

Was *Jesus*  
REALLY  
Like Us?

**A Challenge to  
Re-evaluate Your Christianity**

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# Dedication

**D**edicated to Margaret, my wife, of whom—for me—it may fitly be said that “as iron sharpen iron, so one ... sharpens the wits of another (Proverbs 27:17, N.E.B.).

# Acknowledgments

**W**HATEVER is of value in these pages, I credit to God; whatever flaws are here, I ascribe to my own fallibility.

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# The Divine Interpreter

THE whole plan of salvation, which focuses on the Man, Christ Jesus, was possible only because that Man was—is—God. The plan, as unfolded in Scripture, could be accomplished only by a holy, divine, eternal Being—God Himself.

It was Jesus' *deity* that made His humanity of infinite importance. This book is about the humanity of Jesus. But such a book makes sense, and is possible, only because He was divine. Our salvation depends on both His divinity and humanity; this salvation hangs on His humanity precisely because He was divine. All He did for us as a Man was effectual only because He was God. All He did for us as a Man was acceptable to His Father because He was God, and thus could offer, as our Substitute, a perfect life and an unflawed sacrifice.

“The divine Son of God was the only sacrifice of sufficient value to fully satisfy the claims of God’s perfect law. ... His life was of sufficient value to rescue man from his fallen condition.”<sup>1</sup>

“Christ is equal with God, infinite and omnipotent. He could pay the ransom for man’s freedom.”<sup>2</sup>

Much of what Jesus said, and those peak events of His life that were especially critical for us and that He could have avoided had He chosen—the wilderness temptations, Gethsemane, the cross—would have been vanity, incomprehensible, even madness, had Jesus been simply a man.

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1 Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 10.

2 \_\_\_\_\_, in *The Youth’s Instructor*, June 21, 1900.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

If Jesus was not divine then the Bible, the Christian life, and all that has to do with Christianity is useless and a farce. If He was not God then professed Christians, as well as all other men, are without hope, and Christians are vainly looking to just another human being, another Buddha, another Mohammed.

But Jesus was divine; He was the God-man.

Christ “was all the while as God, but He did not appear as God. He veiled the demonstrations of Deity which had commanded the homage, and called forth the admiration, of the universe of God. He was God while upon earth, but He divested Himself of the form of God, and in its stead took the form and fashion of a man. He walked the earth as a man. ... He laid aside His glory and His majesty. He was God, but the glories of the form of God He for awhile relinquished.”<sup>3</sup>

### TWO AND YET ONE

As Jesus Christ was the God-man, two and yet one, deity and yet humanity, so His mission was a dual mission. As God He came to pay the penalty for sin that only God could pay; as a Man He came to demonstrate the kind of life a man may live.

So A. H. Strong was certainly right when he wrote, “The Person of Christ is an absolutely unique fact, for which we can find no complete analogies.”<sup>4</sup> “The person of the God-man is unique and without adequate parallel. But this constitutes its dignity and glory.”<sup>5</sup>

But in contemplating Jesus’ divinity, it becomes ever more meaningful to me as I see it through His humanity. Those divine attributes that I can to some small degree comprehend become more understandable when interpreted through Jesus’ humanity.

The concept of deity, as apart from humanity, requires us to wrestle with such incomprehensible ideas as transcendence, omnipotence, omniscience, immanence, and immutability. And even the more apprehensible attributes of God, such

3 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, July 5, 1887.

4 A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1949), p. 693.

5 *Ibid.*

## The Divine Interpreter

as love and mercy, may still, for us, be on a plane that seems infinitely rarified.

So man needs something more comprehensible, more comfortable, more approachable, more “human.” He needs something to translate God, the Transcendent, the Unseen, the Unseeable. He needs a God with a face he can see, a Person that he can observe in his own sphere.

We have that in Jesus, the God-man. Jesus’ humanity is the medium through which God demonstrates to our poor senses and bedimmed minds His tremendous love and mercy, His unfathomable concern and compassion, His friendliness—and a sacrifice that exceeds the bounds of all imaginings. Jesus’ humanity, which veiled but at the same time blended with His deity, and which was manifested in our midst for thirty-three years, enables us to reach out our hands in our darkness and smallness to find them grasped in a hand that is divine and that yet is like our own. And herein is the marvel of it all!

The idea of God becoming man and living as a veritable Man among men was too much for human comprehension two thousand years ago. And still today men cannot accept the fullness of that “becoming.” Yet the kernel of righteousness by faith is found in this subject. What righteousness by faith is can best be understood when the human nature of Jesus, and its significance for us, is rightly understood.

This book, then, is offered with one major purpose in mind: to explore anew the evidences available that illuminate the human nature of Jesus and the life He lived on earth, and to seek some understanding of how that nature and that life relates to our own.

What is presented in the following pages is based on a few strong definitive biblical texts on the human nature of Christ, illuminated by a greater number of Spirit of Prophecy statements. I would not have so much as dreamed of writing about the human nature of Christ had it not been that I saw concepts in the Spirit of Prophecy that I felt needed examining.

If the objection be raised that too many quotations are used from the writings of Ellen White, I can only reply, What other authoritative source is there, since the Bible itself does not discuss the matter at length? I have sometimes used several

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Spirit of Prophecy quotations on the same point because there are nuances in each that, I felt, need to be seen.

I have tried to look at the material on hand in a balanced way, as much as I am capable. Without doubt some facets of the subject will become clearer to me as time goes on.

I do not offer this book assertively—although I have felt constrained to write positively—but as food for the reader’s serious thought, and to stimulate his own study in this area. More, that he may be led to see that “through faith in Christ, every deficiency of character may be supplied, every defilement cleansed, every fault corrected, every excellence developed.”<sup>6</sup>

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6 E. G. White, *Education*, p. 257.

# PART 1

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# Was Jesus Really Like Us?



## CHAPTER 1

# “But, Daddy, Jesus Was God!”

WHEN our youngest daughter was about 6 years old, she became involved in some misdemeanor for which I felt she needed some counseling. So I led her into the bedroom and had a little chat with her.

In the course of the monologue—for I did most of the talking—I tried to get her to see the wrongness of disobedience. I ended with the lesson that Jesus, who was an example for children, never once disobeyed Joseph and Mary.

My daughter listened to me seriously. But when I made that statement as a sort of clincher, she said, “Yes, but, Daddy, Jesus was *God!*”

The problem my small daughter had is not limited to 6 year olds. It has confronted many professed Christians through the centuries. And there are people ten times as old as my daughter who are still troubled with the problem.

