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*Week
of
Prayer*

December 3-12, 1999

Christ Our Righteousness

October-December 1999

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The Reformation Herald

“The age in which we live calls for reformatory action.”
—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 488.

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Christ Our Righteousness

Another year, 1999, is about to close. In fact, many claim that at the end of 1999 an entire millennium will close. While this notion is not technically accurate (the current millennium does not actually close until the end of the year 2000), there is no doubt that, in God's sight, we are already living on borrowed time. Momentous changes are about to take place. Government officials and news reports tell us of likely upheavals in the lifestyle to which we are accustomed. Although many still cry “peace and safety,” it is easy to see how current events could usher in the final scenes of earth's history.

“We are living in the time of the end. The fast-fulfilling signs of the times declare that the coming of Christ is near at hand. The days in which we live are solemn and important. The Spirit of God is gradually but surely being withdrawn from the earth. . . .

“The agencies of evil are combining their forces and consolidating. They are strengthening for the last great crisis. Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones.”¹

Where does this present hour find us spiritually? Where do we place our trust? Wherein lies our security? The prophet declares, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places” (Habakkuk 3:17–19).

“As a power from beneath is stirring up the children of disobedience to make void the law of God, and to trample upon the faith of Christ as our righteousness, a power from above is moving upon the hearts of those who are loyal to exalt the law, and to lift up Jesus as a complete Saviour.”²

Precious light shines forth from the Scriptures “in the presentation of the great subject of the righteousness of Christ connected with the law, which should be constantly kept before the sinner as his only hope of salvation.”³ Thus, the timely theme for this year's Week of Prayer is *Christ Our Righteousness*. Please remember that **Sabbath, December 11**, is set aside as a special day of **prayer and fasting**, and that on **Sunday, December 12**, a **special offering** will be gathered to support God's work around the world.

Indeed, “the end is near! We have not a moment to lose! Light is to shine forth from God's people in clear, distinct rays, bringing Jesus before the churches and before the world. . . . One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other—Christ our righteousness.”⁴

May the Lord grant each participant in this Week of Prayer the blessing so earnestly sought, both to receive and to share with others!

¹ *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 11.

² *The Review and Herald*, September 3, 1889.

³ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 212.

⁴ *The Review and Herald*, December 23, 1890.

Friday, December 3, 1999

Compiled from the writings of E. G. White

A MESSAGE OF ACTION



CHRIST has sent out an invitation to every son and daughter of Adam, saying, "Come; for all things are now ready." He has sent out His human agents to call men to the marriage supper of the Lamb. The experience that the believers gain in calling men to the gospel feast, in working in harmony with Christ, is of more value than silver and gold and precious stones. They proclaim the same message that John proclaimed: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." . . .

We were created to fulfill a higher and nobler purpose than merely to eat and drink, and to live to please ourselves. What infatuation, what madness, it is to refuse

to partake of the richest feast that could possibly be furnished by our heavenly Father! How vain are the excuses offered for rejecting the message to come to the marriage supper! Men declare, "I will go on with my worldly pursuits. I do not wish to displease my neighbors, and therefore I cannot come." Let men remember that they are commanded to follow the Lamb of God whithersoever He goeth. His guidance is to be chosen, His companionship valued above the companionship of neighbors and friends. It is too honorable, too precious, to be refused. We are to be willing to endure any reproach for Christ's sake; for all who accept Christ must be made conformable unto His image. Shall we reject the grace of Christ, and put away the hope of salvation, and refuse to be partakers of the sufferings of Christ? Then we shall reap the result of our choice, if we persist in rejecting the invitation of His Spirit. Were the Lord to deal with us as we deserve, would we not be punished in many ways as stubborn, ungrateful children? But He is long-suffering, he does not deal with us according to our perversity. Instead of this, he offers to take us into partnership with Himself and with His Son. All may have life who will accept it; the world has been invited to the gospel feast. When those who were first invited refused the invitation, the master of the feast declared that none of those who were bidden should taste of His supper. But the banquet was not to be devoid of guests. He sent His messengers into the streets of the city, into the highways and byways, to compel

men to come in, that His house might be filled. Men were to be compelled, not by force, but by the presentation of such convincing arguments that they would be constrained to come in. This compelling message represents the message that God would send to men to impel them to receive Christ, the world's Redeemer. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." . . .

It is the Saviour's love that constrains the messenger to bear the message to the lost. O how wonderful is the importuning of Christ with sinners! Although His love is beaten back by the refusal of hard, stubborn hearts, He returns to plead with greater force, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." His love woos with winning force, until souls are compelled to come in. Those who come to the supper turn to the blessed Jesus and say, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." He wins them by the word of His love and power; for the word of God is the rod of His power. He says, "Is not my word like a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" When the word of God is sent home to the human heart by the Holy Spirit, it is mighty to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan. Finite men could do nothing in the great warfare, were it not for the word of God. They could not plead successfully with human hearts, that are as hard as steel, that are bolted and barred, lest Jesus should find an entrance there; but the Lord endows men with His wisdom, and the weakest

one may become as David by faith in God. The Lord takes those who are devoted to Him, even though they may be uneducated, humble men and women, and sends them forth with His warning message. He stirs their hearts by His Spirit, He gives them spiritual muscle and sinew, and they are enabled to go forth with the word of God, and to compel men to come in. Thus many poor, fainting souls, who are starving for the bread of life, are out of weakness made strong, and wax valiant in the fight, and put to flight the armies of the aliens.

“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.” Every time you turn away your ear and refuse to listen, every time you fail to open the door of your heart, you strengthen yourself in unbelief, and make yourself more and more unwilling to listen to the voice of Him that speaketh, and you diminish your chance of responding to the last appeal of mercy. Be warned by what the Saviour says; for they that were bidden to the supper and refused His invitation were not to taste of the supper. There is a point beyond which forbearance cannot go. Let it not be written of you, “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.” Let not Christ weep over you as he wept over Jerusalem, saying, “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”¹

When we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, we shall have no relish for sin; for Christ will be working with us. We may make mistakes, but we will hate the sin that caused the sufferings of the Son of God. A door has been opened, and no man can close it, neither the highest powers nor the lowest; you alone can close the door of your heart, so that the Lord cannot reach you. You have been having light from heaven for the past year and a half, that the Lord would have you bring into your character and weave into your experience.

The watchmen upon the walls of Zion are to cry aloud and spare

not, to lift up their voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sin. When John came to Jordan, it was to arouse the people, to lay the ax at the root of the tree. Christ had not yet come to reveal Himself to the world, and John was to prepare the way of the Lord. He rebuked, reprovved, stirred men up to repentance, condemned their sin, and then Christ came to pour the

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healing balm into the prepared soul. When the disciples of John were jealous because Christ baptized more disciples than did their master, he answered, “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.” Do you think that John had no human feelings?—Of course he did,

but he determined that they should have no control over him. When he had seen Jesus on the banks of the Jordan, he had said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!” . . .

God has set before you an open door; let not man seek to close it. Open your heart and mind, and let the Sun of Righteousness shine into your soul. How long will it be before the word of truth will have weight with you? How long will it be before you will believe the testimonies of God’s Spirit? When is the truth for this time to find access to your hearts? Will you wait till Christ comes? How long will God permit the way to be hedged up? Clear the King’s highway, I beseech you, and make his paths straight.

I have traveled from place to place, attending meetings where the message of the righteousness of Christ was preached. I considered it a privilege to stand by the side of my brethren, and give my testimony with the message for the time; and I saw that the power of God attended the message wherever it was spoken. You could not make the people believe in South Lancaster that it was not a message of light that came to them. The people confessed their sins, and appropriated the righteousness of Christ. God has set His hand to do this work. We labored in Chicago; it was a week before there was a break in the meetings. But like a wave of glory, the blessing of God swept over us as we pointed men to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The Lord revealed His glory, and we felt the deep movings of His Spirit. Everywhere the message led to the confession of sin, and to the putting away of iniquity.²

The religion of Jesus Christ means something more than talk. The righteousness of Christ consists in right actions and good works from pure, unselfish motives. Outside righteousness, while the inward adorning is wanting, will be of no avail. “This, then, is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship

with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." If we have not the light and love of God, we are not His children. If we gather not with Christ, we scatter abroad. We all have an influence, and that influence is telling upon the destiny of others, for their present and future good, or for their eternal loss.

All have lessons to learn in the school of Christ, in order to perfect Christian characters, and have a oneness with Christ. Said Christ to His disciples, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." He explained His meaning to them. He did not wish them to become children in understanding, but in malice. Little children do not manifest feelings of superiority and aristocracy. They are simple and natural in their appearance. Christ would have His followers cultivate unaffected manners, that their whole bearing might be humble and Christlike. He has made it our duty to live for others' good. He came from the royal courts of heaven to this world, to show how great an interest He had in man; and the infinite price paid for the redemption of man shows that man is of so great value that Christ could sacrifice His riches and honor in the royal courts, to lift him from the degradation of sin.

If the Majesty of heaven could do so much to evidence His love for man, what ought not men to be willing to do for each other, to help one another up out of the pit of darkness and suffering? Said Christ, "Love one another as I have loved you;" not with a greater love, for "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Our love is frequently selfish; for we confine it to prescribed limits. When we come into close union and fellowship with Jesus Christ, our love and sympathy, and our works of benevolence, will reach down deeper, and will widen and strengthen with exercise. The love and interest of Christ's followers

must be as broad as the world; and those who live merely for "me and mine" will fail of heaven. . . .

