

The Righteousness of the Last Generation

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Much has been said regarding the spiritual condition of the generation that will be living just before the Second Coming of Jesus. There is no doubt that those who are God's people will be translated as perfected humanity. But when that spiritual perfection takes place is a question that has caused much controversy. Specifically, is it possible to attain that perfection now? Can I truly live without sin before Christ's Second Coming?

I've heard people say, "I'm a sinful human being. There is no way I can be perfect!"

"Isn't it a bit arrogant to say you will be perfect?"

"Saying I have to be perfect before Jesus comes puts too much pressure on me."

These and many similar statements have been made regarding this touchy issue. But we don't have to wonder. God has made it plain, in Scripture and through the writings of Ellen White, what He expects of His people. It would be foolish to think, if God expects us to be perfect, that He wouldn't make it plain to us in His word.

But the idea of Christian perfection troubles some people. Just the word "perfect" has been a stumbling block for many. But this is the word God uses. It's not something someone just made up.

The first command that God's people be perfect is found in Deuteronomy 18:13, "Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God." The Hebrew word translated "perfect" is defined by Strong's as "without blemish, complete, full, perfect, sincerely (-ity), sound, without spot, undefiled, upright (-ly), whole." I think we all could agree sin is a blemish in God's perfect universe. We could also agree that Christ came to fulfill God's perfect law and that He was perfectly without spot and undefiled by sin. In other words, to be perfect means to be like Christ.

There are many other texts that speak of this Christian perfection, which is tied to the keeping of God's law.

"Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day." 1 Kings 8:61.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matthew 5:48.

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." 2 Corinthians 13:11.

"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:" Colossians 1:28.

"That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Timothy 3:17.

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." 1 Peter 5:10.

Peter tells us we are made perfect through the grace of God. Paul states it happens when we are "in Christ Jesus." We don't do it alone; we can't do it alone! We need God.

“God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect.” 2 Samuel 22:33.

“It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect.” Psalm 18:32.

It is God who makes our way perfect. And how does He make our way perfect?

“Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?” Psalm 77:13.

God’s way of perfection is outlined in the sanctuary, which points us to Jesus, who is “the way.” Our only hope of perfection is to look to Jesus. Are you getting the idea? Looking to and beholding Jesus is the key to our becoming like Him.

Regarding that perfection, we are told in Jude 1:24, “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”

To “keep you from falling,” according to Strong’s, means to “keep you without sin.” Is this text one to be believed? We dare not doubt God’s word! If indeed He is able to “keep you from falling,” then it is possible to keep from sinning. This is made possible only through the grace of God through whom we are granted the privilege of receiving the righteousness of Christ. But the question still remains, when does this happen?

It was Jesus alone who lived a perfect life. We are to constantly be looking to Jesus. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” Hebrews 12:2. Paul says that Christ is the author and finisher of our faith. In other words, it is Christ that gives us faith and brings that faith to fulfillment in the development of a character like His. If we focus on the idea of perfection in this life, we will become legalists. That’s what happened to the Pharisees. They focused on keeping the law to such an extreme that they forgot why they were to keep it, and to whom the law was to lead them. But if we focus on Jesus instead of becoming perfect, we will be changed into His likeness. 1 John 3:2 says, “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.” When Christ appears, we will be like him. We will have His character. The intimation is that we will already have that character “when he shall appear.” Second Corinthians 3:18 tells us, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The likeness of Christ in His people at His Second Coming, is a result of beholding Christ. These texts suggest this process occurs here on earth prior to the Second Coming.

So, if we are to focus on Jesus and not on being perfect, why this whole treatise on Christian perfection? For the simple reason that if we believe we cannot overcome sin, we are denying the message of the gospel. We are denying the truth of righteousness by faith.

You see, it isn’t us that lives that perfect life, but Jesus living in us. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” Galatians 2:20. It is Christ, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, that lives in us and empowers us to do His will perfectly. If Christ is indeed living in us, will we sin? It is when we put Christ out of our lives that we sin. But God’s word says He can keep us from falling (sinning). In other words, Christ will live in us continually. There won’t be a moment when He is not living in us. Paul says it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” Colossians 1:27.

Christ continually living in us is our only hope of living in glory. And if Christ continually lives in us we will not sin. It cannot be otherwise.

