterfeit plan for moving us from earth to heaven, he can take to final destruction most of those who profess to be on God’s side, even while they think they are on the highway to heaven.

3. **The Great Controversy.** The theme of the great controversy faces head-on the questions of whether God really knows best and if He can be trusted. With clear answers to these ageless inquiries, we have the best opportunity to survive the doubts caused by the uncertainties life throws at us.

We will take a brief journey through these three issues, with the hope that our travel will find us on a narrow but completely secure road, leading us to only one possible destination—the New Jerusalem.

## **Personal Salvation**

Personal salvation is not really very complicated, which is as it should be, since education, background, or birthplace are not determining factors in whether or not we will live eternally with God. All the elements of personal salvation are gifts from God, and can never be earned or merited by human beings. Everything starts with God's grace. But God has chosen to make that grace effective in our lives by one very human step with which He will never interfere, and which Satan has no ability to negate. There is one thing God will not do in His desire to save us. He will never make our choices for us. He will never force us to make correct choices. He will wait for *our* choice to be saved.

First of all, we need to ask, what is salvation? From what are we being saved? The Bible gives us the answer very early in the New Testament: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). So, it is sin from which we need to be saved.

Second, the Bible tells us how sin is defined. The apostle John writes, "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). God's Ten Commandment law is declared in Scripture to be the stan-

dard of character and the measure by which all will be judged (Eccl. 12:13-14; James 2:10-12).

Third, the Bible informs us that all have chosen to violate God's law and are thus guilty of sin. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). Once we understand this, we realize our personal unfitness for the companionship of pure, holy angels.

Fourth, God placed discomfort in human hearts for Satan's lies way back in Eden (Gen. 3:15) before any of us had even made a decision to repent. All of us were born with a conscience which is uncomfortable with deceptive lies. God reminds us through this conscience that our history and present behavior are unacceptable and in rebellion against God's law (John 1:9; Rom. 2:14, 15).

Fifth, we recognize that our best efforts, apart from His transforming grace, are futile in correcting our bad behavior. If we desire and ask for a repentant heart, God will give it to us (Rom. 2:4; Acts 5:31).

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? (Rom. 2:4).

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31).

Sixth, when we make the choice to repent, which means genuine sorrow for what we have said and done (not just the results of our actions) (2 Cor. 7:10), combined with willingness to turn away from past rebellion, God recognizes that choice immediately and provides the forgiveness that only He can offer. Ellen White defines repentance in a brief but simple statement in her book *Steps to Christ*: “Repentance includes sorrow for sin, and a turning away from it.”<sup>1</sup>

The Bible is clear that the confession, repentance, and forsaking of sin are essential in order to receive God’s forgiveness:

If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chron. 7:14).

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (Prov. 28:13).

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1 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 23.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:7).

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Thus begins the heart transformation Scripture calls the new birth (John 3:3-8). God changes our values and desires so that they are now in harmony with heaven and the law of God.

Scripture calls this justification by faith (Titus 3:5-7). Some contend that this part of salvation is easy, but in reality it is the hardest part of the whole process. To utterly and completely surrender our rebellious heart is the most difficult choice we will ever make. And according to the inspired pen, this choice must occur before we can be forgiven, or justified. In Ellen White's words: "God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place."<sup>2</sup>

Once the choice to surrender is made, all future choices are easy by comparison, so long as we continue in that choice. It often takes a significant

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2 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 366.



period of time before we are truly repentant. But when it is done our future looks totally different. Our past is completely forgiven and we are born again. God actually chooses to look at us as if we had never sinned before. We are right with Him.

God knows that we are too self-focused to realize the depths of our selfish nature and have no clue about what will protect us from Satan's coming deceptions. He therefore begins the process of educating and training us so that we will be happy in an environment of purity and perfection. He begins the painful work of piercing through the layers of self-deception that we have so carefully cultivated to protect our fragile egos. He lays bare the motives and emotions which can be so easily manipulated by Satan, and then He waits to see if we will choose to surrender them. Once again, these are not easy choices.

We don't like to have our innermost self laid bare before God and angels. But until we are willing to yield all hidden selfishness to God's cleansing power, we will revert back to the rebellious heart experience, and will lose the peace and joy that forgiveness brings. Make no mistake—this repeated choice to surrender is the hardest part of the saving process. Everything in our fallen nature

and our cultivated habits revolts against the concept of surrender. But if we only partly surrender, if we knowingly choose to retain things that God has condemned, the words “saved,” “forgiven,” and “salvation” are empty terms. Our conscience may try to fool us into thinking that we are on the narrow path (Matt. 7:14), when in fact we are walking with the multitude to certain destruction (Matt. 7:13). “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12).