Implicit in my daughter’s response was the thought, Jesus was not really as we are. He must have been different in some significant way. He must have had an advantage in some way to live as He did, without sin.

The enigmas related to Jesus’ human and divine natures, which have a bearing upon His sinlessness, have perplexed theologians and students of the Bible for some two thousand years. And they have given rise to a number of theories, variations of theories, and heresies since the days of Peter, John, and Paul.

One such teaching, called Docetism, was that Jesus was not really a man at all; He didn’t actually have a body but only seemed to have one. He was actually a phantom.

You can readily see how believing this would make it impossible for one to accept the Bible teaching that Jesus was “in all points tempted like as we are” (Hebrews 4:15). How could

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

a phantom, without the real faculties of a man, be meaningfully tempted as a man is?

The Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, proclaimed a dogma by Pope Pius IX in 1854, has to do with the sinless nature of Christ. According to this dogma, Christ was completely untouched by sin because His mother, Mary, was preserved from all stain of original sin from the moment of her conception. Being thus sinless, the doctrine says, she could pass a sinless nature to her Son, Jesus. Thus a holy deity, combined with a sinless human nature, resulted in a holy Jesus Christ, who did not have the human weaknesses we have. He thus could not be tempted as we are tempted, and could not sin. He would then be merely “a God wearing a mask, and playing the part of a tempted man.”

Incidentally, a question has been raised regarding the Immaculate Conception that is very much to the point: If God can and did miraculously preserve Mary from sin, why does He not do the same for all of us, which would essentially solve the sin problem? And if He does not, is He not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), to preserve just one person from sin? The fact is, there is absolutely no biblical evidence that Mary was so conceived. And Jesus was not different from any human being with respect to His human inheritance.

### **WAS IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR JESUS TO SIN?**

But it is not only Roman Catholic theology that teaches Jesus could not sin. From a different basis, much Protestant theology does also. For instance, Professor L. Berkhof, in his widely used *Systematic Theology*, says, “It was impossible for Him to sin ... because of the essential bond between the human and the divine natures.”<sup>7</sup> We might say that divinity overpowered humanity. But if this statement is correct, then the temptations that the Bible tells us came to Jesus were in actuality meaningless. He could not have fallen under them in any case.

Others, including some Seventh-day Adventists, have gone close to the other extreme and made Jesus altogether such an

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7 L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1969), p. 318.

## “But, Daddy, Jesus Was God!”

one as themselves. But Ellen G. White says, “We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ.”<sup>8</sup> But it is in that very sinlessness that we have our problems regarding His likeness to us.

Let us look at some phases of the problem. Jesus was made a human being. He was “made like unto his brethren” (Hebrews 2:17). He “took upon Him our sinful nature.”<sup>9</sup> Yet He was without sin (chapter 4:15). (And right here, in the Ellen G. White statement, would seem to be a problem—in fact, a contradiction—with respect to the previously quoted statement regarding “the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ.” But there is no contradiction, as we shall see later on.)

### A SIN-FREE COMPARTMENT?

In any case, the very fact that Jesus was sinless might appear to seal Him off from us in a sort of sterilized, sin-free compartment.

Here are all the billions of humanity that have ever lived: “All have sinned” (Romans 3:23). That includes you and me.

And over here, in a class by Himself, is One—the only One of all the human race—who has not sinned. He is “separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). Wouldn’t this truth seem to make Him, in a very important way, unlike us? If He is separate from sinners, how could He really understand us sinners? How could He be in common with us?

Ellen White tells us that Jesus had no propensity for sin: “Not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.”<sup>10</sup>

Propensity means natural inclination, bent, liking, hankering. Christ had no inclination, no hankering, for sin. Humans, in varying areas and to varying degrees, have strong inclinations and hankering for sin. And, of course, it is those very inclinations and hankering that engender the problems.

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8 *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:14, p. 1131.

9 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 15, 1896.

10 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:1–3, 14, p. 1128.

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Jesus had no propensities for sin. The human race seems to have infinite propensities. Then does that not make Him very much unlike us?

Most knowledgeable Christians will agree that no understanding of Christ's nature can be true that would weaken or reduce His equality with God and with man. He was fully God; He was fully man. But what must we look for to understand His equality with man?

Let us look for an answer to the question in a practical way.

Jesus was like us physically. He grew up in the same way any child grows (Luke 2:52). He became hungry, tired, thirsty. He needed food, rest, sleep. He had identically the same physical needs we have. He suffered pain as we do.

But these areas only touch upon the real problem.

### **LOOKING AT THE REAL PROBLEM**

Aside from the body and its functions, life—the human personality, individuality—is composed of three factors: thought, feelings or emotions, and impulses. If Jesus was a real human being, made in all respects as we are, then He had human thoughts, emotions, impulses.

With this in mind, let us think of some situations in which our thoughts, emotions, and impulses are involved. Then let us compare or contrast Jesus' responses in those situations with what the natural human response is likely to be.

This evening you are driving home in your car in heavy traffic. Suddenly another driver cuts in front of you. You have to brake sharply. Anger wells up. If you had the opportunity, you would tell that chap a thing or two.

Would Jesus have felt that way?

When you get home, you ask one of the children to do a certain task. He takes quite a bit longer than you feel he should. You begin to think about the unnecessary dawdling and become impatient. You shout, "Will you hurry up!"

Would Jesus have reacted that way?

Your husband (or wife) makes a remark that touches a raw nerve related to an old problem between you. A feeling of resentment wells up and takes hold of you.

Would Jesus have had the same reaction?

## “But, Daddy, Jesus Was God!”

Someone in the place where you work gets some sort of honor that you feel should have been yours, or you feel that at least you should have received the same recognition. You begin to dwell upon it. A feeling of jealousy and envy creeps in.

Would Jesus have felt the same way under the same circumstances?

Each of these illustrations refers to a common feeling that may easily overtake us every day. But did Jesus feel the kind of anger suggested (for a discussion of Jesus’ anger, and legitimate anger in the Christian, see Appendix A, p. 181)? Did He feel impatient, resentful, envious, jealous? I believe you will agree that He did not.

We read that “it is a sin ... to feel angry,”<sup>11</sup> that cherished impatience separates us from God,<sup>12</sup> that “resentment is the spirit of Satan,”<sup>13</sup> that envy “will not be in [the] heart”<sup>14</sup> of Christians, and that jealousy is an attribute of Satan.<sup>15</sup>

“The law of God takes note of the jealousy, envy, hatred, malignity, revenge, lust, and ambition that surge through the soul, but have not found expression in outward action, because the opportunity, not the will, has been wanting. And these *sinful emotions* will be brought into account in the day when ‘God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil’”<sup>16</sup>

### DIFFICULT WORDS

These words may be very difficult for some of us to accept, because they seem to make the Christian way so narrow. They strip away every excuse for inward, as well as outward, sin. (When they are properly understood it will be clearly realized that God never sets goals for us that are unattainable—or unreasonable.) “As the will of man cooperates with the will of God, it becomes

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11 E. G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 95.

