

## FAITH IS THE VICTORY

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"And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." (Luke 12:39,40)

But how can Seventh-day Adventists experience the thief in the night at Christ's second advent? Would they not expect His return after the Sunday law, death decree, and plagues? Surely they will not be surprised. But what if the thief in the night experience takes place before the second advent? What if it takes place at the coming of the latter rain?

There are two comings of the God in the end time: the coming of the latter rain, and the coming of Christ. Just as Christ comes a second time, the coming Pentecost is the second coming of the Holy Spirit. Preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit is the most important need for us today. We must be ready to be sealed by the Holy Spirit in order to be ready for Christ's second advent. For us, the most important concern is being sealed in our minds and characters, not the coming of Christ.

### **Purpose of the Remnant**

So how can we avoid the "thief in the night" crisis? Christ spoke of ten virgins, representing those who believed in the second coming. The foolish virgins were unprepared. For some time they were satisfied with their state. After all, they were virgins waiting for the bridegroom. But they were satisfied with only a little of God's oil when they really needed much. They were not candidates for the sealing. Christ speaks of the end-time church as Laodicea, which thinks it needs nothing, but really needs everything that counts for salvation. They are defeated by the crisis of self-satisfaction.

Here are two sobering quotations. "Had the church of Christ done her appointed work...the Lord Jesus would have come to our earth in power and great glory." (DA 634) "It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration and strife among the Lord's professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years." (Ev 696) We have been failing in the purpose God has set for His people.

Ellen White defines the sealing as "a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved." (FLB 287) Without the seal, or without the latter rain of the Holy Spirit, no one can survive the times of trouble that are coming. The reason for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to prepare a people to receive the seal of God.

Revelation 7 tells of four angels who are holding back the winds of destruction for one reason. "And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." (vs. 2,3) Only when God's people are sealed will it be possible for Jesus to return. Yet this simple truth is currently one of the most opposed truths within Adventism.

### **Sample of Opposition**

Following is a typical example of this kind of opposition. "We drift to believing we influence the determined time of the return of Christ, believing we have delayed His return or can hasten His return. We believe that we may become, by our own efforts, the last generation. We determine within ourselves to be a people of a special quality, a distinct people like the world has never before known, fit for the return of Christ. Ellen White does not call for a supposed higher spiritual nature of God's people, and there is no reference to the human moral condition being determinative. Believing we become the last generation by our own spiritual performance produces a focus on ourselves. Inevitably, such a focus leads us to moralism and perfectionism as ends in themselves and as substitutes for faith and humble proclamation of the grace of God."

I would suggest nine points of response to these ideas:

1. It refers to a determined time of the return of Christ, as if nothing can change that.
2. It says that it is wrong to believe that we have delayed His return. But did not DA 634 and Ev 696 say exactly that?
3. It says that it is wrong to believe that we may become by our own efforts the last generation. Who has ever said that we can do this by our own efforts?
4. It refers to a special quality, a distinct people. But isn't that exactly what it will take to live after the close of probation without a Mediator?
5. It refers to a supposed higher spiritual nature. We could fill the rest of this paper with inspired statements which refer to a higher spiritual condition of the last generation.
6. It refers to our own spiritual performance. This makes it sound like some kind of spiritual show instead of a deeper dependence on the power of God.
7. It refers to a focus on ourselves. This makes it all sound like self-righteousness and Phariseism.
8. It refers to moralism and perfectionism. It is so easy to label character perfection as perfectionism, to make it appear as negative as possible.
9. It says these are substitutes for faith, as if believing in victory over sin through God's grace is the opposite of faith.

For years there has been a determined attack on the primary mission of the remnant church, which is a) to prepare a people who are ready to receive the seal of God and the latter rain, and b) to give the final warning message to the world, and c) to overcome all sin by God's grace and Christ's power, and d) to live without any sin during the seven last plagues, and e) to vindicate God's promise that there will be a people who will actually keep His commandments 100% of the time.

### **How Can This Be Done?**

If we are willing to reject, as we definitely should, this Satan-inspired attempt to discredit the divinely-given mission and message of the remnant; if we will choose to believe that God did not make a mistake when He made promises to His chosen people that are higher than the highest human thought can reach, then the only question left to ask is How. How can we be part of such an impossible dream?

The answer is found in the midst of a storm on Galilee. "And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm. And he said unto them, Where is your faith?" (Luke 8:24,25) Today the question for us is, Where is our faith? Will we spend the rest of our lives in pious apology for failing to do what He says we can do? Will we continue to refuse to believe that all His biddings are enablings?