This is not to say we will never slip and fall again. The apostle John writes: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). So God’s plan for us, when we claim His converting power, is that we not sin. But if we do slip and fall, we won’t excuse our failings, or defend them, or blame someone else for them, or claim they don’t matter because we are “justified.” We will quickly repent anew and surrender that failure to God’s mercy, and plead for Him to increase His process of purifying and cleansing in our innermost being.

Here we must make a clear distinction between choosing to surrender and the ability to carry out that surrender. The choice is always ours, but the power is always God's. No matter how much we grow, there will never be enough power in our own fallen natures, in our own strength, to avoid failure. Therefore, we must constantly ask for God's help and depend on His presence and power to keep us from falling (Jude 24).

Another series of choices that God is asking us to make is, in reality, one choice—the choice to be obedient to whatever knowledge of His will He decides to share with us. Since we have already decided that God knows what is best for us, we will always be seeking for more ways to experience true happiness and peace, which is found only in loving obedience to His will. For example, when we discover that because God has given us the wonderful gift of life and time, He asks us to recognize that reality by returning one-seventh of our time back to Him, we will gladly ask Him how that is done. We will not ask what other Christians are doing, but will look only to the way God has chosen to communicate His will to us—through His Word. When we learn

about the sacredness of the seventh day, we will choose to make that a priority in our lives.

But once again, we don't have the ability on our own to carry out that choice, and so we must ask the Holy Spirit, through God's written counsel, to direct us in the proper ways to keep the Sabbath holy. Only a holy, transformed person can truly observe a holy, sacred day. It is for this reason that Ellen White declares, "In order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

For the same reason, when we realize God has given us the ability to earn a living, and that all our earnings are gifts from His hand, we will gladly choose to return one-tenth of our income to Him (Gen. 14:20; 28:22; Mal. 3:8-10). When we understand that all food that the earth produces is a constant miracle of His life-giving power, we will choose to fill our body temples only with that which is nourishing and pleasing to God (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 3 John 2). Once again, the choice and the ability to carry out that choice are not the same. As Jesus said to His disciples, regarding the obedience God requires, "With men this is

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3 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 283.

impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). We will always be asking God for His special power to resist what our fallen appetites crave.

In our sanctified stewardship of God’s blessings, whatever they may be, our motto will echo the words of King David in his final address to Israel, “For all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee” (1 Chron. 29:14). This is true not only of our finances, but of everything we possess. Nothing we have belongs to us. In our striving to experience the Biblical condition of salvation, which is obedience to God’s commandments (Matt. 19:16-26; Luke 10:25-28; Rom. 2:6-10; 8:13; Heb. 5:9), we recognize that both the power bestowed at conversion and the power of choice with which we were born, are gifts from God. Thus we can claim no credit for our spiritual growth, as everything which makes this growth possible is the Lord’s to begin with.

We could continue with many other choices that God is asking us to make in various areas of daily living, but surely the point is crystal clear. We will always be asking God to reveal more ways of honoring Him and producing more personal happiness, and what He tells us, we will

always choose to obey. We call this whole process sanctification by faith, which is just another phase of righteousness by faith.

We must *never* make the tragic mistake of thinking that one phase of salvation is more important than another, or that one phase assures our salvation, even when another phase is neglected. Both justification and sanctification are accomplished by the blood of Jesus, whether applied to heaven's records to cover our sinful past (Eph. 1:7), or to our hearts and lives through God's transforming grace (Heb. 13:12, 20-21). And according to the Bible, salvation is accomplished both by justification (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7) and by sanctification (2 Thess. 2:13), both by Christ's work for us (2 Cor. 5:21) and His work in us (Titus 3:5).

There is, in short, no salvation unless justification and sanctification are both present and working in harmony with each other. If we are concerned about our assurance of salvation on any given day, we must simply and honestly ask ourselves: Are all my choices in total surrender to God today? Am I holding anything back because I am unwilling to give it up? Have I chosen to give my life to God without reserve?

These, in reality, are just *one* question, phrased in three different ways. That one question is: Do I love God with all my heart? If we can say, “All my choices are to obey God, and if I fail to obey, I will immediately plead for a more complete surrender to His will, and will renew my choice and my surrender,” then we do love Him with all our hearts, and can have perfect peace and the assurance that we are safe in His hands (John 14:15; Rom. 13:10; 1 John 2:3 and 5:3).

Remember always that the God of Scripture is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). He wants us in heaven far more than even we want to be there.