12 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 350.

13 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 243.

14 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 488.

15 \_\_\_\_\_, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 278.

16 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 217. (Italics supplied.)

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings.”<sup>17</sup>

So then, Jesus responded to none of the everyday, sinful emotions that so frightfully easily master the human race. These are part of man’s heritage, from which much of our sin problem springs. There was in Him nothing that in the minutest respect reacted to sin in thought, attitude, word, or action. “Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold. ... Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory.”<sup>18</sup> When a situation arose that would in the unconverted heart tend to arouse resentment, anger, envy, jealousy, greed, pride, and sinful ambition, He felt none of these. The mother sin, selfishness, found in Him nothing at all that answered to it. But all of these feelings and impulses are common to the fallen human race.

### WHERE DO WE FIND EQUALITY?

If none of these qualities of human nature, these common dispositional elements, were in Him, where must we look to find in Him meaningful equality with us?

The questions raised in this chapter touch upon only one aspect of the tremendous enigma that is Jesus Christ, the God-man, and His relationship to us. One day, while I was wrestling with questions similar to those we have been contemplating, it suddenly occurred to me that a certain passage of Scripture offered a key to the problem. And as I pondered the passage, answers to questions, like scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, began to fall into place. A little of the enigma of the God-man, who “took upon Him our sinful nature” and who was yet sinless, began to resolve itself for me.

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

18 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Great Controversy*, p. 623.

## Examining the Golden Chain

“THE humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. *This is to be our study.*”<sup>19</sup>

“The study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, and will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth.”<sup>20</sup>

These statements indicate that it is not to be regarded as presumptuous to seek to understand the human nature of Jesus. That humanity, the golden chain linking man to God, *is to be our study.*

The statements also imply that God has revealed enough about Jesus’ human nature that we can find a degree of satisfaction for our minds, and blessings for our souls, as we humbly and prayerfully study with a desire to know. This desire should not grow from curiosity or for self-glorification. Instead, we should study so that by understanding something of Jesus’ nature we may comprehend its relationship to our own. There are far more connotations in the earthly nature of our Saviour relative to our salvation than many of us realize.

There is encouragement as well as caution in the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever.” We must diligently quarry in those mines that are available to us.

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19 E. G. White, in *The Youth’s Instructor*, Oct. 13, 1898. (Italics supplied.)

20 E. G. White, manuscript 67, 1898.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

“The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and ever will remain a mystery. That which is revealed, is for us and for our children, but let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be.”<sup>21</sup>

Now, what has been revealed? Let us turn to the book of Hebrews. This book was written for Jewish Christians, with the main purpose of establishing for them the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Messiah. The author also hoped, no doubt, that he could reach other Jews who were not Christians. Consequently, he expressed his ideas as diplomatically as possible to appeal to both groups.

Chapter two, verses 11 to 17, read thus: “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

The author’s point in this passage is to show that the purpose of the Incarnation, in which Jesus was a man in reality, was to offer an effectual atonement and priesthood for man, thereby freeing man from death and the fear of death. But in making that point, the writer reveals certain things about Jesus’ nature. Let us analyze the following words and phrases:

Verse 11: “... he that sanctifieth”; “... they who are sanctified”; “... all of one”; “brethren.”

Verse 12: “Brethren.”

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21 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:1–3, 14, p. 1129.

## Examining the Golden Chain

Verse 13: "... children which God hath given me."

Verse 14: "... children [who] are partakers of flesh and blood"; "... took part of the same [nature]."

Verse 16: "... the seed [descendants] of Abraham."

Verse 17: "... in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren."

### WHAT "SANCTIFIED" MEANS

The "He" referred to at the beginning of verse 11 is obviously Jesus. Paul refers to the work of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 1:2: "... to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus."

The Greek term translated "sanctified" here means to be set apart for, to be devoted to, a special use. The idea of goodness or holiness, which has to do with spirituality and morality, is not inherent in the word. In the Mosaic sanctuary, pots and pans were sanctified, dedicated, to a particular use.

It is when *people* are sanctified that the moral concept comes in. When a man was consecrated to the priesthood by the high priest in the Levitical system, he was ritually cleansed and dedicated to God. As such, he was expected to be a certain kind of person, to live a certain kind of life that might be termed a sanctified life.

Nevertheless, the idea of moral cleansing and rectitude is not prominent in the Old Testament. It is not until we get to the New Testament that this concept comes to the fore. Commenting on the word translated "sanctified" in our text, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* says, "It is in the New Testament more and more felt that it is only by purification of character men can be set apart for God, so that this higher meaning also attaches to the word [sanctified]."<sup>22</sup>

When this concept of sanctifying is applied to the work of Christ, as in Hebrews 2:11, the idea of ceremonial cleansing and dedication falls away entirely and we think of the cleansing done in the heart and life. The contrast between ritual cleansing, or dedication, and the work done in the individual when one is sanctified by Christ is conspicuous in chapter 9, verses 13 and 14:

22 W. Robertson Nicholl, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1970), vol. 4, p. 266.

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“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Now we go on to ask, Who are “those who are sanctified,” who are set aside for God, and whose hearts and lives are cleansed?

Romans 6:22 is illuminative: “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”

Those who are sanctified are having that process continue in their lives because they have been “made free from sin, and become servants to God.”

Of whom can it be said that they have been “made free from sin”?

There is only one possible answer. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36); “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his [Jesus’] death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin” (Romans 6:5–7). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. ... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath *made me free from the law of sin and death*” (chapter 8:1, 2).

Those who have been set free from sin and thus are being sanctified are the ones who have died to self and sin and been born again.

Thus those who are sanctified—set apart as children of God—are men and women who, in short, *have been born again*.

The phrase “all of one” seems to refer to the Father, at least in the primary sense. *The International Critical Commentary* says in discussing the term: “Since Jesus and Christians have the same spiritual origin, since they too in their own way are ‘sons’ of God, He is proud to call them brothers and to share their lot.”<sup>23</sup> And, in the words of *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*

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23 James Moffatt, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1952), p. 32.

## Examining the Golden Chain

on our text, “The ‘many sons’ [of verse 10] who are brought to glory and the ‘Son’ who leads them are of one parentage.” That parent is God the Father. So Jesus instructed Mary after His resurrection, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17).