A cultivated intellect is a great treasure; but without the softening influence of sympathy and sanctified love, it is not of the highest value. We want words and deeds of tender consideration for others. A thousand little attentions we can manifest in friendly words and pleasant looks, which will be reflected back upon us again. Thoughtless Christians manifest in their neglect of others that they are not in union with Christ. It is impossible to be in union with Christ and yet be forgetful of others' rights, and be unkind to others. Many long intensely for friendly sympathy. God has given each of us an identity of our own, which cannot be submerged in another; but our individual characteristics will be much less prominent if we are indeed Christ's, and His will is ours. Our lives should be, as was our Saviour's, consecrated to the good and happiness of others. We should be self-forgetful, and ever looking out for opportunities, even in little things, to show gratitude for the favors we have received of others, and watching for opportunities to cheer and lighten, and relieve the sorrows and burdens of others, by acts of tender kindness and little deeds of love. These thoughtful courtesies in our families, that extend outside the family circle, help make up the sum of life's happiness; and the neglect of these little things makes up the sum of life's bitterness and sorrow. . . .

How little many of us realize the bearing of our daily acts upon the history of others. We may think that what we do and what we say are of little consequence, when the most important results for good or evil are the consequence of our words and actions. The words and actions, looked upon as so unimportant and so small, are links in the long chain of human events. With our first parents, the desire for a single gratification of appetite opened the flood-gate of woe and sin to this world. Would that all might feel that every step they take may have a lasting and controlling influence upon their

own lives and the characters of others. Oh, how much need, then, of communion with God! What need of divine grace to direct every step, and show us how to perfect Christian characters!

Christians will have new scenes and new trials to pass through, where their past experience cannot be a sufficient guide. We need to learn of the divine Teacher as much now as at any period of our lives, and even more. And the more experience we gain, the nearer we draw toward the pure light of heaven, the more shall we discern in ourselves that needs reforming. We may all do a good work in blessing others, if we will seek counsel of God, and follow on in obedience and faith. The path of the just is a progressive one, from strength to strength, from grace to grace, and from glory to glory. The divine illumination will increase more and more, corresponding with our onward movements, qualifying us to meet the responsibilities and emergencies before us.

Real godliness is diffusive and communicative. The psalmist says, "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart. I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation. I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation." Wherever the love of God is, there is always a desire to express it. It is hard for us to submit to the crucifixion of self; but when the work is all submitted to God, to Him who knows our weaknesses and our sinfulness, He takes the very best way to bring about the desired results. It was through constant conflict and simple faith that Enoch walked with God. We may all do the same. We may be thoroughly converted and transformed, and be indeed children of God, enjoying not only the knowledge of His will, but leading others, by our example, in the same path of humble obedience and consecration.³

¹ *The Review and Herald*, September 24, 1895.

² *Ibid.*, March 18, 1890.

³ *Ibid.*, June 22, 1886.

Acceptable Confession

Different Kinds of Confessions

Whenever we speak of confession, we should understand the difference between merely admitting a sin and truly confessing it. There are those who, when their sins are pointed out, try to find an excuse and blame circumstances, persons, and anything else but themselves. Frequently it happens that a person acknowledges a sin committed and supposedly confesses it, but at the same time he is trying to justify himself.

On the other hand, we also find cases where someone commits a sin and his guilt is revealed, he denies it just because there were no witnesses to testify. He conceals his sin from everyone until he is caught in a corner where he cannot deny it any longer. Then he admits it. This admission is not a genuine confession. If he had not been caught, he might never have confessed anything at all.

There are also confessions which are not acceptable because they are made too late. Examples of these are found in the cases of Lucifer, Esau, and Judas.

Admissions and confessions are often generalized. We might ask forgiveness for anything and everything for which we may not even be guilty, without specifying the particular sins which have been committed. But the Spirit of Prophecy teaches us how proper confessions should be made:

"True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite

and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty."¹

Private Confessions

There are sins which are committed secretly where no other person is involved, sins that only God knows. These may be sins committed by thoughts, by a look, and so on. Such sins should be confessed only to God, and to no one else:

"I have been shown that many, many confessions should never be spoken in the hearing of mortals; for the result is that which the limited judgment of finite beings does not anticipate. Seeds of evil are scattered in the minds and hearts of those who hear, and when they are under temptation, these seeds will spring up and bear fruit, and the same sad experience will be repeated. For, think the tempted ones, these sins cannot be so very grievous; for did not those who have made confession, Christians of long standing, do these very things? Thus the open confession in the church of these secret sins will prove a savor of death rather than of life."²

In the Gospel of Jesus written by Matthew we receive special instructions on how we should proceed when we offend our brother or sister, or our neighbor.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established" (Matthew 18:15, 16).

Here Jesus is speaking about an offense committed by one person against another person. If I offend my brother, and I realize that he is hurt, I

should come to him and solve the problem between him and myself, and the matter is settled. If he will not hear me, I should call for a witness or two, to testify that I apologized to him and that he has not forgiven me. And if he does not listen to me even in the presence of the witnesses, then, and only then, the members of the church should be informed about the matter. And even if the church members are informed of the fault or offense of the brother in question, the matter should not be made public.

Before we bring our offerings of thanksgiving and supplication to the Lord, any problem that might exist between two brethren should be settled. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24).

"Then there are confessions that the Lord has bidden us make to one another. If you have wronged your brother by word or deed you are first to be reconciled to him before your worship will be acceptable to heaven. Confess to those whom you have injured, and make restitution, bringing forth fruit meet for repentance. If anyone has feelings of bitterness, wrath, or malice toward a brother, let him go to him personally, confess his sin, and seek forgiveness."³

"If I have sinned against my neighbor in word or action, I should make confession to him. If he has wronged me, he should confess to me. So far as is possible, the one who has wronged another is to make restitution. Then in contrition he is to confess the sin to God, whose law has been transgressed. In sinning against our brother, we sin against God, and

we must seek pardon from Him. Whatever our sin, if we but repent and believe in the atoning blood of Christ, we shall be pardoned.”⁴

Public Confessions

If a member openly violates the law of God and his transgression becomes known, the church should deal with his case. Although church discipline should be applied, if he repents, he may be readmitted in the membership after a reasonable time. He should show the fruit of repentance:

“Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life.”⁵

Faults, mistakes, and grievances are not to be made public, to be known by everybody everywhere. There are clear instructions in the Spirit of Prophecy that show the procedures to be followed in such cases.

“If there are things of a disgraceful nature that should come before the church, let them be brought before a few proper persons selected to hear them, and do not put the cause of Christ to open shame by publishing abroad the hypocrisy that has existed in the church.”⁶

“There are many professed Christians whose confessions of sin are similar to that of Achan. They will, in a general way, acknowledge their unworthiness, but they refuse to confess the sins whose guilt rests upon their conscience, and which have brought the frown of God upon His people.”⁷

It may happen that a brother commits a transgression of the law of God. For instance, he transgresses the seventh commandment. He confides his sin only to one brother, a good friend of his, and pleads that his guilt be kept secret. What should be the attitude of that brother, the friend of the guilty? Should he keep it to himself? Perhaps he may reason that because he is a good friend, he will keep the “secret.” If he does that, he is a partaker of the same evil. When a sin is committed

that involves another person it cannot be considered secret, especially if the guilty one reveals his sin to a third person. The Bible clearly states that he should not cover up sin:

“Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him” (Leviticus 19:17).

“When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers” (Psalm 50:18). What is the duty of the church? She should act and “cleanse the camp.” And if the camp is not cleansed, how does God consider the church itself? We read:

“God holds His people, as a body, responsible for the sins existing in individuals among them. If the leaders of the church neglect to diligently search out the sins which bring the displeasure of God upon the body, they become responsible for these sins.”⁸

“When existing evils are not met and checked, because men have too little courage to reprove wrong, or because they have too little interest or are too indolent to tax their own powers in putting forth earnest efforts to purify the family or the church of God, they are accountable for the evil which may result in consequence of neglect to do their duty. We are just as accountable for evils that we might have checked in others, by reproof, by warning, by exercise of parental or pastoral authority, as if we were guilty of the acts ourselves.”⁹

The servant of the Lord makes it clear what should be done in case of open transgression of the seventh commandment.

“Cleanse the camp of this moral corruption, if it takes the highest men in the highest positions. God will not

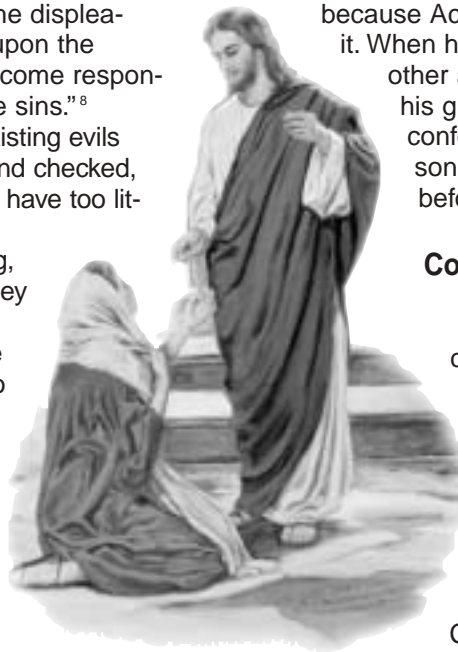
be trifled with. Fornication is in our ranks; I know it, for it has been shown me to be strengthening and extending its pollutions. There is much we will never know; but that which is revealed makes the church responsible and guilty unless they show a determined effort to eradicate the evil. Cleanse the camp, for there is an accursed thing in it.”¹⁰

There are admissions made by some who have committed terrible sins, but they do not confess them; they only admit what they have done when they are caught is a corner. Remember the case of Achan. The curse of God rested upon His people, and the Lord commanded Joshua to search out the problem. Although Joshua and the other leaders of the people did not know it, this was not a secret sin, because Achan's family knew about it. When he was caught, he had no other alternative but to admit his guilt. His was not a true confession, and for that reason the Lord punished him before all Israel.