Salvation ultimately boils down to this basic issue, which frees us from endless debates about words like imputed, imparted, and infused so far as Jesus’ righteousness is concerned. The question at the heart of it all is really quite simple: Am I always willing to stand on God’s side? Do I really love God with all my heart?

## **The Gospel**

If we truly desire the personal assurance of salvation each and every day, then it is wise to

have a clear understanding of the gospel, which is simply the good news of how salvation comes to fallen humanity.

Our enemy knows the crucial importance of the gospel, and so—not unexpectedly—he has devised counterfeits of the gospel to confuse us. He intends to lead us to either give up on salvation, or to actually follow a distorted gospel, which Christ characterized as a broad road leading to destruction (Matt. 7:13). We may not be able to totally comprehend every truth in the Bible, but a right understanding of the plan of salvation will guard us against Satan’s deceptions.

So let’s start with the basics. The reason we are in need of salvation is because of sin (Matt. 1:21). Sin has twisted every part of the world we live in, but the worst damage has been to the human nature with which we begin our existence. Instead of the loving, obedient, kind, generous, and joyful nature God placed within Adam and Eve, we are all born with natures prone to selfishness, disobedience, anger, pride, and discouragement. And if we decide that we want to opt out of these characteristics and be like Adam and Eve before the fall, we find that we are completely powerless to carry out our desires. We are so weakened by our



fallen natures that our most determined efforts lead only to failure and despair. The history of six thousand years of fallen natures trying to exist together on this planet tells us what we need no textbook to explain—fallen nature is the curse of human existence.

This fallen nature is so ugly that ever since the days of Augustine, most Christians have concluded that our fallen nature is itself sin, and that we thus stand condemned and lost from the moment of birth, because we were born on the wrong planet to the wrong parents. Many say that we are born in a state of sin, rebellion, and separation from God, and that is the reason we inevitably do, say, and think wrong things. Our words and actions are simply the natural result of already being trapped in sin and rebellion from birth.

Sin, this theory claims, is just a normal part of being human in the same way that dying is a normal part of living. Supposedly, sin is a part of our very being, which means that as long as we have fallen natures (until Jesus comes), we will continue to sin by nature, even if at every moment we, through God's grace, are receiving the mind of Christ and striving not to sin. It also means we

need constant forgiveness for constant sin, with no hope of ever ceasing to sin as long as we live on earth.

But is this theory correct? Let us examine this a little further.

Two important concepts stand out here. Inevitability and responsibility are not happy bedfellows. If sin is an inevitable part of human existence, and if sin is built into my very being, then I am not responsible for my sins. I was born that way, and I can't help but lash out from time to time. Sin is not my problem. I am simply caught up in Adam's problem, and sinning is as natural and constant as breathing. According to this theory, only when God sees fit to take away my fallen nature at His coming will I stop sinning. All my attempts to stop now lead to failure and despair (even though it is "Christ in me" gaining the victory, as Paul promises). So, this logic insists, I need a gospel which will give me peace and assurance while living with some degree of sin in my life. After all, sin is *not my fault*.

But inevitable sinning just doesn't square with the Bible's repeated appeals to take responsibility for our bad decisions and to make better choices.

The Bible is full of appeals to be responsible for our lives and to stop blaming others or circumstances for our wrongdoing (Gen. 3:11-13). Since this is true, we must have a better definition of sin. The sin for which we are lost, condemned, and doomed to eternal destruction is not an accident of birth. According to the Bible, sin is a choice. In the words of the apostle John: “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Ellen White tells us that “this is the only definition of sin.”<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere the Bible says, in the words of the apostle James:

Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin (James 1:14-15).

Ellen White agrees:

There are thoughts and feelings suggested and aroused by Satan that annoy even the best of men; but if they are not cherished, if they are

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4 \_\_\_\_\_, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 951; see also *The Great Controversy*, p. 493; *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 320; *Faith and Works*, p. 56; *Our High Calling*, p. 141; *Upward Look*, p. 371; *Confrontation*, p. 75; *Review and Herald*, July 15, 1890; *Signs of the Times*, November 24, 1887; March 3, 1890.

repulsed as hateful, the soul is not contaminated with guilt and no other is defiled by their influence.<sup>5</sup>

So according to the counsel of God, sinning is not hardwired into our natures. It is a choice. In fact, at the moment of Adam's sin, God placed a resistance to Satan (enmity) in our very fallen natures (Gen. 3:15), so that we would not be comfortable with sinning on an ongoing basis, but would desire something better, with the hope of actually achieving that better state. While we do have a nature that pulls us toward rebellion and distrust of God, sin is not an automatic part of possessing a sinful nature.