By way of contrast, and to help us see that the words of Hebrews 2:11 are restrictive, we may recall that once, while talking to the Jews, Jesus said, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44).

And in Ephesians Paul refers to the unregenerate as “children of wrath.” Writing to the Ephesians who had found Jesus, he said: “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:3).

### ONLY TWO FAMILIES

There are two, and only two, great families in the world: those who are the regenerate, under the Fatherhood of God; and those who are rebellious, under the fatherhood of Satan. H. D. McDonald affirms that “in truth in no single passage in the sources does Jesus speak explicitly of God as the Father of all men.”<sup>24</sup>

We have pointed out that it is most likely that “all of one” refers to God the Father. A few Bible scholars are of the opinion that it refers to Adam. Could we not accept both as true? Such an idea is certainly in line with what the Bible says in Hebrews and in other places.

In His humanity Jesus was from Adam: “Jesus, ... being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, ... the son of Adam” (Luke 3:23–38). In His divinity Jesus came forth from the Father: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son” (Galatians 4:4).

Similarly, the person who has experienced spiritual rebirth has Adam as his physical father, and God as his spiritual Father.

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24 H. D. McDonald, *Living Doctrines of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1972), p. 19.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

In these respects Jesus and “born-again” people have kinship. He calls them brethren.

Of this *The Expositor’s Bible* says, “He that consecrates [or sanctifies, as our text has it] ... and they that are consecrated are united together, first, by being born of the same Divine Father, and, second, by having the same human nature. Here ... the chain connects at both ends: on the side of God and on the side of man.”<sup>25</sup>

Latent in the term “brethren” is, perhaps, one of the most vital clues to an understanding of the human nature of Jesus to be found in all the Bible. The way in which the term is used in Hebrews 2:11–17 opens a vast field of exploration, both in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy writings.

In its notes on Hebrews 2:11, *The Anchor Bible* tells us that “the term ‘brothers’ occurs 217 times in the New Testament, outside of Hebrews, when the term refers to *other members of the same covenant rather than blood brothers.*”<sup>26</sup>

This fact is well illustrated by Matthew 12:46–50: “While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

On this text Ellen White comments, “All who would receive Christ by faith were united to Him by a tie closer than that of human kinship. They would become one with Him, as He was one with the Father.”<sup>27</sup>

In *Signs of the Times*, March 9, 1882, Ellen White referred to the “true Christian” whose “godly life and holy conversation

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25 T. C. Edwards, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The Expositor’s Bible (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son), p. 41.

26 *The Anchor Bible, To the Hebrews* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1972), p. 33. (Italics supplied.)

27 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 325.

## Examining the Golden Chain

are a daily testimony against sin and sinners. He is a living representative of the truth which he professes. *Of these true-hearted followers, Jesus declares that He is not ashamed to call them brethren.*" (Italics supplied.) And in *The Great Controversy* we read that "through Jesus the fallen sons of Adam become 'sons of God.' 'Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.'" <sup>28</sup>

The terms "brethren" of verse 12, and "children which God hath given me" of verse 13 are quotations from the Old Testament (Psalm 22:22 and Isaiah 8:17, 18). The first is used to show Jesus' relationship with His human brethren; the second is offered as substantiation of His humanity.

### **"PARTNERS IN FLESH AND BLOOD"**

In Hebrews 2:14 we have the phrase "the children are partakers of flesh and blood" and the statement "He [Jesus] ... partook of the same nature." A. T. Robertson, in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, tells us that "partook" is a "practical synonym" for the term translated "partners." Accordingly, we may say, "As the children (whom we have seen to be born-again people) have become partners in flesh and blood, Jesus also became a partner (with them) in flesh and blood."

The important point, as far as our study is concerned, is in the statement "He ... likewise partook of the same." Another translation would be "Since therefore the children share [or become partners] in flesh and blood, [correspondingly] he himself likewise became a partner [of the same flesh and blood]."

Nevertheless, many other translations are correct in assuming that the point being made is that He partook of a nature in common with "the children." "Flesh and blood" is a representative term for the whole man. M. R. Vincent says the term is "in rabbinical writers a standing phrase for human nature in contrast with God."<sup>29</sup>

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28 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Great Controversy*, p. 477.

29 Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1946), vol. 4, p. 404.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

Jesus partook not merely of the physical qualities of human beings. He assumed a full human nature also, with all the weaknesses that are implied.

In its discussion of our text, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* says that Jesus “was divine, but He took our human nature, mysteriously blending the two natures in one.” And *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* states that the “Son of God ... Himself shared with them [His brethren] in their identical nature.”<sup>30</sup> “He was born without a taint of sin, but came into the world in like manner as the human family.”<sup>31</sup>

To summarize the message of verse 14: “Born-again” people are partners in a common nature. Jesus partook of that nature with them.

Verse 16 states: “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he [Jesus] took on him the seed of Abraham.”

The last part of this verse is the focus of our attention: “the seed of Abraham.” Is the writer of Hebrews making this statement in a literal sense? Was Jesus really concerned only with one small nation, the physical descendants of Abraham, when He became incarnate?

B. F. Westcott sees a reason why the answer to this question is *no*. In the Greek there is no article before the words translated “seed of Abraham.” So he comments, “The absence of the article shows that a character and not a people (‘the Jews’) is described.”<sup>32</sup>

There is ample evidence to assure us that a spiritual application is to be made, even from the Old Testament: “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart” (Psalm 73:1). This is a synthetic parallelism, a device of Hebrew poetry in which the second part enlarges upon, or defines, the first.

### “THE SEED OF ABRAHAM”

The New Testament many times makes this clear: “They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham”

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30 W. R. Nicholl, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 267.

31 E. G. White, letter 97, 1898.

32 B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1970), p. 55.

## Examining the Golden Chain

(Galatians 3:7). “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (verse 29). “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children. ... That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed “ (Romans 9:6–8; see John 1:12, 13). Again the reference in each case is to regenerated people.

Moreover, Hebrews 2:9 states that “Jesus ... [tasted] death for every man,” showing unequivocally that His concern was not limited to the Jews. The whole tenor of the Bible is negative to the idea that only the Jews are meant. So we must understand that the author of Hebrews is writing of Abraham’s spiritual descendants.

*A Theological Word Book of the Bible* states, “It is to be noted that, apart from Matthew 23:9, the Gospels never show Jesus speaking of God as men’s Father, except to disciples.” (In that verse Jesus used the term in a technical, rather than a spiritual, sense.) This source goes on to say, “The Epistle to the Hebrews expresses the same relation from the side of Christ’s self-identification with the believer.”<sup>33</sup>

Let us pause at this stage, and briefly check what we have thus far concluded in our examination of Hebrews 2:11–17.