God and sin cannot dwell in the same place. If we were to sin and God was dwelling in us, we would be destroyed. Speaking of the keeping of God's law, Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 4:24, "For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God." Remember what happened to Nadab and Abihu? We must, through the power God gives, retain Him in our lives. And if He is constantly before us and dwelling in us, if we are constantly beholding Him, we will not sin. But is it really possible to constantly keep our minds on Him, is it really possible to stop sinning?

"It is by grace that the sinner is saved, being justified freely by the blood of Christ. But Christ did not die to save the sinner in his sins. The whole world is condemned as guilty before God, for they are transgressors of his holy law; and they will certainly perish unless they repent, turn from their disobedience, and through faith in Christ claim the merits of his precious blood. The sin of Adam and Eve lost holy Eden for themselves and their posterity, and those who continue to live in the transgression of God's law will never regain the lost paradise. But through the grace of Christ man may render acceptable obedience, and gain a home in the beautiful Eden restored." {ST, July 29, 1886 par. 3} (Emphasis supplied.)

If we do not receive the grace of Christ and render obedience to Him, we will still be sinning when Christ comes. We will not have turned from our disobedience. We will be continuing "to live in the transgression of God's law" and will effectively be asking God to save us "in our sins." But we need not believe this is the way things must be.

"Many bemoan the disobedience of Adam, which resulted in bringing sin, suffering, and death, into the world. Surely, such should cease to transgress. But instead of doing better themselves than Adam did, they follow a course of transgression, thereby increasing the tide of woe. But let the children of Adam, who have the example of their father before them with all its terrible results, stop sinning, instead of complaining of their father, while they themselves are doing worse than he did." {HR, December 1, 1872 par. 8} (Emphasis supplied.) The implication here is to stop blaming Adam for our sin. We are guilty of, and should recognize our responsibility for our own sin, and "cease to transgress."

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!' Shall not we decide to let Christ take away our sin? Is sinning so great a pleasure to us that we will decide to continue to grieve the One whose heart is filled with infinite love for us? Why not cease sinning? We can do this by faith, if we lay hold on Christ's promises, and say, 'In my hand no price I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling.'" {2SAT 234.4} (Emphasis supplied.) If we are clinging to the cross of Christ and relying on His infinite love for us, that love will keep us "from falling."

Ceasing to sin is not something we do suddenly. It is a process that God leads us through. As we follow His leading in this process, by faith, we receive increasing power to resist and overcome sin.

"Looking unto Jesus we obtain brighter and more distinct views of God, and by beholding we become changed. Goodness, love for our fellow men, becomes our natural instinct. We develop a character which is the counterpart of the divine character. Growing into His likeness, we enlarge our capacity for knowing God. More and more we enter into fellowship with the heavenly world, and we have

continually increasing power to receive the riches of the knowledge and wisdom of eternity.” {COL 355.1} (Emphasis supplied.)

The result is that our characters become like the character of Christ and we grow “into His likeness.” As we continue to behold Christ, we become like Him in character. And “When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.” {COL 69.1} It is not until Christ’s character is reproduced in His people that He will come. That character is not simply handed to us at the close of probation or the Second Coming, it is the quality of the generation of God’s people living before He comes. A quality of character that has been developed through continual submission and surrender of their will to the will of God. This was the character of Christ.

And what of that last generation of God’s people? They will be a righteous generation. What does it mean to be righteous? Righteousness is simply right doing. So, if we are righteous, then we are doing that which is right. You can’t be completely righteous and still be sinning. The definition of what is right is found in God’s word. Psalm 119 and Ezekiel 18, along with many other biblical passages, equate righteousness (right doing) with God’s law. But if we do something outside of God’s will, against His law, then we are not doing what is right. We are not righteous.

So how do we do what is right? How do we live righteously? There is only one way that we, hopeless sinners, can live righteous lives. That is by faith in Christ, His sacrifice for us, and His promise of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live such a life. In fact, Romans 9:31 says, “But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.” So, the Law of God IS righteousness. But how can we keep that law? Romans 8:4 tells us. “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” As we walk through this life, guided by the Holy Spirit, making choices according to His leading, we will have the Law of God “fulfilled in us” just as it was fulfilled in Jesus as He walked in this life. We can be righteous just as Jesus was righteous. Revelation 12:11 says of the righteous, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” This overcoming the power of the devil’s temptations through faith in the blood of Jesus is righteousness by faith.