Collective Confessions

“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 Chronicles 7:14).

“We read that Daniel, the prophet of God, was a man ‘greatly beloved’ of Heaven. He held a high position in the courts of Babylon, and served and honored God alike in prosperity or trial; and yet he humbled himself and confessed his sin, and the sin of his people. With deep sorrow of heart he acknowledged: ‘We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments; neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our



kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. . . .'

"Daniel did not seek to excuse himself or his people before God; but in humility and contrition of soul he confessed the full extent and demerit of their transgressions, and vindicated God's dealings as just toward a nation that had set at naught His requirements and would not profit by His entreaties."¹¹

Unacceptable Confessions

"Confession will not be acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reformation. There must be decided changes in the life; everything offensive to God must be put away. This will be the result of genuine sorrow for sin."¹²

"There are too many confessions like Pharaoh when he was suffering the judgments of God. He acknowledged his sin, to escape further punishment, but returned to his defiance of Heaven as soon as the plagues were stayed. Balaam's confession was of a similar character. Terrified by the angel standing in his pathway with drawn sword, he acknowledged his guilt, lest he should lose his life. There was no genuine repentance for sin, no contrition, no conversion of purpose, no abhorrence of evil, and no worth or virtue in his confession. Judas Iscariot, after betraying his Lord, returned to the priests, exclaiming, 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' But his confession was not of such a character as would commend him to the mercy of God. . . . His confession was only prompted by a selfish and darkened heart.

"After Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, they were filled with a sense of shame and terror. At first their only thought was, how to excuse their sin before God, and escape the dreaded sentence of death. When the Lord inquired concerning their sin, Adam replied, laying the guilt partly upon God, and partly upon his companion: 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.' The woman put the blame upon the serpent, saying,

'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.' Why did you make the serpent? Why did you suffer him to come into Eden? These were the questions implied in her excuse for her sin, thus charging God with the responsibility of their fall. The spirit of self-justification originated in the father of lies, and has been exhibited by all the sons and daughters of Adam. Confessions of this order are not inspired by the divine Spirit, and will not be acceptable before Heaven."¹³

"All the riches that the most wealthy ever possessed are not of sufficient value to cover the smallest sin before God; they will not be accepted as a ransom for transgression. An act of wrong or oppression, or deviation from the right way, will no sooner be tolerated in a man who possesses property than in a man who has none. Nothing less than repentance, confession and forsaking of sin is acceptable to God."¹⁴

Peace With God and Man

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

There can be no greater happiness than to have the assurance that our confessions have been accepted and that our sins have been forgiven. But our confessions, though made by most earnest supplications, are imperfect. Before the Father could grant us His forgiveness, our petitions are to be perfected by our Intercessor, Jesus Christ:

"The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God."¹⁵

After our confessions are accepted before God through the intercession of our Advocate, Jesus Christ, we must have the sweet peace in our hearts, believing that the promise of God is fulfilled. The word of God assures us:

"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).

"If we would offer up acceptable prayer, we should realize that in our petitioning we are in the audience chamber of the Most High. . . . We come to make known our wants, to confess our sins, and to present to Him His own promises."¹⁶

"The conditions of obtaining mercy from God are simple and reasonable. The Lord does not require us to do some grievous thing in order to gain forgiveness. We need not make long and wearisome pilgrimages, or perform painful penances, to commend our souls to the God of heaven or to expiate our transgression. He that 'confesseth and forsaketh' his sin 'shall have mercy.'¹⁷

"Confession of sin, whether public or private, should be heartfelt and freely expressed. It is not to be urged from the sinner. It is not to be made in a flippant and careless way, or forced from those who have no realizing sense of the abhorrent character of sin. The confession that is mingled with tears and sorrow, that is the outpouring of the inmost soul, finds its way to the God of infinite pity."¹⁸

Let us come boldly before the throne of mercy and confess our own sins, the sins of our families, the sins of our church. Let us have the full assurance of acceptance before God. Do not let go the arm of God. Be like Jacob, who said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Genesis 32:26. May the Lord bless us that this be our experience. Amen. ☩

¹ *Steps to Christ*, p. 38.

² *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 645.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 646.

⁴ *The Review and Herald*, February 9, 1897.

⁵ *Steps to Christ*, p. 23.

⁶ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 646.

⁷ *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 2, p. 997.

⁸ *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 269.

⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 516.

¹⁰ *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 427, 428.

¹¹ *The Signs of the Times*, March 16, 1888.

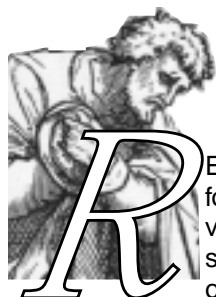
¹² *Steps to Christ*, p. 39.

¹³ *The Signs of the Times*, March 16, 1888.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, June 30, 1887.

¹⁵ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 344.

Repentance



REPENT ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you" (Acts 3:19, 20).

"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" (Isaiah 55:7).

True repentance is the first step that each sincere soul should take as soon as he realizes his condition as a sinner. True repentance means sorrow and displeasure for sin. Paul the apostle, in chapter 7 of his epistle to the Romans, speaks about the two natures of man, the fleshly nature and the spiritual one in battle (Romans 7:15–24), and as a result of this battle one of the two will perish.

True Repentance

What does true repentance mean?

a. True repentance is the request of the conscience of a soul that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, feels sorrow for his past life of sin. Acts 2:37.

b. True repentance is the desire to make a U-turn in one's life because one feels that his procedure has been wrong and he wants to change it. Psalm 32:5.

c. True repentance is the strong desire to stop, once and for all, a life of sin and wrongdoing, and change to a life of obedience and submission to the will of God. Psalm 51:2.

"It is the virtue that goes forth from Christ, that leads to genuine repentance. Peter made the matter clear in his statement to the Israelites when he said, '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). We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ. Christ is the source of every right impulse. He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin."¹

When man does not resist the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, a complete change will come to pass in his life. The Spirit of God implants in the heart both aversion to sin and a desire for a pure life—honorable, and faultless. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that originates in man's heart a strong desire for something that he does not possess. The world has no more attraction for him and cannot satisfy the anxiety of his soul. There is a thirst, a search for something that can be found only in Christ Jesus. To those souls the message is: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Examples of True Repentance

David

The experience of David is a worthy example of true repentance. David's prayer in the 32nd Psalm is an example of the way the sinner should proceed when his conscience is awakened by the Spirit of God. In his prayer David does not try to minimize or excuse his guilt. He recognizes his iniquity. He sees

with sorrow his soul polluted by sin. He hates the sin he has committed, he seeks pardon from God, and appeals for a new and pure heart. He wants to be holy and to be in peace with his conscience and with God. His prayer is a true and sincere confession.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. . . . Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. . . . Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness" (Psalm 51:1–4, 9–11, 14).

"A repentance such as this, is beyond the reach of our own power to accomplish; it is obtained only from Christ, who ascended up on high and has given gifts unto men."²

The Publican

True repentance makes the sinner conscious of his guilt. He admits his sin without trying to make excuses for it. He is like the poor publican who, "standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

Peter

Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him, but Peter did not know himself. He was sure that he was ready even to die for Christ. But when his faith was tested he fell exactly on the point where he thought he was so strong.

“It was through self-sufficiency that Peter fell; and it was through repentance and humiliation that his feet were again established. In the record of his experience every repenting sinner may find encouragement. Though Peter had grievously sinned, he was not forsaken. The words of Christ were written upon his soul, ‘I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.’ Luke 22:32. In his bitter agony of remorse, this prayer, and the memory of Christ’s look of love and pity, gave him hope. Christ after His resurrection remembered Peter, and gave the angel the message for the women, ‘Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him.’ Mark 16:7. Peter’s repentance was accepted by the sin-pardoning Saviour.”³

“The disciples were noted for the purity of their language, and Peter, to convince his accusers that he was not one of Christ’s disciples, denied the charge the third time with cursing and swearing. Jesus, who was at some distance from Peter, turned a sorrowful reproving gaze upon him. Then the disciple remembered the words which Jesus had spoken to him in the upper chamber, and also his own zealous assertion, ‘Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended.’ He had denied his Lord, even with cursing and swearing; but that look of Jesus’ melted Peter’s heart and saved him. He wept bitterly and repented of his great sin, and was converted, and then was prepared to strengthen his brethren.”⁴

“Peter’s sorrow for his apostasy was sincere. He brought to God a broken and contrite heart; and this God has promised that He will not despise. His repentance was accepted of heaven, and Jesus intrusted to him not only the care of the sheep of

his flock, but also of the tender lambs, the young converts to the faith.”⁵

Paul

The examples in God’s Word of genuine repentance and humiliation reveal a spirit of confession in which there is no excuse made for sin, or attempt at self-justification. Paul did not seek to shield himself; he paints his sin in its darkest hue, not attempting to lessen his guilt. He says: “Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:10, 11).

He does not hesitate to declare that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).