Jesus’ Father is God. When men and women are “born again,” God spiritually becomes their Father also. This makes the regenerate “brethren” of Jesus. The unregenerate are termed “children of wrath” and have Satan as their father. In that Jesus in His humanity has, with the regenerate, a common human father, Adam, He is their brother in all possible aspects.

That it is only born-again people Jesus accepts as His brethren is further confirmed by the phrase “the seed of Abraham.” This phrase is seen to refer to spiritual rather than physical posterity, thus affirming the special nature of His work for regenerate people.

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33 Alan Richardson, ed., *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 79.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

There remains one phrase to be considered: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.” We shall take this up in the next chapter.

# Light From the Book of Hebrews

**T**HE light shining from the terms we have looked at in the previous chapter is captured in Hebrews 2:17, concentrated, and reflected back to us in magnified rays that bring the Son of man, Jesus Christ, near to humanity in a new and clearer way. It helps us to look as with new eyes on One who endearingly speaks of flawed and fallen, but surrendered, mortals as His brethren. And He does not do this in a condescending, figurative, or honorary sense, but as a reality.

We have seen that Jesus and His human, regenerated brethren are said to have one common origin: The heavenly Father is their common spiritual Source, and Adam, their physical source. In the passage under examination, “born-again” people are the only ones considered. It is they alone that Jesus is not ashamed to call brethren.

Now, carefully consider the following statement from Hebrews 2:17, and as you read, emphasize the word in capital letters: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.”

## **NOT A NATURE COMMON TO ALL MEN**

The point that presents itself so forcefully here is that Jesus was not incarnated with a nature common to all men. He did not come to this world to be in all respects like all men. The human nature He was endowed with was not like that of unregenerate sinners. His human nature *was common only with those who have experienced a spiritual rebirth.* (What is meant by this human nature needs careful study. But this must be reserved for later chapters.)

Let us express this another way: Of Mary, Jesus was born “born again.”

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

Please note that this concept did not originate with me. Vincent seems to be saying as much when he observes: “Christ takes hold of the seed of Abraham, the church of God, and is made like unto His brethren, tempted as they are.”<sup>34</sup>

Patrick Fairbairn quotes an old German theologian, Dörner, who referred to Jesus as “the true Son of man—needing no new birth, but by nature the new-born man.”<sup>35</sup>

Arthur W. Pink lists seven ways in which Jesus was like His brethren: “First, they are one in sanctification, verse 11. Second, they are one in family relationship, verses 11, 12a. Third, they are one in worship, verse 12b. Fourth, they are one in trust, verse 13. Fifth, they are one in nature, verse 14. Sixth, they are one in the line of promise, verse 16. Seventh, they are one in experiencing temptation, verse 18.”<sup>36</sup>

Essentially, each of these experiences highlights the born-again experience of “brethren.” And, inasmuch as Jesus had those things in common with them, they affirm that He was like them, “born again” in nature.

### THE RULE OF FIRST MENTION

There is another point that tends to confirm the position that Jesus had the nature of a born-again person. It has to do with what is called the rule of first mention. This is simply the common-sense assumption that the meaning (stated or implied) given a term, person, or thing the first time it is used in a passage is the meaning to be maintained throughout the passage unless some signal is given to indicate otherwise.

We saw, in our analysis of Hebrews 2:11, that where the word “brethren” is first used in the passage, it is employed of those who are being sanctified. We showed that this must refer only to born-again people. So if we apply the rule of first mention, then when we read that Jesus was in all respects like

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34 M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies on the New Testament*, vol. 4, p. 406.

35 Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1957), p. 244.

36 Arthur Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), p. 141.

## Light From the Book of Hebrews

His brethren we understand that He had a nature like born-again people.

The concept that Jesus was born “born again” has been phrased by Seventh-day Adventist scholars in the past. For example, W. W. Prescott, one of the leading early educators of the Adventist Church and editor of the *Review and Herald* for a number of years, wrote in an editorial that “Jesus was born again by the Holy Spirit. ... When one commits himself to God and submits to be born of the Spirit, he enters upon a new stage of existence, just as Jesus did.”<sup>37</sup>

What is the meaning, and what are the implications, of the concept of Jesus as having come into the world “born again”?

We use the phrase “born again” for want of a better term that will picture a certain kind of experience, person, and character. Even this phrase conveys only palely the person and character of Jesus. Human language inadequately expresses many of the things of God because they are so far beyond our minds and imaginations. The best we can do is look for similarities and make comparisons.

So the term “born again” as used of Jesus is an inadequate one. For one thing, it makes us think of people who have lived sinful lives but who have surrendered, abandoned, themselves to God and been renewed by the Holy Spirit so that they are spiritually new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is clear that Jesus never needed this experience of being newly created. He was born “that holy thing” (Luke 1:35); He “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21); “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22); “In him is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

### A POINT OF DEPARTURE

So although the term “born again” has its shortcomings in describing the nature of Jesus, it is a good point of departure and serves a vital purpose in two respects: it illuminates the experience of regenerate men and women who are, by their new birth, bound to Him in a very real sense as brothers and sisters; and it helps us, as no other concept does, to understand what His nature was really like. I use the term, then, primarily to

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37 W. W. Prescott, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 9, 1905.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

help those who have been born again to comprehend what His nature was like when He was born, and to make understandable something of His experience throughout His life on earth. We shall be dealing with those concepts in the following pages.

To appreciate the tremendous significance of the statement “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren,” let us ask the question, Suppose the Hebrews author had written, “He had to be made like *men* [*anthropoi*] in every respect”? For, as the authoritative *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* points out, that term, as used in the Greek, places “special emphasis on the transitoriness ... of human nature as ... sinful (Romans 3:4; 5:12), full of evil (Matthew 10:17; Luke 6:22), loving flattery (Luke 6:26) and subject to human error (Galatians 1:1, 11f.; Colossians 2:8, 22).”<sup>38</sup>

There are meaningful implications of the character of man in John’s observation in John 2:24, 25, that “Jesus did not commit himself to them [the people of Jerusalem], because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (and here we have a form of the term *anthropos*). Jesus knew human nature and human character absolutely—the follies, weaknesses, pretentiousness, the self-deception and self-seeking, the deviousness, the evil intentions, all the governing ideas and ways of unregenerate mankind.