The answer to "how" always has been and always will be **Faith**. Faith kept Jesus from sinning. The faith of Jesus produced the character of Jesus. "As the Son of God lived by faith in the Father, so are we to live by faith in Christ. So fully was Jesus surrendered to the will of God that the Father alone appeared in His life." (DA 389)

God is not asking us to have the faith of Abraham or the faith of Moses, but the faith of Jesus. It will take the faith of Jesus to withstand the assaults of Satan in the last days. "Where is your faith?" is the question Jesus asks of the last generation. Out of the large group who talk and sing about being ready for the return of Jesus, there will come a smaller group who will understand Jesus' question.

So what is the faith of Jesus. It is heart certainty that what God says is true and real, no matter how impossible it seems. Biblical faith knows that God's Word can be trusted. Faith is the whole person saying "Yes" to God and obeying whatever rules He sees fit to give us without complaining or quibbling. Faith is the opposite of sin. Faith is power and vigor and living as Jesus did.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. (1 John 5:4) Faith, not knowledge or trying harder, overcomes Satan. Christ demonstrated that when faith connects with divine power, men and women can live without sinning. Either sin is destroyed completely, or it will triumph completely.

Only when His people reveal faith in His power will they be able to take the gospel to the world. They will show that faith is the difference-maker between nominal church members and genuine Christians. "He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep Him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God." (RH March 10, 1904)

God is waiting for men and women of faith. Enoch and Elijah were men of faith, and their lives teach us that heaven will translate no one unless he or she has become an overcomer. "The godly character of [Enoch] represents the state of holiness which must be attained by those who shall be 'redeemed from the earth' at the time of Christ's second advent." (PP 88,89) "For his faithful obedience to God he was translated. So, also, the faithful, who are alive and remain, will be translated." (2T 122)

Some generation of church members will become God's faithful last generation. They will not only say "Yes" to everything He says, but they will demonstrate the quality of what happens to people who say "Yes" to God. Not a rebel exists among them--they are men and women of **faith**.

### **The Surrender of Self**

Following are some excerpts from a Joe Crews Classic:

Every day with Jesus should be sweeter than the day before. Each moment should find us moving up in our experience with a deeper faith. This very moment He wants to lead us deeper into the waters of surrender and consecration. There are still victories to be won, sins to be put away, and a drawing together that needs to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit. Many are afraid

of that word "perfect." They are fearful that God will ask them to do something they are not willing to do.

But now we come face to face with the basic weakness that has led millions into discouragement and defeat. They simply have not been reconciled to giving up the enjoyment of their sins. Until that choice is made and acted upon, there can be no real victory over sin. I am convinced that there are only two possible reasons for a person holding back. Either he or she is not willing to give up the enjoyment of the sin or else does not believe that God can give deliverance from it.

Self is our greatest enemy. Once we have settled the score with that old man of the flesh who seeks to rule over us, all the other victories will come in their course. God has given every one a powerful and personal weapon to use in combating the self. The will is our only natural reserve weapon; everything depends on the right action of this resource.

Many are not willing to admit the true cause behind the raging conflict. The truth is that God wants something that self is not willing to give up. They love something more than they love God.

We also need to admit that we fight a spiritual enemy who is stronger than we are. In the weakness of our flesh the harder we try the deeper we sink into the mire. We have no natural ability to keep our thoughts and imagination under control. Without the transforming grace of the new birth, "the carnal mind...is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Romans 8:7) The mind renewed by Jesus Christ holds the only answer to true victory. (Inside Report, July-Sept., 2015)

Ellen White adds this remarkable statement: "Every faculty that we possess has been provided for us in Christ....A spark of God's own life has been breathed into the human body, making man a living soul, the possessor of moral endowments, and a will to direct his own course of action." (ST Aug. 26,, 1897) This spark of God's own life is a conscience and a will to choose against self, and every man and woman has been given this spark.

When we choose God's way instead of our own selfish way, we will truly care about others. This means that car mechanics hasten the coming of Jesus by offering the best possible service at reasonable pricing to those whose vehicles are not performing well, thus blessing the owners. It means plumbers fix the leaky pipes of elderly widows cheerfully, and maybe at a reduced cost. It means that schoolteachers recognize that the troublesome student in their class is a child coping with severe family dysfunction and in urgent need of love and support. It means that the city employee, paid to collect rubbish, willingly picks up the scattered mess of a trashcan overturned by a carelessly backed car.