If we are overcoming sin, that necessarily means we are remaining obedient to the requirements of God’s law. Obedience to the law of God was what Christ came to prove was possible. We obey through faith in Christ and by doing so, we are developing the character of Christ. Jesus life was not to be the only demonstration of the power of God working in mankind to overcome. “The principles of the law of God were wrought out in the character of Jesus Christ, and he who co-operates with Christ, becoming a partaker of the divine nature, will develop the divine character, and become an illustration of the divine law. Christ in the heart will bring the whole man, soul, body, and spirit into captivity to the obedience of righteousness. Christ’s true followers will be in conformity to the mind and will and character of God, and the far-reaching principles of the law will be demonstrated in humanity.” {RH, March 9, 1897 par. 2} This is the result of righteousness by faith.

Do we believe in righteousness by faith? If there is no possibility of doing what is right through faith in God’s promise, then there is no such thing as righteousness by faith. But if there truly is such a thing as righteousness by faith, then we must have the capacity, through the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, to do what is right (live righteously) by faith. Righteousness by faith is not claiming the righteousness of Christ and continuing in sin and having “faith” that Christ’s righteousness will cover our sin.

Righteousness by faith means that we live righteous lives through faith in the promise of God that He can and will live that life in us. This is the power of God “to keep you from falling.”

Jesus, speaking of the Holy Spirit, says in John 16:8, “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” And verse 13 says, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.” It is the role of the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and guide us into the truth. And if we are in the truth, we are most certainly living righteous lives, because Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life.” If the Holy Spirit isn’t able to give us the power to live righteously, then there is no such thing as righteousness by faith. If there is no such thing as righteousness by faith, then there is no justification. Without justification, there is no sanctification. Justification is an indispensable component of righteousness by faith.

What is justification? “As penitent sinners, contrite before God, discern Christ’s atonement in their behalf, and accept this atonement as their only hope in this life and the future life, their sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith. Every believing soul is to conform his or her will entirely to God’s will, and keep in a state of repentance and contrition, exercising faith in the atoning merits of the Redeemer, and advancing from strength to strength, from glory to glory. Pardon and justification are one and the same thing. . . .” {CTr 150.3}

But for the sake of argument, let’s look at what it would be like if justification was all we had. The best we could hope for is that we would continually confess and repent of our sins and receive forgiveness (justification). There would be no hope of overcoming sin (sanctification) in this life. Those who say we cannot overcome sin in this life would have us believe this to be our destiny. We would be hopelessly sinning, confessing and repenting of the same sins over and over until Jesus came to change us into sinless beings. The fact of this change from sinful to sinless is not disputed. The only real issue we have is when this takes place. If God has the power to do it then, He has the power to do it NOW!

Yet some say that completely overcoming, the perfection of character, is not possible in this world, only forgiveness (justification). But sanctification, that perfection of our characters, is simply continued justification. E. J. Waggoner wrote, “And since a man, after he has been justified by faith, would fall into condemnation if he should refuse to do any duty that was presented to him, and can only retain his state of justification by continuing in obedience to the law, it may be said that sanctification is but continued justification. Each new duty only makes the performance of others possible, and so ‘the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.’” (Emphasis supplied.) {April 1, 1886 EJW, SITI 200.13} By “continued justification,” Waggoner did not mean that we are continually asking forgiveness for the same sins over and over. Notice the word is “continued” not “continual.” The context of Waggoner’s statement is in reference to obedience. In other words, once we have been justified through confession and repentance, we continue to obey, and that justification continues to be applied for us for that particular sin. This continued obedience is not possible unless, through faith, we lay claim to the overcoming power that God desires to give us through His Spirit. As we overcome individual sins, one by one, that continued justification for those sins leads us to sanctification. If there is no justification, we have no hope of righteousness by faith. If there is no justification, we have no hope of sanctification. Both are inseparable components of righteousness by faith. Without both, we have no “hope of glory.”

But wait, doesn’t repenting mean a turning away from? How can we turn away from sin if there is no righteousness by faith, no sanctification? We will just keep on committing the same sins over and over.

John says in 1 John 5:4, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." If we do truly repent and turn away from our sin, we do it by faith, faith that God, through the Holy Spirit, can keep us from committing that sin again. We gain the victory over that sin. And as we gain victory or overcome that sin, we are experiencing the process of sanctification. "Repentance is genuine when reformation takes place." {SpTB07 23} Reformation of character is what happens through genuine repentance (justification). This is what Waggoner meant when he said that "sanctification is but continued justification."