“The humble and broken heart, subdued by genuine repentance, will appreciate something of the love of God and the cost of Calvary; and as a son confesses to a loving father, so will the truly penitent bring all his sins before God. And it is written, ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’”⁶

False Repentance

There are many who manifest sorrow for their sins and may give up some of their wrong habits out of fear that their sins may bring them serious consequences, but this is not the repentance that the Bible teaches.

In cases of false repentance, the sinner feels sorrow, not for his own sins, but for the consequences which have resulted from it. Let us consider some examples of false repentance in the Bible:

Esau

Esau, after he sold his birthright, cried with bitterness, because he

would miss out on some important privileges that were the prerogative of the firstborn.

Balaam

When Balaam saw the angel of God with the gleaming sword in his hand, he feared for his life and “repented” because he could have been killed by the angel. “And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: and the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her live. And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me” (Numbers 22:32–34).

Achan

When Achan’s guilt was pointed out, he admitted and confessed his sin, but only because he saw the weight of the consequences. “And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done” (Joshua 7:19, 20).

Judas

Judas also recognized his sin: “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” “When he saw that [Christ] was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders” (Matthew 27:3).

“The confession was forced from his guilty soul by an awful sense of condemnation and a fearful looking for of judgment. The consequences that were to result to him filled him with terror, but there was no deep, heartbreaking grief in his soul, that he had betrayed the spotless Son of God and denied the Holy One of Israel.”⁷

Conversion

“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22–24).

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We may not be able to establish the place, the day or the hour of our conversion, or specify the process and sequence of the circumstances under which it occurred, but this does not mean that we are not converted. The process of conversion is like the wind. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

“Conversion is a work that most do not appreciate. It is not a small matter to transform an earthly, sin-loving mind and bring it to understand the unspeakable love of Christ, the charms of His grace, and the excellency of God, so that the soul shall be imbued with divine love and captivated with the heavenly mysteries. When he understands these things, his former life appears disgusting and hateful. He hates sin, and, breaking his heart before God, he embraces Christ as the life and joy of the soul. He renounces his former pleasures. He has a new mind, new affections, new interest, new will; his sorrows, and desires, and love are all new. . . . Heaven, which once possessed no charms, is now viewed in its riches and glory; and he contemplates it as his future home, where he shall see, love, and praise the One who hath redeemed him by His precious blood.

“The works of holiness, which appeared wearisome, are now his delight. The word of God, which was dull and uninteresting, is now chosen as his study, the man of his counsel. It is a letter written to him

from God, bearing the inscription of the Eternal. His thoughts, his words, and his deeds are brought to this rule and tested. He trembles at the commands and threatenings which it contains, while he firmly grasps its promises and strengthens his soul by appropriating them to himself.”⁸

“When the transforming grace of Christ is upon the heart, a righteous indignation will take possession of the soul because the sinner has so long neglected the great salvation that God has provided for him. He will then surrender himself, body, soul and spirit, to God and will withdraw from companionship with Satan, through the grace given him of God.”⁹



“All need to understand the process of conversion. The fruit is seen in the changed life.”¹⁰

The New Life

“Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering” (Colossians 3:12).

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. . . . Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

. . . Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:2, 3, 5, 9).

No conversion is genuine that does not produce a reformation, or a complete change in the life of a person that is made known in habits and practices. The truly converted person will give up whatever would draw away the heart from God.

“The Lord Jesus is making experiments on human hearts through the exhibition of His mercy and abundant grace. He is effecting transformations so amazing that Satan, with all his triumphant boasting, with all his confederacy of evil united against God and the laws of His government, stands viewing them as a fortress impregnable to his sophistries and delusions. They are to him an incomprehensible mystery. The angels of God, seraphim and cherubim, the powers commissioned to cooperate with human agencies, look on with astonishment and joy, that fallen men, once children of wrath, are through the training of Christ developing characters after the divine similitude, to be sons and daughters of God, to act an important part in the occupations and pleasures of heaven.”¹¹

May the Lord help each one of us, that we may have a true repentance and conversion in our Christian experience. The Lord Jesus understands our struggles and temptations. He is ready to accept our repentance, and he asks us to make peace with Him.

It is my wish that you and I, fellow reader of this 1999 week of prayer readings, may renew our promise of loyalty and faithfulness. Let us be reconverted to the Lord. Amen.

¹ *Steps to Christ*, p. 26.

² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³ *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 155, 156.

⁴ *Early Writings*, pp. 169, 170.

⁵ *The Signs of the Times*, February 4, 1897.

⁶ *Steps to Christ*, p. 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸ *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 294, 295.

⁹ *Messages to Young People*, p. 278.

¹⁰ *The Faith I Live By*, p. 139.

¹¹ *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 18.



JOB, when he underwent a severe trial of faith and realized the sinfulness of his nature, exclaimed “How then can man be justified with God?” (Job 25:4).

Multitudes convicted of their sins through the straight testimony of the apostles asked, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). The apostle Paul, wrestling with his sinful nature, cried out similarly, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24).

Truly, is this not the heartfelt cry of many today who desire to live a genuine Christian life? Many have good intentions, but they are ignorant of the work of God for His repenting child. As we realize our own human weaknesses and failures, through the work of the Holy Spirit we are led to ask the same question as Job, Paul and many others have asked. It is of foremost importance and urgency to find the answer to these pleas: “How shall a man be just with God? How shall the sinner be made righteous? . . . How are we to come to Christ? . . . What shall we do?”¹ Yes, indeed, to know how, what, and who does this is the first key toward a successful Christian life.

The Expression of God’s Infinite Love

Jesus Christ our Saviour came to this earth to reveal the character of His heavenly Father. After three and

Justification — The Work of God *for Us*

half years of sacrifice and untiring ministry for our salvation, He left us the greatest illustration of the forgiving love of God. To His disciples who were selfish, proud, rude, unkind, impolite and disgraceful, He showed most of all His forgiving love. When He was hung upon the cross for our sins, He prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). “All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love.”² The greatest love ever expressed for the repenting sinner is the forgiving love of God. For this very reason, if, by the grace of God, we realize our sin and acknowledge that we are sinners, then we can truly say with David, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1).

“How infinitely greater is the love of God than is our love. It is not the greatness of our sin but the depth of our repentance that brings the pardoning love of God to our hearts. When there is much forgiven, the heart loves much.”³ “In His tender love a forgiving Father brings forth His best robe in which to array His returning child.”⁴

Various Terms for Justification

There are different expressions in the Scriptures which refer to justification, including “pardon,” “forgiveness,” “covering,” and “imputed righteousness.”

Justification — Pardon (Forgiveness)

“Justice demands that sin be not merely pardoned, but the death penalty must be executed. God, in the gift of

His only-begotten Son, met both these requirements. By dying in man’s stead, Christ exhausted the penalty and provided a pardon.”⁵ “Justification means pardon. It means that the heart, purged from dead works, is prepared to receive the blessing of sanctification.”⁶ “What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.”⁷

Wrong Attitudes and False Theories

It is because justification is a work of God for the repenting sinner, Satan, the archdeceiver, works hard among professed Christians today to prevent them from understanding justification. And with some who think that they know all about God’s plan of salvation without having experienced the power of this truth, the enemy of souls deceives them so that they become his agents to confuse others who are seeking to find the way of life. “Some who will gossip over the Bible subject of justification by faith, and cavil and question and throw out their objections, do not know what they are talking about. They do not know that they are placing themselves as bodies of darkness to intercept the bright rays of light which God has determined shall come to His people.”⁸

“The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a

special manner to confuse the mind on this point. . . . The point that has been urged upon my mind for years is the imputed righteousness of Christ.”⁹ Therefore, we must be very careful not to have a wrong attitude or false ideas regarding this subject.

Wrong Attitudes Include:

1. Gossiping, cavilling, questioning, or throwing out objections to justification by faith.
2. Wrong manner of reaching the heart (presenting doctrine without the merits of Christ).
3. Emphasizing the needed growth experience without the beginning experience (justification).
4. Emphasizing only the new birth without the growth to follow (sanctification).

False Ideas Include:

1. Mixed and confused ideas of salvation.
2. The idea that all are saved.
3. Thinking that the death of Christ is only for a selected part of mankind.
4. Justification by faith carried to its extreme, as described below by an early pioneer writer:

“Different ages develop different forms of error, and reforms take their character from the work they have to perform. Thus the reform in the early age of Christianity was a reform from idolatry among the heathen, and from legality among the Jews; and the reform of the 16th century had for its password, ‘Justification by faith,’ against the papal errors of penance and works, and image and saint worship; it was of God, but men rested content with this stride, and justification by faith is now carried to its extreme, and sincerity and faith are made a hobby by which to overleap the law of God.”¹⁰

Pardon Granted on Conditions (True Justification)

Jesus explained the heavenly principle of pardon or forgiveness. Please read Matthew 18:23–35. We understand that although God’s forgiving love or pardon is for all, the

impenitent will nonetheless be punished with everlasting death. The death of Christ does not of itself justify anyone, but rather makes justification available to everyone.

The position of an individual who is justified by faith may be illustrated thus: S (sinner) owes L (law) a sum which he is not able to pay, and J (Jesus) engages to take the responsibility of the debt on certain conditions; and in order to make it sure, J deposits with L an amount sufficient to cover the debt. Now it is stipulated that if S fulfills the conditions, L shall cancel the debt from the deposit made by J. And as long as S is faithfully fulfilling the conditions, and L is satisfied in regard to the debt, of course he will not trouble S for it, knowing it is secure. Thus S is accounted just in the sight of L, though not really just in himself, because he fails to pay a just debt. He is considered as just, or justified through obedience to the conditions of J, who is his surety. But if S refuses or neglects to fulfill the conditions, the deposit of J no longer avails for him; he falls from the favor of L, which he had enjoyed through this arrangement, and the debt stands against him as fully as though J had never engaged to pay it on any condition.