### “MEN” AND “BRETHREN” CONTRASTED

A number of enlightening contrasts can be drawn between “men,” as here defined, and “brethren,” as used in Hebrews 2. Men are in rebellion against God, brethren are not; men are the servants of sin, brethren are not; men are not being sanctified, brethren are; men are outside the family of God, brethren are part of the family; men do not really worship God, brethren do; men do not have a living faith in God, brethren do; men do not have a common nature with Jesus, brethren do; men have no part in the promises of the heavenly kingdom, brethren do.

Thus, had the author of Hebrews written, with respect to the human nature of Jesus, that He had “to be made like unto

38 Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964), vol. 1, p. 364.

## Light From the Book of Hebrews

his brethren,” we would have had to deal with implications and complications that would affect the whole New Testament teaching of the sinlessness of Jesus.

# Divinity and Humanity Combined

**D**OES the Spirit of Prophecy support what has been presented from Hebrews 2 as evidence that Jesus was what we have termed “born again”? We believe it does.

Understandably, Ellen White does not use the expression “born again” to describe the nature of Jesus Christ. As observed in the previous chapter, the phrase suggests that one has been unregenerate, needing a transforming experience. A born-again person is a sinner whose life has been changed by the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was ever filled with the Spirit, pure, sinless, untainted in the minutest degree by sin. So He never needed that transforming experience. Thus, when we use the term with reference to Him, we do so in an accommodated sense for want of a better term. (We shall clarify the concept in chapters 10–15.)

## **DEFINING THE NEW BIRTH**

To make clear what we mean by the expression “born again,” we offer this definition: The new birth is an experience that brings a total renunciation of self and a willing abandonment to God, permitting the Holy Spirit to pervade fully and direct completely the life. It brings an attitude of heart and mind in which God’s way is happily sought and contentedly followed, of the individual’s own volition as well as from a sense of loving obligation. In it is experienced a shunning and increasing abhorrence of sin in every known aspect. In the born-again person there is a recognition that full dependence on God is vital for sustained and complete victory.

It is an experience in which it may be said that humanity and divinity have met in an individual.

## Divinity and Humanity Combined

The idea of divinity being combined with humanity is an important one for us in this study. When we hear the expression “divinity united or combined with humanity,” we may think of it as referring only to Jesus Christ. Ellen White used it many times in reference to people who are born again. And Scripture, though it does not use the words, certainly presents the concept.

“If Christ be *in you*, ... the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Romans 8:10); “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ *is in you*, except ye be reprobates [fail to meet the test]” (2 Corinthians 13:5); “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ *liveth in me*” (Galatians 2:20); “That Christ may dwell *in your hearts* by faith” (Ephesians 3:17); “Christ *in you*, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Note a few instances in which Ellen White refers to the uniting of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ: “In Christ, divinity and humanity were combined.”<sup>39</sup> “He [Christ] united humanity with divinity; a divine spirit dwelt in a temple of flesh.”<sup>40</sup> “In contemplating the incarnation of Christ in humanity, we stand baffled before an unfathomable mystery, that the human mind cannot comprehend. ... Divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one.”<sup>41</sup>

### PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

There are many instances in the Spirit of Prophecy writings in which divinity is said to be united with humanity in God’s people: “Christ came to be our example, and to make known to us that we may be partakers of the divine nature. ... Men may have a power to resist evil ... a power that will place them where they may overcome as Christ overcame.”<sup>42</sup> “Man is, through faith, to be a partaker in the divine nature, and to

39 E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 408.

40 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Isaiah 53:2, 3, p. 1147.

41 E. G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, July 30, 1896.

42 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Matthew 4:1–11, p. 1082.

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overcome every temptation wherewith he is beset.”<sup>43</sup> “Divinity and humanity are blended in him who has the spirit of Christ.”<sup>44</sup>

It needs to be emphasized that only those who are totally, unreservedly surrendered to the Master have this wonderful unity. “Those who accept Christ as their Saviour, *becoming partakers of His divine nature*, are enabled to follow His example, living in obedience to every precept of the law.”<sup>45</sup>

The human Jesus, then, was, in this respect, on the same level as the born-again Christian. We must emphasize that He utilized no resources that every human being may not have. “The power of the Saviour’s Godhead was hidden. He overcame in human nature, relying upon God for power. This is the privilege of all.”<sup>46</sup> “Jesus, the world’s Redeemer, could only keep the commandments of God, in the same way that humanity can keep them.”<sup>47</sup> In what way can humanity keep the commandments? Only as the Holy Spirit is in the life in a manner experienced only by the born-again person. So Jesus had to have the Holy Spirit with Him.

“Unless He [Jesus] met man as man, and testified by His connection with God that divine power was not given to Him in a different way to what it will be given to us, He could not be a perfect example for us.”<sup>48</sup>

Carefully mark this statement:

“When God and the Son of God made a covenant to rescue man from the bondage of Satan, every facility was provided that human nature should come into union with His divine nature. [Remember that sinful human nature becomes united with divine nature *only*

43 E. G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 48.

44 \_\_\_\_\_, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 24.

45 \_\_\_\_\_, “*That I May Know Him*,” p. 292. (Italics supplied.)

46 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Matthew 27:50, p. 1108.

47 E. G. White, manuscript 1, 1892.

48 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Heb. 2:14–18, p. 925.

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*through the new-birth experience, as the Holy Spirit comes into the life. Now continue with the quotation.] In such a nature was our Lord tempted.”<sup>49</sup>*

To get the significance of these words, let us recapitulate: to save man, provision was made that divinity and humanity might be combined in him. This unity in man comes only through the new birth. “In such a nature [divinity and humanity united] was our Lord tempted.” Thus we may conclude that the human Jesus, having a nature like a born-again person, may legitimately be described as having a “born-again” nature.

When we describe Jesus’ spiritual and moral nature as “born again,” we would not convey the idea that it is just like the moral and spiritual nature of any regenerated person. Jesus is the ideal Man, the Absolute in perfection of character in every respect. A born-again person is still a flawed person from whom Christ is removing the defects. For example, he may lack sensitivity to the needs of others. His conscience will need continued sharpening. “The ideal of Christian character is Christlikeness.”<sup>50</sup> He is the Apotheosis, the Glorified Exemplar behind the idea, “Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God’s ideal for His children. Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached.”<sup>51</sup>

### ILLUMINATING THE “BORN-AGAIN” CONCEPT

Many Spirit of Prophecy statements tend to corroborate and illuminate the concept that Jesus had a “born-again” nature.