The question still remains, "So, when can I gain victory over every sin?" That victory can be gained in this life, before the Second Coming of Jesus. "Every one who by faith obeys God's commandments, will reach the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression." {ST, July 23, 1902 par. 14} Notice it is obedience "by faith" that brings about this sinless condition. How do I know it can happen in my life?

Let's look at the lives of Enoch and Elijah. Both were translated without seeing death. Does that mean they never sinned? We have evidence that Elijah went contrary to God's will, Elijah sinned. Inspiration tells us that when Elijah fled from the threat on his life by Jezebel, it was contrary to the will of God. But yet Elijah was translated without seeing death. He was a sinner who continually walked with God until his character perfectly reflected the character of Christ. He overcame sin through God's power working in his life. God was able to keep him from falling.

Enoch was a sinner too. How do we know? The Bible says in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." That includes Enoch and Elijah. So, Enoch was a sinner like you and me. Yet Enoch was translated to heaven without seeing death. How can that be? Revelation 21:27 tells us, "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." And we know that sin is what defiles us and makes us unworthy of heaven. Ezekiel 37:23 says, "Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God." So, Enoch must have been "undefiled" or without sin to enter heaven without seeing death. The only way he could have entered heaven is to have confessed and repented of his sins and gained the victory over those sins.

Enoch and Elijah were sinners, but they were forgiven sinners who turned away from (repented of) all their sins. They were therefore ready to be received into heaven without seeing death.

But how do we know that Enoch and Elijah weren't miraculously changed immediately before or at their translation? Were they suddenly changed into sinless humanity and then translated? Or had they, through the power of God, gained the victory over sin at some time prior to their translation?

"Angels of God are weighing moral worth; and we are to obtain a fitness here to join the society of sinless angels. Do you expect that when Christ comes he will give you that fitness? Not at all. You must be found of him without spot, without blemish, or wrinkle, or anything like it. Now is the watching and trying time. Now it is the time to obtain a preparation to abide the day of his coming, and to stand when he appeareth. Do you say that you cannot do it because around you are so much sin and iniquity and corruption? I refer you to Enoch. He lived just previous to the world's being washed from its moral pollution, by a flood. He was on the earth at the time when corruption was teeming on every hand; and

yet he bore the impress of the divine. He walked with God three hundred years; and he was not, for God took him, that is, translated him to Heaven. The flaming chariots of God were sent for this holy man, and he was borne to Heaven. Enoch had the witness that he pleased God. And this witness we can have.

“Enoch represents those who shall remain upon the earth and be translated to Heaven without seeing death. He represents that company that are to live amid the perils of the last days, and withstand **all** the corruption, vileness, sin, and iniquity, and yet be unsullied by it all. We can stand as did Enoch.” {RH, April 19, 1870 par. 10,11} (Emphasis supplied). Enoch withstood or resisted “all the corruption, vileness, sin and iniquity.” If it was possible for Enoch in the pre-flood world and all its sin, it is possible for us! Doesn't God's word say, “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man” Luke 17:26? That applies to the wicked as well as the righteous. We can have the same experience as did Enoch! And how did Enoch accomplish this fitness for heaven, this spotless, unblemished character?

Hebrews 11:5 “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

According to Hebrews 11:5, Enoch's spotless, unblemished character, the character of Christ, was developed through faith. This is an example of true righteousness by faith!

So, what of the last generation?

“Elijah was a type of the saints who will be living on the earth at the time of the second advent of Christ and who will be ‘changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump,’ without tasting of death. 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52.” {PK 227.2}

And how are these saints changed? Are they suddenly made sinless? Or is does this change affect some other aspect of their being?

“[The disciples] saw Moses, representing those who will be raised from the dead at the time of the second advent; and there also stood Elijah, representing those who at the close of earth's history will be changed from mortal to immortal and be translated to heaven without seeing death.” {PK 227.2}

The change that happens at the Second Coming of Christ is a change from mortality to immortality, not sinfulness to sinlessness. Paul comments on this also in the passage quoted above, 1 Corinthians 15:52-53, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” And how will we be changed? Will we be made sinless? What does Paul say? “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” The incorruptibility spoken of here does not mean sinlessness. It refers to the susceptibility of decay. In other words, Paul is repeating himself in different words to tell us that we will be changed into creatures not subject to death and decay. The change that happens at the Second Coming of Christ is not a change from sinfulness to sinlessness, but a change from mortality to immortality.