“The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been—just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents—perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any condition short of this, then the happiness of the whole universe would be imperiled. The way would be open for sin, with all its train of woe and misery, to be immortalized. . . .

“But Christ has made a way of escape for us. . . . If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”¹¹

Through this, we may understand that justification by faith, or the pardon we receive while on pro-

bation, is a conditional pardon. He that is justified by faith may, by disobedience, lose that justification, and his righteousness will not be remembered. The blood of Jesus is the bountiful supply, or the rich deposit where all may find a covering for their sins; but whether their sins are actually atoned for and removed by that blood depends upon their acceptance of it and their faithfulness to the conditions of acceptance. Without faith and obedience this deposit will never avail for anyone. Yet we hear many say, with the utmost assurance: “My debt is all paid; I cannot be lost, because Christ has died for me.” But this is not the language of trust; it is rather that of presumption. Faith claims the promise of God on the fulfillment of its condition. The great question to be decided is this: In what respect is the gospel plan unconditional, and in what respect is it conditional? Through the word of God, we find that,

1. The invitation of the gospel is unconditional. But,
2. The application of the gospel justification is conditional.

“Calling and justification are not one and the same thing. Calling is the drawing of the sinner to Christ, and it is a work wrought by the Holy Spirit upon the heart, convicting of sin, and inviting to repentance.”¹²

When Does Justification Take Place?

“From the simple Bible account of how Jesus healed the sick, we may learn something about how to believe in Him for the forgiveness of sins. . . . Jesus bade [the paralytic at Bethesda], ‘Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.’ The sick man might have said, ‘Lord, if Thou wilt make me whole, I will obey Thy word.’ But, no, he believed Christ’s word, believed that he was made whole, and he made the effort at once; he *willed* to walk, and he did walk. He acted on the word of Christ, and God gave the power. He was made whole.”¹³ “When you take the righteousness of Christ as a free gift you are justified freely through the redemption of Christ.”¹⁴

Christ's Righteousness Not a Cloak to Cover Unconfessed Sin

"But while God can be just, and yet justify the sinner through the merits of Christ, no man can cover his soul with the garments of Christ's righteousness while practicing known sins, or neglecting known duties. God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul."¹⁵ "Christ's white robe of righteousness will never cover any soul that is found in sin unrepented of and unforsaken. 'Sin is the transgression of the law' (1 John 3:4). Therefore those who are trampling upon the law of God, and teaching others to disregard its precepts, will not be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Jesus came not to save people in their sins, but from their sins."¹⁶ "The righteousness of Christ will not cover one cherished sin."¹⁷

The Work of the Spirit of God Through Grace

"In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory" (Isaiah 45:25). "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33). "It is God that circumcises the heart. The whole work is the Lord's from the beginning to the end."¹⁸ "When men and women receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they will confess their sins, and, pardon, which means justification, will be given them."¹⁹

"That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). "Without the grace of Christ, the sinner is in a hopeless condition; nothing can be done for him; but through divine grace, supernatural power is imparted to the man and works in mind and heart and character. It is through the impartation of the grace of Christ that sin is dis-

cerned in its hateful nature and finally driven from the soul temple."²⁰

God's Desire and Work for Us

After Adam and Eve were cast out from the Garden of Eden because of their transgression, God in His great love provided the coats of skin for both of them (see Genesis 3:21). Although they had transgressed His command, He wanted them to be covered, so that they might be protected from cold, heat and all the other elements that might hurt or injure them. Here we see a symbol of the first justification of man.

Ever since God clothed the first repentant sinners with coats of skins, He has been gracious to all who realize their sinful condition and desire to be reconciled with Him, and He is willing to pardon and justify them. As we understand that God is so willing to justify us, therefore, the most urgent need for us all is to recognize and confess our sin, without any excuse or cover-up because of our name or pride.

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are now at the end of this year, 1999. Let us be honest with ourselves before God, and answer individually the following questions: Where am I? (or are we now as a people) in the journey to the heavenly Caanan? Is my account with God clear? Am I not responsible for souls next to me who can't see the way to heaven clearly because of my failures and inconsistency? How many more weeks of prayer could I have on this earth? What must I do during this week of prayer? Is my life hid with Christ in God? When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, will I then also appear with Him in glory?

Satan continually insinuates that God is always ready to look for our faults, mistakes and sins. But the Spirit of the Lord speaks to us in a different way. In other words, God is waiting and ready for something else. "Arise and go to your Father. He will meet you a great way off. If you take even one step toward Him in repentance, He will hasten to enfold you in His arms of infinite

love. His ear is open to the cry of the contrite soul. The very first step in reaching out after God is known to Him. Never a prayer is offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after God is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it. Even before the prayer is uttered or the yearning of the heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working upon the human soul."²¹

Are you grasping the meaning of justification? Let us remember and thank our heavenly Father, for justification is not a result of man's effort, but the fruit and expression of God's mercy and compassion. It is not a work of men but the work of God for us. In the beautiful hymn "Rock of Ages," Augustus M. Toplady said:

*Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

May the Lord grant us understanding that we may realize our unworthiness, and have a clear view of what God does for all who desire to be reconciled with Him. ✠

¹ *Steps to Christ*, p. 23.

² *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

³ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, pp. 349, 350.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 203.

⁵ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 340.

⁶ *The Signs of the Times*, December 17, 1902.

⁷ *The Faith I Live By*, p. 111.

⁸ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 463.

⁹ *Faith and Works*, p. 18.

¹⁰ *The Review and Herald*, August 21, 1860.

¹¹ *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

¹² *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 390.

¹³ *Steps to Christ*, p. 50. [Author's italics.]

¹⁴ *Faith and Works*, p. 25.

¹⁵ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 366.

¹⁶ *The Review and Herald*, August 28, 1894.

¹⁷ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 316.

¹⁸ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 392.

¹⁹ *This Day With God*, p. 326.

²⁰ *Faith and Works*, p. 100.

²¹ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 206.

Sanctification — The Work of God *in Us*



AT the crossroads of our existence, in the presence of expected or unexpected circumstances, we are often called upon to make decisions affecting our present and our future. That is when our conscience may be aroused, and we may start asking ourselves a serious question: "In which direction am I going—toward life eternal or eternal death?" And many of us, honest-minded thinkers, cannot rest in peace until we have the needed assurance. Even the most hardened unbeliever, as we hear from former atheists, may be suddenly stung in his mind by the thought that the end of this life may not be the end of everything, and that after his death he may have to stand before the judgment seat of God (Hebrews 9:27). Otherwise, why would many scoffers, when facing the danger of imminent death, get down on their knees and pray to God?

Saved in Sin or From Sin?

Every time we have to choose between our God-appointed duties and our self-delineated conveniences, we know (or should know) that we are choosing between life and death. Our conscience warns us that, by our own unwise decision, we may be forfeiting our place among the few that are chosen to be in the kingdom of God (Matthew 22:14). And then the wisest thing that we can do is to place our salvation as our first priority.

The declaration that "Christ came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15) should not be mis-

understood. He saves only those who are willing to be saved. Not by following our own way, but by taking the way that leads to God, will we be able to stand before Him. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

While many professed Christians speak and act as if Christ had come to save them *in* their sins, believers in the threefold message know that He came to "save his people *from* their sins" (Matthew 1:21). And they also know that sin is revealed by the Law of God (Romans 3:20; 7:7–9). Disobedience to God's Law is sin (Romans 4:15; 5:20; 1 Corinthians 15:56; 1 John 3:4), and sin will keep people out of heaven. This is very clear to us.

We cannot be taken to heaven as sinners in the hope that we will then have a better opportunity to become saints upon our arrival there (Revelation 21:27; 22:14, 15). Nor will such a transformation be possible at the coming of Christ (Luke 13:23–30; 17:28–30). If we want to be saved from the second death, which means extinction, we must turn to God now, so that our characters can be changed while the door of probation is still open.

As Christ offers salvation only to those who are ready to obey Him (Hebrews 5:9), what will happen to those who profess to have accepted Him and claim to be doing everything in His name, yet do not walk "even as he walked" (1 John 2:6) in obedience to God's commandments (John 15:10)? What will be the end of those who like the Jews, resist the Holy Ghost and trample upon

the holy oracles spoken by Christ on Mount Sinai? (Acts 7:38, 51, 53; Romans 2:17–23). He will say to them: "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity [in Greek, *anomia*, 'illegality']" (Matthew 7:23).

How Does Christ Save Sinners?

Here is an example showing how Christ saves sinners. A woman accused of breaking the seventh commandment was brought to Jesus by men who pretended to hold the civil law of Moses in high respect, when, in reality, they only wanted to set a trap for the Master. After they had gone away with a guilty conscience, the Lord addressed the repentant woman: "Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her. Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:10, 11).

Salvation came to that woman and also comes to us in two steps: (1) Assurance of forgiveness is granted us on condition of repentance. This is justification—the work of Christ done *for* us when we accept Him as our personal Savior. (2) We are cleansed from our sins. This is sanctification—the work of Christ done *in* us, through the Holy Spirit, with our consent and cooperation.