So the correct understanding of the sin which brings condemnation and destruction is *choice*. It is important to note that this is more than acts or words. Choices are made by the will, the deciding power of the human mind. Sin can be the choice to do the opposite of what our conscience tells us is right, or the choice to ignore what Scripture or nature tells us about right and wrong. Sin is not a natural, essential part of our being. It is always rebellion against God's will, a lack of faith, and

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5 \_\_\_\_\_, *That I May Know Him*, p. 140.

rejection of the divine purpose for the life He gave us.

The sin for which we are accounted lost always comes *after* we become aware of God's will, after light and knowledge of right and wrong comes to us and we are convicted of its importance. When we deliberately choose to turn away from those convictions (Acts 17:30; James 4:17), that is when we sin. Only in this way can the prophets rebuke us for our continued sinning and urge us to choose a better, more responsible way. Only with this foundational understanding of sin can we understand the gospel correctly.

When Christ entered this world's darkness to become the new leader of the human race and lead condemned sinners into the narrow way of eternal life, He did so by proving that Satan had lied when he claimed fallen nature was so hopeless that mankind was doomed to inevitable sinning and destruction. "Satan...had declared that no man could keep the law of God after the disobedience of Adam."<sup>6</sup>

It would have been very tempting for Christ to bypass the morass of weak, fallen nature and take a more suitable nature for God to inhabit, and

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6 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 136.

thus prove that Adam and Eve could have made better choices. But the Bible is clear that Jesus took, in His humanity, the same fleshly urges and liabilities every human being takes at birth (Rom. 1:3; 8:3; Heb. 2:14-17; 4:15). Thus Ellen White assures us:

It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, God's love for us was so great that He allowed His Son to live for three long decades in a nature which had produced nothing but violence and turmoil for four thousand years. By living daily in our degraded nature, He emblazoned on the face of the universe the truth that a fallen nature does not make sin inevitable. Jesus

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<sup>7</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

can mean what He says when He tells a fallen woman to “go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Of course, this comprehension of God’s great love and Christ’s incredible sacrifice in coming to be one of us is possible only with a correct understanding of sin. If we believe sin to be an inescapable part of our fallen nature, then Christ could not have taken our fallen nature, nor could He have proved Satan was lying when he claimed that fallen nature makes sin inevitable.

If Jesus didn’t take our fallen humanity, we are no closer to a solution for the sin problem than if He had never come to earth. But the glorious truth is that Christ really did become our Brother, fighting against Satan in the same way we must—with a weakened, powerless nature that needs constant connection with the Father’s power to make even the most basic right choices. On more than one occasion Christ acknowledged this fact when He declared openly that He must do His Father’s will rather than His own will (Luke 22:42; John 5:30), which had been weakened by four thousand years of sin—just like our will.

When we truly see the reality of the battles against sin that Christ waged in His own mind, and the terrible danger He, this world, and the

universe confronted every day of His incarnate life, our hearts cannot but thrill with the incredible love of God for fallen men and women, and we will throw away our lame excuses and rebelliousness as unworthy of the Christ whose name we often claim so lightly. We will fall at His feet in unending praise and devotion to the One who battled so hard for our salvation, and who did not take the easier path of an unfallen nature, which is unavailable to us in our own battles.

The following Ellen White statement comes to mind in this regard:

By experiencing in Himself the strength of Satan's temptation, and of human sufferings and infirmities, He would know how to succor those who should put forth efforts to help themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Once we understand the gospel's basic principles, we get a clearer picture of the "how" of the gospel—what Scripture calls justification and sanctification. Justification occurs when we fall at the foot of the cross, confess our unworthiness and life of rebellion, and receive Christ as both Substitute (He took our punishment) and Lord

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8 \_\_\_\_\_, *Confrontation*, p. 78.



(He is ruler of our life). Christ recognizes our decision by forgiving our past sins and treating us as if we were beginning with a completely clean slate.

But more importantly, He implants within us what the Bible calls a clean heart (Psalm 51:10). We become what Paul describes as “a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). By a miracle called the new birth, we see things as God sees them, and obtain supernaturally implanted desires to do things God’s way. The Holy Spirit becomes the master of our brains, directing us in ways which moments before would have seemed totally foreign and even impossible. We begin to have the mind of Christ and think like He would think. Justification by faith is so much more than recordkeeping. It is the most powerful force ever unleashed in the human mind, literally turning sinners into saints.