“When He comes He is not to cleanse us of our sins, to remove from us the defects in our characters, or to cure us of the infirmities of our tempers and dispositions. If wrought for us at all, this work will all be accomplished before that time. When the Lord comes, those who are holy will be holy still. Those who have preserved their bodies and spirits in holiness, in sanctification and honor, will then receive the

finishing touch of immortality. But those who are unjust, unsanctified, and filthy will remain so forever. No work will then be done for them to remove their defects and give them holy characters. The Refiner does not then sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done in these hours of probation. It is now that this work is to be accomplished for us." {2T 355.1} (Emphasis supplied.) The work of removing sin from our lives is to be done prior to the Second Coming of Jesus. It is to be done "now."

But if we are to be without sin at the Second Coming, we must know now what the will of God is for us. We must know what sin is. It is God's will that we be sinless beings. That is how He created us. That is how He expected us to live eternally. But sin disrupted that ideal. We must regain the knowledge of God's will for us.

How do we know what God's will is? We must know His word intimately. That means we must study it. Not merely read it, but study it with the insight that the Holy Spirit gives so we might understand it as God intends.

And what is it that God intends for us to learn as we study? He wants us to be born again, born of God spiritually, not born of the flesh.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" 1 John 5:4, 5.

If we are born again, "born of God," then we may overcome the world. And this overcoming is accomplished by faith.

The idea of God's people overcoming is throughout the book of Revelation. We are told that those who overcome will "eat of the tree of life" (Rev. 2:7), "will not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:11), will "eat of the hidden manna" (Rev. 2:17), will be given "power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26), "clothed in white raiment" (Rev. 3:5), will not have his name blotted "out of the book of life" (Rev. 3:5), will be made "a pillar in the temple of my God" (Rev. 3:12), Christ says they will "sit with me on my throne" (Rev. 3:21), and "shall inherit all things" (Rev. 21:7).

And how do we overcome?

Revelation 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

We overcome in the same way Christ overcame. The word of our testimony is the same word through which Christ overcame. Three times in Matthew chapter 4, Jesus overcame the temptations of the devil by quoting Scripture, the word of His testimony. David also said, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" Psalms 119:11. It is the word of God (Christ) in our hearts, that will allow us to overcome sin. But that word must be actuated by the Holy Spirit. John 14:26 says, "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." Without the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the word of God is just that, simply words. We must allow the Spirit to change us. We must be Born of the Spirit.

John 3:5 states, "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

We must be born of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. What does it mean to be born of the Spirit?

Jesus said in John 16:13, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:15-17 that being born again had something to do with belief in Him. To be born again means we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into the truth. Truth is more than just a concept. Truth leads us to a way of life that is in harmony with the will of God. That "Truth" is in fact Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:22 "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit . . ."

Peter tells us we obey the truth through the power of the Holy Spirit. And what is the result? We are sealed.

Revelation 7:3 Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

What does it mean to be sealed? It means we have received the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

And we cannot receive the Holy Spirit unless we have totally submitted our will to His. "Those who receive the seal of the living God [Holy Spirit] and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully." {EW 71.1} If we "reflect the image of Jesus fully," will we be found disobedient? And if we are disobedient, will we receive the Holy Spirit? If we totally submit our will to God's will, then we have no more desire for sin. Sin will become repulsive to us. We will no longer bear the fruits of sin, but only the fruits of the Spirit. This is sanctification.

Ephesians 5:9 "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Notice the word "all" in this passage. It tells us that when we have the Holy Spirit, we will have "all goodness and righteousness." We will, as Paul says, "come behind in no gift." The implication is also that neither will we have any unrighteousness, because righteousness and unrighteousness cannot dwell together. 2 Corinthians 6:14 "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

"I saw that none could share the 'refreshing' unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action. We should, therefore, be drawing nearer and nearer to the Lord and be earnestly seeking that preparation necessary to enable us to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord. Let all remember that God is holy and that none but holy beings can ever dwell in His presence." {EW 71.2} (Emphasis supplied.) How do we gain the victory over every sin? By "drawing nearer and nearer to the Lord."