John brings out this point clearly when he says: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive as our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Justification is possible only if followed by sanctification, and sanctification is possible only if preceded by justification. One without the

other does not work. We either have both or neither.

How Justification Is to be Retained

"As God [through the Holy Spirit] works in the heart, and man surrenders his will to God, and cooperates with God, he works out in the life what God works in by the Holy Spirit, and there is harmony between the purpose of the heart and the practice of the life. Every sin must be renounced as the hateful thing that crucified the Lord of life and glory, and the believer must have a progressive experience by continually doing the works of Christ. It is by continual surrender of the will, by continual obedience, that the blessing of justification is retained."¹

Justification cannot be retained unless it is followed by sanctification.

The idea that our salvation depends only on the first step (justification), and not on the second step (sanctification), is in opposition to a plain "Thus saith the Lord." We read: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). "Holiness," which is another word for sanctification, is a condition "without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

"God's law tolerates no sin, but demands perfect obedience. The echo of God's voice comes to us, ever saying, Holier, holier still. And ever our answer is to be, Yes, Lord, holier still. Holiness is within the reach of all who reach for it by faith, not because of their good works, but because of Christ's merits. Divine power is provided for every soul struggling for the victory over sin and Satan.

"Justification means the saving of a soul from perdition, that he may obtain sanctification, and through sanctification, the life of heaven. Justification means that the conscience, purged from dead works, is placed where it can receive the blessings of sanctification."²

How Justification and Sanctification Go Hand in Hand

"Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that [righteousness] wrought by His Spirit working in and through us."³

"We need the Spirit of God within us [so that we may obtain the needed fitness] in order to reach heaven, and the work of Christ without us in order to give us a title to the immortal inheritance."⁴

"The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven."⁵

"Neglect this great salvation, kept before you for years, despise this glorious offer of justification

If wholeheartedly accepted and properly used, His righteousness works as a healing principle, killing off sin

through the blood of Christ and sanctification through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation."⁶

What an antiseptic ointment does to our wounds, Christ's righteousness does to our sins. If wholeheartedly accepted and properly used, His righteousness works as a healing principle, killing off sin. So long as we have not received this "ointment," the healing process cannot begin. Without justification there can be no sanctification. On the other hand, however, the "ointment" can have no effect upon our spiritual wounds unless it is applied according to the prescription of our Great Physician. Justification, without sanctification, does not extir-

pate sin from our characters. In this article we want to emphasize that Christ's righteousness is not a sort of bandage to be used for tying up never-healing wounds. Rather, it is a principle, a remedy, which is to eradicate sin from us. And we also want to emphasize that, unless we overcome sin by the power of God we will not enter into the heavenly mansions that Christ is preparing for His followers. Bear this in mind:

"[Christ] has become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Through faith in His name, He imputes unto us His righteousness, and it becomes a living principle in our life."⁷

"The new principle in the soul creates conflict where hitherto had been peace. The power which Christ imparts enables man to resist the tyrant and usurper."⁸

Sanctified by the Holy Spirit

Repentance comes before justification, but no one can repent unless the Holy Spirit is already striving with him. This means that God takes the very first step in our salvation (Revelation 3:20). It often happens that, when a sinner hears the voice of the Saviour and wants to open the door of his heart, Satan tries to put negative thoughts into his mind: "It's too late. You have gone too far in the wrong way. God will not accept you. There is no more hope for you." It is only by looking up to Jesus, in prayer, that the repentant sinner can be victorious in this spiritual crisis. This is what some of the Corinthians did. Otherwise Paul could not have written the following testimony about them:

"Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

These former sinners will be admitted into the kingdom of God

because they were “washed”; and we will be admitted on the same condition. But the process of purification must be completed before the close of probation. We are not to be *made* blameless, but *found* blameless when Christ comes (2 Peter 3:14). Therefore:

“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” (1 John 3:2, 3).

“Does this text mean that the human agent can remove one stain of sin from his soul? No. Then what does it mean to purify himself? It means to look upon the Lord’s great moral standard of righteousness, the holy law of God, and see that he is a sinner in the light of that law. . . . It is through faith in Jesus Christ that the truth is accepted in the heart, and the human agent is purified and cleansed. . . . He has an abiding principle in the soul, that enables him to overcome temptation.”⁹

Our souls are purified “in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1 Peter 1:22) as we allow Him to guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

This is true sanctification. Jesus prayed to the Father in behalf of His followers: “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Paul referred to the same experience, saying:

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

By guiding us into all truth, with our consent and cooperation, as mentioned before, the Holy Spirit brings us closer and closer to God, until the character of Christ is reproduced in us. Then, when we have reached this condition of blamelessness, we will be able to say with Paul: “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). Through an indwelling Christ (Galatians 2:20), we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and show in our life the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). This is the evidence that will lighten the world

(Habakkuk 2:14; Revelation 3:18). This is true sanctification.

“True sanctification will be evidenced by a conscientious regard for all the commandments of God, by a careful improvement of every talent, by a circumspect conversation, by revealing in every act the meekness [i.e., the character] of Christ.”¹⁰

“The world can only be warned by seeing those who believe the truth sanctified through the truth, acting upon high and holy principles, showing in a high, elevated sense the line of demarcation between those who keep the commandments of God and those who trample them under their feet.”¹¹

Sanctification Taught in Parables

True sanctification—the implanting of Christ’s character in us—is emphatically taught in the parable of the wedding garment.

“By the wedding garment in the parable is represented the pure, spotless character which Christ’s true followers will possess. . . . It is the righteousness of Christ, His own unblemished character, that through faith is imparted to all who receive Him as their personal Saviour. . . . Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us. . . . When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness.

. . . The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God’s law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God’s commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ’s righteousness, they will have a place at the King’s feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng.”¹²

The parable of the wedding garment shows two sides—the destiny of those who are clothed in the apparel of Christ’s righteousness and

the fate of those who stand in their own righteousness. These professed Christians may even claim, presumptuously, the blessing of justification, which they may have obtained but failed to retain. For this reason they lack the blessing of sanctification. And, because of this lack, they are not approved in the judgment.

“And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:11–13).

The same truth—the development of Christ’s character in us through the process of sanctification—is taught also in the parable of the seed (Mark 4:26–29). The meaning of “the full corn in the ear” is explained as follows:

“The object of the Christian life is fruit bearing—the reproduction of Christ’s character in the believer, that it may be reproduced in others. . . . When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”¹³

Dear brother, dear sister, let us wrestle with God in prayer, like Jacob, until we have the assurance that Christ’s sacrifice was not in vain for us!

¹ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 397. [Emphasis supplied.]

² *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 7, p. 908.

³ *Steps to Christ*, p. 63.

⁴ *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 442. [Emphasis supplied.]

⁵ *Messages to Young People*, p. 35.

⁶ *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 97.

⁷ *The Review and Herald*, July 12, 1892.

⁸ *The Great Controversy*, p. 506.

⁹ *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 7, pp. 950, 951.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 908.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 980.

¹² *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 310–312, 315.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 69.



Obedience: a Condition for a Happy Life

When our forebears, Adam and Eve, came from the hands of their Creator, they were both perfect. "Everything that God had made was the perfection of beauty, and nothing seemed wanting that could contribute to the happiness of the holy pair."¹ The man was big, strong, and healthy. He was happy in his sinless state. "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Genesis 2:8). In this fragrant environment of paradise, all the conditions were placed before man for a life full of happiness and joy. "Obedience, perfect and perpetual, was the condition of eternal happiness. On this condition he was to have access to the tree of life."²

Today also, we are given precious promises on the same conditions as in those former days. The Lord says to us, "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isaiah 1:19). And the psalmist writes, "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and . . .

A Life of Obedience

have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee" (Psalm 81:13–16). In another verse we read: "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:18).

Our well-being or our failures, our life and death depend on our willingness or unwillingness to obey God. "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, . . . and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 11:26–28).

Unfortunately, man became disobedient. Through sin he was separated from God and became subject to death. "By transgression Adam lost Eden. By the transgression of God's commandments man will lose heaven, and an eternity of bliss."³ However, "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

Christ Our Example

Christ, "though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). As a child He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51). "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). At His baptism in the Jordan River He said to John, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus

it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). And of Himself He said, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). About His life it is written, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Hebrews 5:7). He Himself said through the psalmist, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). At the end of His earthly ministry, when the greatest decision was before Him, He prayed in Gethsemane to the Father, "nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Christ's life was, as we can see, a life of constant prayer and strict obedience. His obedience was not forced but rather was derived from love. Christ's suffering had only one purpose, "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9). The apostle Peter writes in his first epistle, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

"Jesus, our great example, in his life and death, taught the strictest obedience. He died, the just for the unjust, the innocent for the guilty, that the honor of God's law might be preserved and yet man not utterly perish. Sin is the transgression of the law. If the sin of Adam brought such inexpressible wretchedness, requiring the sacrifice of

God's dear Son, what will be the punishment of those who, seeing the light of truth,"⁴ set at naught the commandments of the Lord?