Ellen White understood this principle when she wrote:

God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed,

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10.<sup>9</sup>

Along with conversion and forgiveness (justification), sanctification is the daily process of becoming what God has already declared us to be—holy, set apart entirely for holy use. Because sinning has traumatized us so badly, God knows it will take time for us to become, in fact, what God sees in us and promises to do in and through us. So He takes us one step at a time, revealing each day new thoughts about Him and His will, and as we yield in submission to His plan, He makes us more like Him in thought and character.

He also does something that can be painful to our psyche. He reveals to us hidden motives and underlying defects which prevent us from experiencing truly selfless love. He then opens our mind to the beauty and joy of eliminating those negative traits through His supernatural power. As we are willing to lay these idols on the altar of sacrifice, He moves us ever closer—step by step—to the full restoration of the image of God in a nature so scarred and defaced by chosen rebellion.

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<sup>9</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, p. 114 (italics original).

There is one thing about God of which we can be certain: He does not do things halfway. He is not satisfied to give us partial victories and a degree of success. When He promises to sanctify us wholly, He will not rest until He has accomplished His full purpose in our lives (1 Thess. 5:23). There are numerous promises in Scripture assuring that all sin can be removed from us, that we can actually live like Christ lived, and that we will come to hate sin in the same way that God hates it. Such verses as the following are among the plainest in this regard:

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways.... Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee (Psalm 119:1-3, 11).

Awake to righteousness, and sin not (1 Cor. 15:34).

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling

down of strong holds. 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 (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

And these are just the beginning. Many more Bible verses promise complete victory over sin through God's power in this life, here on earth (e.g., Psalm 4:4; 34:13-14; Rom. 8:4; Eph. 5:27; 1 Peter 4:1; Jude 24; Rev. 3:21). Those who claim that the idea of divinely-empowered sinless obedience in this life is based on Ellen White rather than the Bible haven't done their homework.

Ellen White is clear that we will never experience perfection of *nature* till Jesus comes, which is why she declares: "Appetite and passion must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. There is no end to the warfare this side of eternity."<sup>10</sup> But as the above Bible verses make plain, we have the promise that daily surrender will lead to full maturity of character, which means that

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10 \_\_\_\_\_, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 20.

we would literally rather die than sin in thought, word, or action.

Commandment-keeping will no longer be intermittent and sporadic. We will obey because our hearts have been totally transformed and empowered by divine miracles on a daily basis, and we will walk constantly in the white raiment of Christ's righteousness.

Thus the Bible declares of history's final generation of believers:

The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid (Zeph. 3:13; compare Rev. 14:5).

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless (2 Peter 3:13-14).

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.... Little children,

let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous (1 John 3:2-3, 7).

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 (Rev. 3:21).

And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:17).

Here is the patience of the saints. Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12).

## **The Great Controversy**

As vital as personal salvation and a correct understanding of the gospel are, there is something bigger than either of these issues, because it affects the entire universe. If we do not understand the cosmic battle going on above and within us, we will never realize our crucial place in the universe and why each individual is so important.

As long as my focus is limited to what is available to me personally in the salvation process, I will, to that degree, be self-centered in under-

standing God and humanity. I will be concerned primarily with what God will do for me and what I have to do to participate in eternal life. I will be looking for minimum requirements in my desire for personal salvation. If we truly want to grow beyond self-centeredness, then we need to look at what some call “the big picture.”

Ellen White makes the following, very interesting statement about the purpose of our existence:

We were brought into existence because we were needed. How sad the thought that if we stand on the wrong side, in the ranks of the enemy, we are lost to the design of our creation.<sup>11</sup>

Conflict began when one of God’s highest created beings decided to go into business for himself. Lucifer challenged God’s management system. He made it very clear that God wasn’t handling angelic personnel properly. He had far better ideas on how the universe should be run. His primary complaint was that God’s law, God’s rules, were arbitrary and unnecessary. Angels were very bright and could be trusted to make

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11 \_\_\_\_\_, *Signs of the Times*, April 22, 1903.

good decisions on their own, without having to conform to a set of laws. That was restrictive and demeaning. He proposed that he was very capable of reforming the society of heaven if God would just trust him and include him in the planning meetings.

As he shared his ideas with fellow angels, a good number thought they saw wisdom in his suggestions. They united their voices in asking God to reconsider His governing policies. So God called a heavenly council and laid out the issues from His perspective, asking the angels to reconsider their doubts and questions.<sup>12</sup> But Lucifer took great exception to this denial of his “rights,” and persuaded at least one-third of the angels to join with him in a full-blown rebellion against the “arbitrariness” of God’s rulership.