Notice that even the sin of pride is mentioned here. I have had many tell me that the sin of pride is one we may not even be aware of. But yet it is mentioned here. And if we are going to be led into "all

truth," is it not truth that pride is sin? Will the Holy Spirit not reveal to us our sin of pride? We have indication, nay a promise, that He will indeed!

"Today you are to give yourself to God, that you may be emptied of self, emptied of envy, jealousy, evil surmising, strife, everything that shall be dishonoring to God. Today you are to have your vessel purified that it may be ready for the heavenly dew, ready for the showers of the latter rain; for the latter rain will come, and the blessing of God will fill every soul that is purified from every defilement. It is our work today to yield our souls to Christ, that we may be fitted for the time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord--fitted for the baptism of the Holy Spirit." {The Review and Herald, March 22, 1892} (Emphasis supplied.)

The fruit of the Spirit in the life is righteousness, which is right doing. And when probation closes shortly before Christ comes in the clouds, the declaration will be made, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" Revelation 22:11. At this declaration at the close of probation, the condition in which each individual is found prior to that declaration, will be the same condition in which they are found after the declaration. This necessarily means that those who are righteous (doing right) at the close of probation were righteous (doing right) before the close of probation.

But someone still doubts the possibility of attaining the character of Christ before his return. There is evidence that perfection of character is attainable now. It is the very core of the gospel!

"[Christ] came to fulfil all righteousness, and, as the head of humanity, to show man that he can do the same work, meeting every specification of the requirements of God. Through the measure of his grace furnished to the human agent, not one need miss heaven. Perfection of character is attainable by every one who strives for it. This is made the very foundation of the new covenant of the gospel." {RH, April 5, 1898 par. 2} (Emphasis supplied.)

"None need fail of attaining, in his sphere, to perfection of Christian character. By the sacrifice of Christ, provision has been made for the believer to receive all things that pertain to life and godliness. God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ's character. In His humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance of evil, the Saviour showed that through co-operation with Divinity, human beings may in this life attain to perfection of character. This is God's assurance to us that we, too, may obtain complete victory." {AA 531.2} (Emphasis supplied.)

"Complete victory" in this life, leaves no room for the idea of being overcome by temptation!

"Complete victory" means that temptation and sin no longer have any power over us.

"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.' We can overcome. Yes; fully, entirely. Jesus died to make a way of escape for us, that we might overcome every evil temper, every sin, every temptation, and sit down at last with Him. {1T 144.2} (Emphasis supplied.)

Then comes this sobering statement, "He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that he can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him entrance into the kingdom of God." {RH, March 10, 1904, par. 26}

Those saints living on the earth just before Jesus comes will have confessed all their sins. Just as Jacob wrestled with God, God's people will agonize, searching for any unconfessed sin. "So, in the time of

trouble, if the people of God had unconfessed sins to appear before them while tortured with fear and anguish, they would be overwhelmed; despair would cut off their faith, and they could not have confidence to plead with God for deliverance. But while they have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they have no concealed wrongs to reveal. Their sins have gone beforehand to Judgment, and have been blotted out; and they cannot bring them to remembrance.” {GC88 620.1} All their sins have been confessed and repented of. They have been not only justified, but sanctified through their continued obedience.

But even these people, who can find no unconfessed sin, will not feel themselves better than others. They feel they have no claim to holiness. “No one who claims holiness is really holy. Those who are registered as holy in the books of Heaven are not aware of the fact, and are the last ones to boast of their own goodness. None of the prophets and apostles ever professed holiness, not even Daniel, Paul, or John. The righteous never make such a claim.” —Signs of the Times, February 26, 1885. They will be but the humble representatives of Christ. Their humility will reflect His humility.

But why does all this matter? Why does it matter when we are perfected as long as it happens? There is an all-encompassing principle that makes this idea of Christian perfection extremely important. We are caught in the middle of the great controversy between God and the devil. That controversy is over the character of God. We see the sin problem in our world and tend to think that it’s all about Jesus coming to save us from sin. While God desires and has made every provision to save us, there is a more grand and overarching purpose.