### **Character Perfection**

So many are scared to death of the teaching that we will develop perfect characters in Christ's power. John Wesley brought to the forefront the gospel's power to provide victory over temptation. John Wesley met much opposition. One of his greatest opponents was Count von Zinzendorf. In commenting upon von Zinzendorf's views Wesley wrote: "There is scarcely an expression in Holy Writ which has given more offense than this. The word perfect is what many cannot bear. The very sound of it is an abomination to them, and whosoever preaches perfection...that it is obtainable in this life, runs great

hazard of being counted by them, worse than a heathen man or a publican." Still speaking of Count von Zinzendorf, Wesley continued, "'No,' says the great man. 'This is an error of errors. I hate it from my heart. I pursue it through all the world with fire and sword this idea that you can overcome sin.'" In response, Wesley said, "I say, why so vehement? Why are those who oppose salvation from sin...so eager? In God's name, why are you so fond of sin? What has it ever done for you? What good is it ever likely to do for you in this world, or in the world to come? And why are you so violent against those who hope for a deliverance from it?" (The Works of Wesley, vol. 6, p. 1)

The final generation of saints will reflect the character of Christ, not for human glorification, but for the glorification of their Lord. Any claims which deny that Christ has the power to give victory in the life of the wholly surrendered soul is an attack upon His character, His sacrifice, and His high priestly ministry.

But when our personal salvation is made central to the gospel, self-centeredness seems to dominate the thinking, and Christ and His glory tend to become secondary. When the most important question is, Am I assured of my salvation?, there is too much of I and me involved. Our focus needs to move away from me to Christ. Is my life glorifying Christ? Am I telling and living the truth about His character? Are His requests and His commands a joy and a delight to follow?

### **Romans 7**

Romans 7 is the chapter most often used to deny character perfection. The man of Romans 7 is not a hypocrite. He is sincere and earnest, but he is not a genuinely converted man. Romans 7 describes the classic legalist. This man sincerely desires victory. He strives with all his human effort for victory, but meets with frequent failure. "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I....For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." (Romans 7:15,18,19)

Let us compare Romans 7 with Galatians 2. "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." (Romans 7:17) "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) These are two entirely different experiences.

Only total dependence upon Jesus can bring perfection of character. The legalist suffers with conflict and frustration. Some give up altogether and choose the pleasures of this world. Others continue with the false hope that someday in the far future they will reach perfection. But the man of Romans 7 asked the correct question when he cried out for help, "Who shall deliver me?" The answer comes quickly in verse 25, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The man of Romans 7 declares himself to be "carnal, sold under sin." (Romans 7:14) Paul notes that "to be carnally minded is death." (Romans 8:6) But in Romans 8 there is transformation because Christ has become the center of this man's life. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:2)

Either we are under the law of sin and death, or we are under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The former are carnally minded, the latter are spiritually minded. Nowhere in Scripture is the contrast between human effort alone on the one hand, and human submission to the power of Christ on the other, more strongly contrasted. That is why Romans 8 ends in such a triumphant proclamation. "Who

shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus or Lord." (Romans 8:35-39)

### Conclusion

One of the greatest fears about the doctrine of perfection is that it concentrates on behavior and does not provide assurance for God's people. It is true that those who have not surrendered their lives to Jesus have no basis for assurance; whereas those whose lives are hid in Him have no reason to doubt His saving grace. "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:22)

God's loyal people, who have known sin and abomination in their lives, but have received of the power of the gospel and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, all in His strength and His courage, face every crisis, every difficulty, every test, every trial, and every barrier, with full assurance of the strength of Christ.

In recent times, with the doctrinal and lifestyle dissonance within our church, there have been strong cries for unity. Jesus showed the way to real unity. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth....And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." (John 17:17,19) Until God's people are sanctified, there will not be unity. Every other call is a call for a counterfeit unity. Frequently, these are calls to compromise, consensus, or the silencing of truth.

Ellen White wrote: "Unity is the sure result of Christian perfection." (SL 85) Unity is not a goal, as it is often presented to be. It is the natural result of Christian perfection. "There is no sanctification aside from truth." (FCE 432) If we are to achieve that perfect unity necessary for the pouring out of the latter rain, God's people must hold the truth inviolate. But more than this, they must allow the truth to be translated into the very fabric of their lives, bringing the sanctifying principle of God's love.

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, be the sleight of man, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." (Ephesians 4:13-15) There is no other way to hasten the coming of Jesus Christ. The sanctuary message is designed to lead to the justification and sanctification of God's people, the blotting out of their sins, and the uniting of the lives of men and women in God's truth, providing their title and fitness for heaven. There is no other way. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.