The end result was war, with Lucifer and his followers being expelled from heaven (Rev. 12:7-9). Some might have thought this was a final solution, but actually it was more like a temporary exile. Lucifer, now Satan, was given permission to make his case outside of heaven’s boundaries. He would be free to talk to any of God’s created

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12 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 36.



beings and attempt to persuade them of the correctness of his views.

As you can imagine, there were major concerns and unanswered questions among the angels who remained loyal to God. Did God handle this situation correctly? Should He have given Lucifer another chance? Was Lucifer right about God being arbitrary and severe? Should God have thrown their fellow angels out of heaven? Was a law really so necessary for angelic happiness?

God had a very difficult problem on His hands. If He used force, He would vindicate Satan's claims about His character. If He ignored the problem, the problem would compound itself throughout the universe. Therefore, God determined to allow free choice to run its unhindered course. He would make His case, and would allow Satan to make his case, and then allow all created beings to make the final decision as to which way would be best for the universe.

The great controversy between God and Satan had begun.

Since one of the rules in this conflict was non-interference in the free will and free choices made, Satan was permitted to use whatever method of persuasion he chose in order to make

his case. He was successful on only one planet, with Adam and Eve. Since God would not overrule their decision, the great controversy would be played out on planet Earth, and every new human being became an important contributor to the conflict's final outcome.

Since Satan had challenged God's law in heaven, he continued that attack on earth, with the added charge that it was impossible for fallen human beings to obey such an impossible set of rules. He said that God's laws were beyond man's ability or desire to obey.

Ellen White explains this satanic charge as follows:

Satan declared that it was impossible for the sons and daughters of Adam to keep the law of God, and thus charged upon God a lack of wisdom and love. If they could not keep the law, then there was fault with the Lawgiver.<sup>13</sup>

Satan was urging upon men the belief that there was no reward for the righteous or punishment for the wicked, and that it was impossible for men to obey the divine statutes.<sup>14</sup>

Thus Satan worked to discourage the people, to lower their conception of the character of

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13 \_\_\_\_\_, *Signs of the Times*, January 16, 1896.

14 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 88.

God, and to bring the faith of Israel into contempt. He hoped to establish the claim put forth when he rebelled in heaven—that the requirements of God were unjust, and could not be obeyed.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Satan said that *fallen* man was really free man, and that free man wouldn't choose to follow God. Put another way, free man (fallen man) would not freely choose to love God. God's response was that *unfallen* man was actually free man, and that *both* fallen man and unfallen man could choose to freely love Him. Since love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10), commandment-keeping became the test. Here it is extremely important to understand that the commandments are not unreasonable demands, but are the genuine conditions of love, a fact which Satan denies.

In order to show the difference between love and selfishness, and to prove that only love could guarantee the peace and happiness of free beings, while selfishness carried within it the seeds of destruction, God set the plan of redemption in motion. This plan was intended to accomplish two things. First, God had to show that love and

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15 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 29.

law are the same thing, and that one could not exist without the other. Second, He needed to reveal that what Satan proposed was not freedom and liberty, but virulent selfishness that would ultimately lead to the attempted murder of God.

The key word in all this was *vindication*. Would the facts vindicate God or Satan?

The entire Old Testament is an ongoing narrative of this struggle, with one side or the other making points in the great debate over who was really right. God worked first through family leaders in making His case. Then He chose a whole community—a nation—with carefully defined laws outlining His plan. Unfortunately, this nation proved to be as much an ally of Satan in the controversy as of God.

Finally, God came to the tipping point in the battle. He came in the person of His Son, to demonstrate that love and obedience to His law were one and the same, and to prove that genuine love would lay down even eternal life before yielding to selfishness. Satan revealed his true character, and forever ripped away the façade that he was working for the betterment of all created beings. The watching beings lost their last bit of sympathy for Satan's cause. They were fully con-

vinced that only God's way would bring peace and happiness to the universe.

In Ellen White's words:

By His life and His death, Christ proved that God's justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed. Satan's charges were refuted. God had given man unmistakable evidence of His love.<sup>16</sup>

But that was two thousand years ago, and apparently not all the issues were fully resolved, because many still live under the delusion that Satan's way works best for the human race. Human beings have yet to clearly see the absolute contrast between God and Satan.