An Obedient People

Society today is characterized by disobedience. The prophet writes, "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant" (Isaiah 24:5). This is why there is "no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land" (Hosea 4:1). Unbelief is on the increase and true love is waxing cold. The law of God has been changed by man. Instead of the Sabbath of the Lord, men have introduced a false sabbath, and many heathen teachings and customs have crept in among professed Christians. People in these last days are indifferent toward their own religious profession (2 Timothy 4:3). They wish to have a religion according to their imaginations and tastes, a kind of faith that does not require obedience to the word of God. There are also those who follow a religion based on forms and sacrifices which are not acceptable in the eyes of God. The majority want to live a life of comfort and irresponsibility, yet they want to enjoy all the privileges and blessings that belong to the true children of God, including eternal life. But this attitude is self-deceptive. The word of God says, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22). In the sermon on the mount Christ said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, . . . and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

In the time of the end God has called a special people to "repair the breach" (Isaiah 58:12) made in the law of God. In his description, point-

ing to the last events to take place on earth, John the Revelator wrote, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). These are the repairers of the breach who have been called to proclaim the threefold message, who are patiently waiting for the second coming of Christ in power and glory, and who show obedience to all the commandments of God. Their attitude is, "Death before dishonor or the transgression of God's law should be the motto of every Christian."⁵

Two Classes of People in the End

"There have ever been two classes among those who profess to be followers of Christ. While one class study the Saviour's life and earnestly seek to correct their defects and conform to the Pattern, the other class shun the plain, practical truths which expose their errors."⁶ After the first Christians passed from the stage of action, and apostasy crept into the church, there were some in the period of Thyatira who would not accept new teachings and practices. In the period of Sardis there were also some who had "not defiled their garments." In the period of Philadelphia, the true believers were those who refused to belong to the "synagogue of Satan." And in our time, which corresponds to the period of Laodicea—which is characterized by lukewarmness—there are people who consent to be educated on the basis of Revelation 3:18-20. The distinction between these two classes of believers, the obedient and disobedient, will become evident under the proclamation of the third angel's message. "In the issue of the contest all Christendom will be divided into two great classes—those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark."⁷

This is the time to which Christ referred when He said, "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them"

(Matthew 13:30). This is to take place in our days. All those who are not prepared to obey the law of God will be united under the banner of Babylon the great. "They point to their own numbers, wealth, and popularity, and look with contempt upon the advocates of truth as few, poor, and unpopular, having a faith that separates them from the world."⁸

But God loves the few, poor, and hated defenders of the truth. In 1844 He sent an angel from heaven with a specific warning message to the world. It is this message that is to be proclaimed in the spirit of Elijah and which will compel men to decide between life or death—the third angel's message (Revelation 14:9-11). The servant of the Lord writes, "Said the angel, 'The third angel is binding, or sealing, them in bundles for the heavenly garner.'"⁹ This work is going on now. Bundles are gathered and sealed for heaven and bundles are grouped together for the fire. Under the final test it will happen that "while one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God."¹⁰ Our willingness or unwillingness to obey God plays a decisive role in this process. Dear brother and sister, on which side will you be found?

Why Obedience?

Our life is characterized by years of disobedience to the commandments of God. Under the influence of sin, our forefathers formed wrong habits which we have inherited and increased through our own sinful life. These bad habits disqualify us for a place in the kingdom of glory. In our own strength we are not in a position to cross the abyss which separates us from God, not even by making the greatest sacrifices, or by showing the strictest obedience to God's law. Nevertheless, when Christ was asked by a young man, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" His answer was "keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:16, 17). Why is

this necessary? It is because the law reveals our sins (Romans 3:20). By obeying the law of God we are to stop sinning. In this sense the law is an aid toward sanctification. "In the light of the law the sinner is convicted as was Paul."¹¹ Please read Romans 7:7, 8.

When we admit that we are sinners, then we feel a desire to become free from sin. We become anxious to obtain salvation from sin (Matthew 1:21). But it is only Christ that can save us with our consent and cooperation. It is then that we turn to our Saviour and seek to maintain uninterrupted connection with Him. He has promised to forgive all our past sins on condition of repentance, and as we look unto Him as the Author and Finisher of our faith, we are "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). We become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). We receive power from above to overcome sin, which weakens our willpower to do what is right in the eyes of God. He grants us power to obey Him, by which we are enabled to develop good habits.

"We shall be individually, for time and eternity, what our habits make us. The lives of those who form right habits, and are faithful in the performance of every duty, will be as shining lights, shedding bright beams upon the pathway of others; but if habits of unfaithfulness are indulged, if lax, indolent, neglectful habits are allowed to strengthen, a cloud darker than midnight will settle on the prospects in this life, and forever debar the individual from the future life."¹²

"Obedience and submission to God's requirements are the conditions given by the inspired apostle by which we become children of God, members of the royal family. Every child and youth, every man and woman, has Jesus rescued by His own blood from the abyss of ruin to which Satan was compelling them to go. Because sinners will not

accept of the salvation freely offered them, are they released from their obligations? Their choosing to remain in sin and bold transgression does not lessen their guilt. Jesus paid a price for them, and they belong to Him. They are His property; and if they will not yield obedience to Him who has given His life for them, but devote their time and strength and talents to the service of Satan, they are earning their wages, which is death. Immortal glory and eternal life is the reward



that our Redeemer offers to those who will be obedient to Him. He has made it possible for them to perfect Christian character through His name and to overcome on their own account as He overcame in their behalf. He has given them an example in His own life, showing them how they may overcome. 'The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'¹³ "Under the covenant of grace God requires from man just what he required in Eden—perfect obedience. The believing sinner, through his divine Substitute and Surety, renders obe-

dience to the law of God. Christ kept the law perfectly, and through Him the believer shall not perish, but have everlasting life. He says, 'I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.'

Mercy granted to man is the reward of the merit of Christ, 'who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' Through the plan of salvation, God can be just, and yet be the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."¹⁴

"Eternal life is the reward that will be given to all who obey the two great principles of God's law—love to God and love to man. The first four commandments define and enjoin love to God; the last six, love to our fellow men. Obedience to these commands is the only evidence man can give that he possesses a genuine, saving knowledge of God. Love for God is demonstrated by love for those for whom Christ has died. While enshrouded in the pillar of cloud, Christ gave directions regarding this love. Distinctly and clearly He laid down the principles of heaven as rules that His chosen people were to observe in their dealings one with another. These principles Christ lived out in His life of humanity. In His teaching He presented the motives that should govern the lives of His followers."¹⁵ Therefore, let us be obedient by the grace of God!

¹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³ *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 141, 142.

⁴ *The Review and Herald*, September 21, 1876.

⁵ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 147.

⁶ *The Great Controversy*, p. 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 450.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 596.

⁹ *Early Writings*, p. 89.

¹⁰ *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

¹¹ *The Signs of the Times*, July 14, 1890.

¹² *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 452.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 365.

¹⁴ *The Signs of the Times*, September 5, 1892.

¹⁵ *That I May Know Him*, p. 9.

Sunday, December 12, 1999

by D. Suresh Kumar — India

The Final Victory



FOR I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6–8).

This poses a question to us: Which requires more of a man—to start or to finish? Good starters and good finishers are not necessarily the same people. The real test of any experience is to endure and persevere until the objective is realized, for to begin the Christian race and not finish is fatal.

A Good Start

What gets a man started? Quite often the enthusiasm, excitement, and the good intentions generated by the challenge of the moment. All look like winners at the beginning of a race. A runner may continue looking good until he comes to the steep hill, and then he begins to pant, the heart pounds, and the limbs ache. When this happens, the participant requires another kind of energy, not apparent at the first. He needs an inward conviction to bolster his sense of purpose. Needed also is motivation to stay with it until the finish line is crossed. Without the last step of crossing the finish line, the first step at the starting line is meaningless.

In human experience, many a good beginning has been nullified because the person concerned

could not maintain the pace—he could not finish. Our Lord said, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). He amplified this in the parable of the sower, leading us to understand that the seed sown on rocky ground made a fair showing at the first, but could not withstand the heat of the sun, because "it had not much earth." Interpreting the parable, the Master said it referred to those who hear the message without hesitation and accept it joyfully. But they have no real roots and do not last. When trouble or persecution arises because of the message, they give up their faith at once. See Mark 4:5, 16.

Perseverance

The apostle Paul, reemphasizing the words of the Saviour, referred to "Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end," "for we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:6, 14). In every case, the Scriptures emphasize the need to endure and continue unto the end.

The Jews could not understand this message, for they had exalted their forms and ceremonies and had lost sight of the object. The traditions, maxims and enactments of men hid from them the lesson which God was seeking to convey. These maxims and traditions became an obstacle to their understanding and practice of true religion. The Pharisees perceived the meaning of Christ's parable, but to them the lesson was

unwelcome. They pretended not to understand it. To the multitude it involved a still greater mystery. Even the disciples had not understood the parable, but their interest was awakened. They came to Jesus privately and asked for an explanation.

This desire Christ had wished to arouse, that He might give them definite instruction. All who came to Christ for a clear knowledge of truth received it. So those who are called to unite with Christ must leave all in order to follow Him. Old associations must be broken up, plans of life relinquished, earthly hopes surrendered. In toil and tears, in solitude and through sacrifice the truth must be preserved.

The apostle Paul's sanctification required a constant conflict with self. He said, "I die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31). His will and his desires every day conflicted with duty and the will of God. Instead of following inclination, he followed the will of God, however unpleasant and crucifying to his nature. Some people have more to overcome than others, due to heredity and environmental factors. While some are continually harassed, afflicted, and in trouble because of their unhappy traits of character, having to war with internal foes and the corruption of their nature, others have not half so much to battle.

Winning depends not so much on a glamorous beginning as on a determined finish. Because of this ever-present danger, Paul bids us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin

which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; . . . lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:1-3). In order to keep continuing the race, we must keep looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. The philosophical theories of literary essays, however brilliant, cannot carry us through. The assertions and inventions of men are of no value. Let the fresh truth from God's treasure house flash into life; "be instant in season, out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2).