Christ “came into our world to *maintain* a pure, sinless character, and to refute Satan’s lie that it was not possible for human beings to keep the law of God. Christ came to live the law in His human character in just that way in which all may live the law in human nature if they will do as Christ was doing.”<sup>52</sup>

How may “all ... live the law in human nature”? Again the answer must be, through being born again. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. ... For

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49 E. G. White, manuscript 94, 1893.

50 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

51 \_\_\_\_\_, *Education*, p. 18.

52 E. G. White, manuscript 94, 1893. (Italics supplied.)

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what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. ... But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Romans 8:1–9).

One thing the regenerated person learns very quickly (or he loses his experience) is that he must have the Holy Spirit continually in his life if he is going to escape being defeated. Notice how totally Jesus was like the born-again person in this respect: “If His [Jesus’] humanity had not been united with divinity, He would have failed and become discouraged.”<sup>53</sup>

“Christ’s humanity alone could never have endured this test [the test in the wilderness], but His divine power combined with humanity gained in behalf of man an infinite victory.”<sup>54</sup>

“In Christ divinity and humanity were united, and the only way in which man may be an overcomer is through being a partaker of the divine nature.”<sup>55</sup>

“Christ’s overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. ... When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity. His imputed grace and power He gives to all who receive Him by faith.

“The obedience of Christ to His Father was the same obedience that is required of man. Man cannot overcome Satan’s temptations without divine power to combine with his instrumentality. So with Jesus Christ; He could lay hold of divine power. He came not to our world to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater, but as a man to obey God’s Holy Law, and in this way He is our example. The Lord Jesus came to our world,

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53 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Mar. 26, 1901.

54 \_\_\_\_\_, *Confrontation*, pp. 66, 67.

55 \_\_\_\_\_, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 24.

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not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could, through faith in God's power to help in every emergency. Man is, through faith, to become a partaker in the divine nature, and to overcome every temptation wherewith he is beset."<sup>56</sup>

### JESUS AS A CHILD

Ellen White's description of Jesus as a child suggests that He could be described as born "born-again."

"Jesus Christ is our example in all things. He began life, passed through its experiences, and ended its record, with a sanctified human will."<sup>57</sup> This is a very important statement. A key factor in the born-again experience is a sanctified, surrendered will. Jesus was born with such a will, and He had a sanctified will throughout His life.

"It is not correct to say, as many writers have said, that Christ was like all children. He was not like all children. ... *His inclination to right was a constant gratification to His parents.*"<sup>58</sup> The inclination of a born-again person is constantly to do the will of his heavenly Father.

Now let us focus attention on the sentences ellipsed from the statement just given: "Many children are misguided and mismanaged. But Joseph, and especially Mary, kept before them the remembrance of their child's divine Fatherhood. Jesus was instructed in accordance with the sacred character of His mission."

It is clear that Joseph and Mary's part was very important in molding the budding life of Jesus. Aware that "Satan [would be] ... unwearied in his efforts to overcome the Child of Nazareth,"<sup>59</sup> His heavenly Father knew the vital necessity of placing Him in a proper environment until He could consciously confirm the untainted nature that had been given Him. Joseph and Mary's part was to protect and, to a degree, direct. Furthermore, "from

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56 \_\_\_\_\_, *Our High Calling*, p. 48.

57 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Oct. 29, 1894.

58 \_\_\_\_\_, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 134.

59 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 71.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

His earliest years Jesus was guarded by heavenly angels.”<sup>60</sup> But in both these respects He had no advantage any other child might not have. “Ministering angels will guard the children who are ... dedicated to God.”<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, there was a fundamental difference between the child Jesus and every other child. All other children are born with incipiently fallen wills. Jesus, with an unfallen will, was “that holy thing” born of Mary (Luke 1:35).

That Jesus was born “born again” is further confirmed by these words: “With deep earnestness the mother of Jesus watched the unfolding of His powers, and beheld the impress of perfection upon His character.”<sup>62</sup> That last phrase strongly conveys the concept that moral perfection was not a process in His life, but a rooted, fixed fact. Mary simply saw, day by day, the young life that showed its natural character in moral flawlessness. (For a definition of perfection, see page 169.)

### CONCEPTS THAT COMPLETE A MOSAIC

There are many statements in the Spirit of Prophecy that, each standing alone, prove little relative to the concept we have been discussing. But they are like bits of glass that, placed together, form a beautiful mosaic.

Notice a few such statements: “Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.”<sup>63</sup>

“When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity.”<sup>64</sup>

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60 *Ibid.*

61 \_\_\_\_\_, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 110.

62 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 69. (Italics supplied.)

63 *Ibid.*, p. 664.

64 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Hebrews 4:15, p. 929.

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“If Christ had a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have, Satan would have made capital of this matter.”<sup>65</sup>

Christ did have a power to overcome that most men do not have. But they might have it would they but commit themselves to God and take hold of His power in faith as Jesus did.

We earlier quoted the Ellen G. White statement that “the Lord Jesus came to our world, not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could do, through faith in God’s power to help in every emergency.”<sup>66</sup> Christ did not come to show what an *unregenerated* man could do, but what a *regenerated* man could do. He came to show what a truly born-again person, who is thus filled with the Spirit, may accomplish.

It would seem that for there to be any meaningful similarity between Jesus and man at all, it had to be so. Man can receive spiritual power from God only as he is regenerate. If Jesus were to have no advantage over us, He would have to be in a position similar to ours. There is no power available for the unregenerate because he has not met the conditions (see John 3:3; Jeremiah 24:7; Romans 6:14; 8:1–8; Galatians 5:22). The unregenerate sinner cannot overcome sin even when his good judgment and his will are directed toward obedience to God (see Romans 7:15–24). He may be able to subdue some acts of sin. Perhaps many. But there will be many he will never be able to subdue on his own. And inward sin, the root that puts forth evil shoots throughout his life, is established in his character. He can do nothing about that.

“Over the lives of very many professed Christians the power of God has but little control. ... The love of Jesus is not a ruling principle in the soul, and therefore cannot exercise a constraining power upon the life. A partial surrender to truth gives Satan free opportunity to work. Until the soul-temple is fully surrendered to God, it is the stronghold of the enemy.”<sup>67</sup>

65 *Ibid.*, p. 930.

66 \_\_\_\_\_, *Our High Calling*, p. 48.

67 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 28, 1899.

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Jesus' capacity to overcome sin was, then, the same that we may have, coming from the same source that may be ours. In His humanity He did not rely upon His inherent divinity; to do so would be to have "a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have." Jesus' power flowed from the indwelling Holy Spirit available because of His total submission to, and constant reliance upon, His heavenly Father. Through a submission and dependence like His we may have the same indwelling Spirit and thus the same power and the same victory.