Even when Christ was making His supreme sacrifice for the preservation of the universe, *not one* human being understood what was happening. Gradually a few individuals began to understand, and they shared this knowledge with as many as would listen. What began as a tiny trickle soon developed into a mighty river, known as Christianity. But even with this new understanding of God and Satan, men and women began to incor-

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16 \_\_\_\_\_, *Ibid*, p. 762.

porate the principles of Satan's world, and within a few centuries very few Christians were following God's principles. Human beings in general were—and are—very ignorant of the real issues in the great controversy.

Then there is the problem of the balance between mercy and justice. Part of God's plan to restore peace to the universe includes transplanting human beings to live peacefully with holy angels. God proposes to take human beings who have been living out Satan's principles and transform them into people who are faithfully living out God's principles. This involves, first, forgiving them for their past rebellion, and second, changing them from the inside out, so that living God's way becomes as natural as rebellion previously was. God is exercising a huge amount of mercy in this whole process.

Ellen White describes this process briefly in the following statement:

Christ bears the penalty of man's past transgressions; and by imparting to man His righteousness, makes it possible for man to keep God's holy law.<sup>17</sup>

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17 \_\_\_\_\_, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1092.

The question is, can God do this without overriding free choice? Is He being fair (just) to His own principles? Can He really show mercy without playing favorites? Further, is this plan really being fair (just) to the angels who have never rebelled? How can He prove beyond a shadow of doubt that taking former rebels into heaven will not seriously endanger the peace and harmony angels enjoy? Just because they've been forgiven doesn't prove they won't slip back into occasional selfishness.

Angels, in other words, are taking a substantial risk in agreeing to allow those who have nurtured selfishness in their lives to be their next-door neighbors. What evidence has God provided to put their minds at ease about this plan? Simply put, the vindication of God's plan has not been fully established yet.

So God has patiently waited through two thousand more years of shifting loyalties to God's plan and Satan's plan, letting Satan himself show why Satan's way is wrong and God's way is man's only hope. To vindicate His character and His plan beyond any further need of proof, God has taken a very dramatic and daring method of proving His point. He has decided to end His

plan of redemption, begun as soon as Adam and Eve rebelled, *before* the demonstration on planet Earth is completed.

God has always offered forgiveness for rebellious thoughts, words, and actions on the part of those choosing to be part of His plan of restoration. He even forgives those who rebel near the end of their lives, like the penitent thief who died with Christ on the cross (Luke 23:42-43). But because this generous mercy makes unfallen beings wonder if redeemed men and women might not slip into rebellion again in heaven, God takes a drastic step. The atoning blood of Christ has been made available to all who want it from the beginning of sin on this earth until now. However, Christ now announces that when the battle between God's way and Satan's way is at its full height—when all possess a clear understanding of the difference between genuine love and genuine selfishness, when all have made their final choice—Christ will end His work of forgiving rebellion. He will close down that part of the heavenly sanctuary which deals with atoning blood covering the sins of those who are repentant.

This is when the declaration goes forth, as recorded in the book of Revelation: “He that is



unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Rev. 22:11). This point, at which Christ’s intercession ceases and forgiveness is no longer available, is often called the close of probation.

Ellen White describes what God will require of His people when this happens:

Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth. . . . When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing.<sup>18</sup>

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18 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Great Controversy*, p. 425.

From that moment, there will be either total obedience or total disobedience—justice revealed. The time in which human beings can switch sides freely will have come to an end, just like when the door of Noah’s ark closed, and remained closed, a week in advance of the great Flood.

The obedience spoken of above will be manifested by those having total faith, trust, and belief of God. On the flipside, the disobedience will be exhibited by those who are lacking in faith, trust, and belief of God.

Satan’s charge against God has always been that God’s law is harsh and arbitrary, and that fallen human beings cannot, under any circumstances, obey that law 100% of the time. This charge has resonated with unfallen watchers who see how easily even the best of humans too often fail. In order to lay this last accusation of Satan to rest for all eternity, God has promised to be able to nurture a final generation to such a point of maturity that He can place His seal of approval upon all of them, and declare, with assurance, that they will never rebel again for the rest of eternity.

Satan will bring his most subtle temptations to bear upon this group, and will use his most effective forms of persecution to prove one simple

point: that God cannot fulfill His promises. This is the period when the beauty and power of God's character, reflected in His earthly, fallen children will be on such display as has never before been seen in history. Unselfish love and self-centered independence will be in all-out warfare.