A Theory of Truth Not Sufficient

In a race, the winner needs to concentrate both on technique and practice. The more he practices, the better his performance. Mere theories never help in the accomplishment. Likewise, our doctrine may be correct. We may hate false doctrine and may not receive those who are not true to our principles. We may labor with untiring energy—but even this is not sufficient. A belief in theory is not enough. To present this theory of truth to unbelievers, we must have a witnessing experience. A theoretical knowledge of truth is essential, but the knowledge of the greatest truth will not save us. Our knowledge must be practical. The truth must be brought into the heart, sanctifying and cleansing it from all earthiness and sensuality, even in the most private thought of life. The soul temple must be cleansed.

A cold, legal religion can never lead souls to Christ; for it is a loveless, Christless religion. It is possible to be a formal, partial believer, and yet be found wanting, and lose eternal life. To assent to a certain church creed is not of least value to anyone if the heart is not truly changed. "There are persons in the church who are not converted, and who will not unite in earnest, prevailing prayer. We must enter upon the work individually. We must pray more, and talk less."¹

Wrong techniques or theories could be fatal if practiced. For exam-

ple, the teaching of "once saved, always saved" is an invention of Satan to deviate God's people from everyday connection with the living God. All who assume the ornaments of the sanctuary but are not clothed with Christ's righteousness will appear in the shame of their own nakedness.

Steady Progress

The first step to steady progress in Christian life is to accept God's will as a personal call to repentance. Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. Multitudes sorrow that they have sinned and even make an outward reformation because they fear that their wrongdoing will bring suffering upon themselves. But this is not repentance in the Bible sense. "True holiness is wholeness in the service of God. This is the condition of true Christian living. Christ asks for an unreserved consecration, for undivided service. He demands the heart, the mind, the soul, the strength. Self is not to be cherished. He who lives to himself is not a Christian."² It is by the invisible union of the soul with Christ through faith that the spiritual life is nourished.

The apostle says, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (James 5:16). Confess your sins to God, who only can forgive them, and your faults to one another. The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness.

A willing obedience is the one that God requires. Total submission to the instructions is the secret of success in any battle or race. The government of God is not, as Satan would make it appear, founded upon a blind submission, an unreasoning control. It appeals to the intellect and the conscience. "Come now, and let us reason together" is the Creator's invitation to the beings that He has made (Isaiah 1:18). God does not

force the will of His creatures. He cannot accept a homage that is not willingly and intelligently given. A mere forced submission would prevent all real development of mind or character; it would make man a mere automaton. Such is not the purpose of the Creator. He desires that man, the crowning work of His creative power, shall reach the highest possible development. He sets before us the height of blessing to which He desires to bring us through His grace. He invites us to give ourselves to Him that He may work His will in us. It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

But we must be aware that "the powers of Satan are at work to keep minds diverted from eternal realities. The enemy has arranged matters to suit his own purposes. Worldly business, sports, the fashions of the day—these things occupy the minds of men and women."³ We must turn away from thousands of topics that invite attention. There are matters that consume time and arouse inquiry, but end in nothing. The highest interests of the soul demand the close attention and energy that are too often given to comparatively insignificant things. We need to feel our responsibility to give our soul food that will nourish and stimulate spiritual life.

Be Watchful

Be on your guard, for Satan as an angel of light is walking in every assembly of Christian workers and in every church, trying to win members to his side. There is nothing that he fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out His Spirit. No matter how high our position, we need to watch and pray continually. The Spirit of God must daily control us or else Satan will be our guide.

Just as in a race when the run-

ner chooses his track and never changes his course, so we ought to take aim on the right path and never falter. We stand in danger of hindering our relationship with God. We indeed have a hell to shun and a heaven to gain. Every step of life tends towards the destination of life or death. No middle ground or neutrality can be maintained. It is through justification by faith that our positive relationship to God is determined. It is through sanctification in Christ that we develop that experiential relationship by which the disposition of the soul is changed and the life is made holy. Putting it another way, justification is a work accomplished *for* us, but sanctification is a work accomplished *in* us. The first excludes works of any kind, the second involves a living union with Christ, which demonstrates itself in obedience and holiness as long as life lasts.

God calls for a spiritual revival and reformation. Unless this takes place, those who are lukewarm will continue to grow more abhorrent to the Lord, until He will refuse to acknowledge them as His children. "A revival and a reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit. Revival and reformation are to do their appointed work, and in doing this work they must blend."⁴ God calls upon those who are willing to be controlled by the Holy Spirit to lead out in a work of thorough reformation.

As we near the close of time, the current of evil will rush more decidedly towards perdition. We can be safe only as we firmly hold the hand of Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is our mighty helper. Only those who are wearing the garment of His right-

eousness will be able to endure the glory of His presence when He shall appear with power and great glory.

Onward, Towards the Goal!

In the Christian race the runner does not run in any direction that he pleases. He runs in the course laid out by God, narrow and straight; but a course that leads to life eternal. For that reason Paul says: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14–16). The appeal is to hold fast. Do not give up, for He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory. God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ's character. This is God's assurance that we, too, may obtain complete victory. We can overcome. Yes, surely, entirely. Cautiously and intelligently we are to be active in developing and encouraging growth in Christ.

Faith Accompanied by Action

As the warrior needs to put on the armor, we need to put on Christ and His righteousness. Then we shall have no relish for sin, for Christ will be working within us. A door has been opened, and no man can close it. You alone can close the door of your heart, so that the Lord cannot reach you. Close beside this door of faith, the enemy of all righteousness has placed another door, a broader and more conspicuous entrance. Through this door many pilgrims bound for the heavenly Canaan have

unconsciously entered upon the path which ends in destruction. But Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

Entering the right path of faith involves more than mere mental assent to the provisions laid down. It is the archway of living faith that works by love and purifies the soul. In order to pass this portal, there must be compliance with certain requirements:

1. There must be an end to the practice of all known sins and neglect of known duty.
2. Willingness to pay the price.
3. Entire surrender of wrong habits.
4. The will power placed in cooperation with God.

If, on our part, this instruction is followed sincerely and wholeheartedly, God will make the result real in our lives; "therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). We shall experience the joy of salvation, and day by day we shall know the reality of victory that overcomes the world. Let us not rest until we have fully entered through this experience. The truth is efficient, and through obedience its power changes the mind into the image of Jesus. It is the truth as it is in Jesus that quickens the conscience and transforms the mind. The Holy Spirit accompanies it to the heart.

Sealing and Protection

Are we seeking for His fullness, ever passing towards the mark set before us—the perfection of His character? When the Lord's people reach this condition they will be sealed in their foreheads, filled with the Spirit, they will be complete in Christ, and recording angels will declare, 'It is finished.' Not one of us will receive the seal of the living God, while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. "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."⁵

“Angels are hastening to and fro in heaven. An angel returning from the earth announces that his work is done; the final test has been brought upon the world, and all who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received ‘the seal of the living God.’ Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above.”⁶ The four angels cease to hold the four winds and there will be famine, pestilence, and sword—nation rising against nation, and the whole world will be in confusion. In all this, those who will have received the seal of the living God are protected. When the work of the investigative judgment closes, the destiny of all will have been decided for life or for death. Probation will be closed a short time before the appearing of the Lord in the clouds of heaven.

“It is impossible to describe the horror and despair of those who have trampled upon God’s holy requirements. The Lord gave them His law; they might have compared their characters with it and learned their defects while there was yet opportunity for repentance and reform; but in order to secure the favor of the world, they set aside its precepts and taught others to transgress. They have endeavored to compel God’s people to profane His Sabbath. Now they are condemned by that law which they have despised. With awful distinctness they see that they are without excuse. They chose whom they would serve and worship. ‘Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not’ (Malachi 3:18).”⁷

The Final Victory

The living righteous are changed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” At the voice of God they were glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God. On each side of the cloudy chariot are wings, and beneath it are living wheels; and as the chariot rolls upward, the wheels cry, “Holy,” and the wings, as they move, cry, “Holy,” and the retinue of angels cry, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.” And the redeemed shout, “Alleluia!” as the chariot moves onward toward the New Jerusalem.

Before entering the City of God, the Saviour bestows upon His followers the emblems of victory and invests them with the insignia of their royal state. A very great number of angels bring from the city glorious crowns—a crown for every saint with His “new name” written thereon. Upon the heads of the overcomers, Jesus with His own right hand places the crown of glory. For each there is a crown, bearing his own (Revelation 2:17), and the inscription, “Holiness to the Lord.” In every hand are placed the victor’s palm and the shining harp. Then Jesus leads the redeemed to the gates of the city. Then, leading to the tree of life He declares, “The leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations. Eat ye all of it.”⁸

Eden restored! The angels who wept at the fall of Adam witness this reunion and they rejoice now as

they behold the work of redemption accomplished. “All unite in praising Him who died that human beings might have the life that measures with the life of God. The conflict is over. Tribulation and strife are at an end. Songs of victory fill all heaven as the ransomed ones take up the joyful strain, Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and lives again, a triumphant conqueror.”⁹

“These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” “And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 7:14–17; 21:4).⁹

¹ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 122.

² *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 48, 49.

³ *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 43.

⁴ *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 128.

⁵ *Evangelism*, p. 702.

⁶ *The Great Controversy*, p. 613.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 639, 640.

⁸ See *Early Writings*, p. 289.

⁹ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 602.

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