It is the “special work of Satan to misrepresent the character of God.” {ST, May 12, 1890 par. 3} God has been accused by the devil of being arbitrary. The devil says that God’s laws are there to keep us down and to keep us from knowing the truth. That was the lie he told Eve in the Garden of Eden. He said, “ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). The devil accused God of keeping us from attaining godhood. He intimated that God was lying to them. He insinuated that God’s character of love was not what God claimed it to be. “God’s law is too restrictive and keeps you from living to your full potential,” was his mantra. It was his plan to show that no one could keep God’s law. “Thus Satan worked to discourage the people, to lower their conception of the character of 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. Even Israel, he declared, did not keep the law.” {DA 29.3} The devil was attacking the character of God. It is God’s character that is on trial in the universe. Satan simply attempts to use humanity as witnesses that his accusations against the character of God are true.

We are caught in the middle of this battle between God and the devil. We are the prize. God says we can keep His law, but the devil says no one can keep it. The real issue here is not our salvation, but the character of God. When Jesus came to this earth to live, love, and die for us, the lie of the devil was exposed. God revealed His love for fallen humanity. He revealed that He was willing to do whatever it took to redeem us from the curse of sin. He revealed that His character was indeed a character of love, mercy, and compassion. Yet the devil insinuates that since Jesus was God, He had an advantage over us. He continues to say that there is no way we, as sinful humans, can keep God’s law.

But God has a plan, a plan that includes us. God says in Isaiah 43:10, “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.” Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “But

ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Paul says in Acts 5:32, “And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”

What is a witness? Someone who testifies about truth, the truth of what they have seen and heard and experienced. We are God’s witnesses before the universe that He is indeed a God of love, that it is possible for mankind to keep His law, that the accusations the devil has made are false. The accusations that Christ had unfair advantage are proved false through the lives and characters of God’s people.

“The principles of the law of God were wrought out in the character of Jesus Christ, and he who cooperates with Christ, becoming a partaker of the divine nature, will develop the divine character, and become an illustration of the divine law. Christ in the heart will bring the whole man, soul, body, and spirit into captivity to the obedience of righteousness. Christ's true followers will be in conformity to the mind and will and character of God, and the far-reaching principles of the law will be demonstrated in humanity.” {RH, March 9, 1897 par. 2} And we know that “When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.” {COL 69.1} The character of Christ “perfectly” reproduced can have no other meaning than His people are living the life that Christ lived while on this earth.

Speaking of those living in the last days, Ellen White states, “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. Those to whom has been committed a trust so sacred must be spiritualized, elevated, vitalized, by the truths they profess to believe.” {CCh 345.6}

How is God’s character vindicated? “Those who fear God, who accept Christ as a personal Saviour, will reveal a Christlike character. The character of God will speak through them in vindication of truth.” {ST, September 15, 1898 par 1} “Vindication of truth,” is the truth that man can indeed keep God’s law, just as “the way, the truth, and the life” kept that same law.

“The Lord has sent to our world a message of warning, even the Third Angel's Message. All heaven is waiting to hear us vindicate God's law, declaring it to be holy, just, and good. Where are those who will do this work? God calls upon His people to gain a deeper insight into His plans and His law. His law is the transcript of His character. It is unchangeable; for God will not alter the thing that has gone out of His lips. Christ has declared that the law is perfect; and with David we may say, ‘It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law.’” {RH, April 16, 1901 par. 16}

It is God’s people that, before the universe, will vindicate His law as a transcript of His character. There is so much more at stake than simply your salvation and mine. Our salvation is only a demonstration of the love of God that leads to the vindication of His character. It was the life of Christ that gives us the assurance that we too can live in harmony with the law of God. Christ is the proof but it remains for us to live up to that proof. But, praise God, He has promised to give us the power to live the same life that Christ lived.

When we believe all this is about us, it’s an indication that we have not yet become mature Christians. We must come to the realization that it isn’t all about us. “[T]he plan of redemption had a yet broader

and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe." {PP 68.2} The manifestation of God's love in sending His Son to die for us is but one aspect of this great controversy between good and evil. We who are living on this earth are God's witnesses that what God says is possible (keeping His law) is in fact doable. The judgment of mankind is not simply to determine who has been good and who has been evil, the judgment also determines whether what God asks (that we keep His law) is something that can be done. This earth is where witnesses may be found that vindicate the character of God. They have lived victorious, overcoming lives. God has indeed kept them from falling.

And you, my friend, can be one of those that God will keep from falling and will be living vindication of His character of love. Let's make it our mission in this life, yours and mine, to let the character of Christ be revealed in us, through faith in God's justification and sanctification of His people, NOW!



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