Ellen White describes this demonstration as follows:

The warfare against God's law, which was begun in heaven, will be continued until the end of time. Every man will be tested. Obedience or disobedience is the question to be decided by the whole world. All will be called to choose between the law of God and the laws of men. Here the dividing line will be drawn. There will be but two classes. Every character will be fully developed, and all will show whether they have chosen the side of loyalty or that of rebellion. Then the end will come. God will vindicate His law and deliver His people.<sup>19</sup>

By revealing His full power in the most rebellious age this world has ever known, God will make it clear that those He has forgiven and empowered in past ages will be safe to live with in heaven. In other words, God can be trusted

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<sup>19</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 763.

completely when He decides who is safe to save. The unfallen watchers will agree that Satan's last accusation against God's law and justice has been discredited once and for all. God will have vindicated His government, His law, His plan, and His character so fully that it will be logically impossible to ever question Him again. Satan's final accusation will be destroyed so totally that even he can find no way to resurrect his cause. And thus every knee shall bow before God.

In practical terms, what does this mean for those of us alive at this point of human history? It means we are called to be part of the final battle between God and Satan. We will take center stage in the universe to demonstrate who is telling the truth and who is lying. God's great plan of redemption will not be complete until He brings a whole generation of Christians to the place where He can safely seal them.

Some think this sealing will make it impossible for those sealed to ever sin again. If that were the case, God would have taken free choice away from them, which would destroy God's bottom line in the controversy with Satan. Satan, rather than God, would thus be vindicated when he says free choice and obedience cannot exist together.

But the seal of God does not remove free will, without which love is impossible. Rather, this seal is our all-knowing God's *assurance* that His followers will never *choose* to sin again.

In fact, the seal of God on the last generation demonstrates to a watching universe that God is able to recognize true faith. He seals the 144,000 before the great test (great time of trouble), and then as they pass through as true overcomers the universe sees that God can be trusted completely in His decisions of whom to bring into heaven.

After He has demonstrated that all whom He sealed have actually overcome the devil's temptation to doubt God's word and seek their own way, He has a good basis for saying that those who died in earlier ages without gaining that victory in every area of life (many of which areas they knew nothing about), are still safe to save! Why? Because God has demonstrated His ability to identify "saving faith." He did that 144,000 times over! Those with true faith can learn what they need to know about how to live that faith out once they are in heaven.

If this promise has any chance of being realized, God must bring this generation to such maturity that—both intellectually and experien-

tially—they can never be moved by Satan’s lies. They will understand God’s truths and Satan’s lies more clearly than any generation before them. They will have entered into such an intimate, trusting relationship with God that sin will be as repulsive to them as it was to Christ. They will have developed such an unbreakable loyalty to God that they will choose to die rather than to rebel ever again. They will have fallen so totally in love with Christ that love will flow from them as naturally as water from a spring. Because they no longer have any sins to confess, they can live on earth without a mediator in heaven.

Such will have become unshakable loyalists to God’s cause—an invincible fortress against Satan’s deceptions. They have become Exhibit A before the jury of the universe for the success of God’s redemption plan. They have been justified (forgiven and born again) and sanctified (fully transformed into the image of God). God will be absolutely, totally, and finally vindicated. Throughout His vast universe, one pulse of harmony and love will provide eternal security against sin ever rising again (Nah. 1:9).

In the first recorded Biblical promise of salvation, God assured humanity that the head of the

wicked serpent (Satan) would be bruised under the feet of Christ (Gen. 3:15). But the Bible also promises that Satan will be bruised under the feet of Christians (Rom. 16:20). Thus Ellen White writes as follows of the responsibility of God's people to vindicate His character in the controversy with evil:

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.<sup>20</sup>

Pray, pray earnestly and without ceasing, but do not forget to praise. It becomes every child of God to vindicate His character. You can magnify the Lord; you can show the power of sustaining grace. There are multitudes who do not appreciate the great love of God nor the divine compassion of Jesus.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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20 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 746.

21 \_\_\_\_\_, *Ibid*, vol. 5, p. 317.

22 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

It is this desire to be part of God's great cosmic victory which will motivate this generation to be totally on God's side, without further delay. This is a far more effective motivator than simply the desire to be forgiven and get to heaven. Personal salvation is of minor consequence in comparison with the privilege of cooperating so fully with God that wars will cease, babies will not die, violence will end, injustice will disappear, and Satan will be destroyed.

We can, if we are willing, choose to be among the last human beings to live under the tyranny of Satan. We can play a decisive role in the adversary's final discrediting. If this does not motivate us to renounce sin forever, perhaps nothing will. God has promised that He will be victorious in this final struggle. Do we believe His Word? Do we trust Him completely? Let us link our lives with His eternal purpose, because we believe that all God's promises are in fact His enablings.<sup>23</sup> "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24).

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23 \_\_\_\_\_, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 333.