# PART 2

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## His Brethren Except for Sin



## “The Word Was Made Flesh”

**W**ILLIAM TEMPLE, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, pointed out that when the apostle John wanted to describe God’s becoming part of the human family, “he did not say ‘The word became man’; he deliberately took the word which represents the lowest elements in human nature and said, ‘The word became flesh.’”<sup>68</sup>

There has been a great reluctance on the part of many Christians to accept the implications of Dr. Temple’s words. And the statement by Ellen White that Jesus possessed the “nature of fallen man,”<sup>69</sup> that He took “our fallen nature,”<sup>70</sup> and kindred statements, some of which are very explicit, has puzzled, even perturbed, some Seventh-day Adventists over the years. Yet, as Harry Johnson puts it, “it has always been accepted [by Christians], in theory at least, that Jesus assumed full human nature.”<sup>71</sup> (In his book Johnson demonstrates that through the centuries to our day there have been Christian leaders who believed that Jesus did have a “fallen human nature,” a term Johnson uses.<sup>72</sup>) But if Christians are to accept the teaching that Jesus had a “*full* human nature,” they must accept the implications of that statement that He had the “nature of fallen man,” a “fallen nature.”

68 William Temple, *Christian Faith and Life* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 55.

69 E. G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 39.

70 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 112.

71 Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour* (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), p. 25.

72 *Ibid.*, pp. 129–189.

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In weighing what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy say about the human nature of Christ, the impression is received that although He was free from sin in every respect, in all other ways His human nature was like ours. He was otherwise, humanly speaking, as we are; He assumed no advantages that placed Him above the humanity with which He identified Himself. He had absolutely no advantages over sin that we may not have. Note a number of biblical and Spirit of Prophecy statements on the subject:

God sent “his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3)—*The Expositor’s Greek Testament* says these words mean “it is that God sent His Son in that nature which in us is identified with sin.”<sup>73</sup>

Christ “But made himself of no reputation [emptied Himself], and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself” (Philippians 2:7,8). “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same [nature]” (Hebrews 2:14). He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (chapter 4:15).

“Our Saviour took humanity, with all its liabilities.”<sup>74</sup> “He did in reality possess human nature.”<sup>75</sup> “He ... became like one of us except in sin.”<sup>76</sup>

### LANGUAGE SUGGESTS CLOSENESS OF NATURES

The very careful phrasing of both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy respecting Jesus’ human nature is doubtless because there is a danger that in reading what is said of His nature, we might conclude that He was sinful. But the very fact that Inspiration needed to approach so closely to the sin idea to tell us what the human nature of Jesus was like, while absolutely excluding sin,

73 W. R. Nicholl, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 2, p. 645.

74 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.

75 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.

76 \_\_\_\_\_, in *The Youth’s Instructor*, Oct. 20, 1886.

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strongly suggests the closeness of His nature to ours. Were He not so closely allied to us, the carefulness would not be necessary; the difference certainly would be easier to describe.

These observations may be illustrated by Romans 8:3, quoted above, in which Paul, in describing the humanity Christ assumed, very carefully states that He came “in the *likeness* of sinful flesh.” The Greek word translated “likeness” is used, for example, to indicate the closeness with which an image conforms to the object it is meant to resemble (see Romans 1:23).<sup>77</sup> It is employed in Romans 6:5 (“If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death”) to mean “If we have become vitally one with the likeness of His death.”<sup>78</sup>

Our conclusion of what Paul is trying to convey in Romans 8:3 is that there is a very close similarity between Christ’s humanity and ours but that they are not identical. There was a uniqueness in Him that could be found in no one else.

The ways in which Jesus was not like us will be discussed in another chapter. But in our commendable cautiousness we are so inclined to emphasize the difference that we minimize the essential similarity. For Christ’s *humanity* is important to us. “The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us.”<sup>79</sup> And, we emphasize again, His humanity is everything to us because He was also divine.

### JESUS’ ONENESS WITH OUR HUMANITY

“We are too much in the habit of thinking that the Son of God was a being so entirely exalted above us that it is an impossibility for Him to enter into our trials and temptations, and that He can have no sympathy with us in our weakness and frailties. *This is because we do not take in the fact of His oneness with humanity.*”<sup>80</sup>

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77 M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies on the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 18.

78 W. R. Nicholl, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 633.

79 E. G. White, in *The Youth’s Instructor*, Oct. 13, 1898.

80 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, May 16, 1895. (Italics supplied.)

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“He who was one with the Father stepped down from the glorious throne in heaven, laid aside His royal robe and crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, *thus bringing Himself to the level of man’s feeble faculties.*”<sup>81</sup>

At this point we need at least a tentative definition of fallen human nature. We suggest that it is human nature affected by the Fall of Adam and Eve, in which the whole person is susceptible to the temptations and weaknesses of mankind, and is inadequate of itself to conform to the will of God.

Even though the whole human race is sinful, this definition does not demand that the possessor of a “fallen human nature” is inevitably sinful. Sin involves the will, and as Johnson states, “Jesus could assume ‘fallen human nature’ without becoming a sinner, because in all His volitional acts [acts of the will] He was sinless.”<sup>82</sup>

Our definition of fallen human nature, and the strong Bible implications and Spirit of Prophecy affirmations that Jesus possessed such a nature, require that we examine more completely its ramifications and inferences.

### A THREE-PART DEFINITION

There are three parts to our definition: Fallen human nature is human nature affected by the Fall of Adam and Eve. It is one that is susceptible to the temptations and weaknesses of mankind. And a person with a fallen human nature—as we all have—is unable of himself to conform to the will of God.

Was Jesus’ human nature affected, as ours is, by the results of the Fall of Adam and Eve?

The fact of His birth establishes that it was. Galatians 4:4 says that he was “made [born] of a woman.” Implicit in these words is the idea that He was part of the nature of His mother. As to His humanity, He was bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, and nature of her nature. This is attested in Hebrews 2:17: “In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.”

Students of the Spirit of Prophecy will recall a familiar statement: “Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been

81 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 11, 1888. (Italics supplied.)

82 Harry Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

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weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life.”<sup>83</sup>

“It was not a make believe humanity that Christ took upon Himself. ... He was not only made flesh, but He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh.”<sup>84</sup>

Our second question is, Was Jesus susceptible to the temptations and weaknesses of mankind?

Again, the affirmations of Hebrews 2:17 and 4:15 make clear that He must have been: “in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren”; He “was in all points tempted like as we are.” This is strongly supported by Spirit of Prophecy statements: “Jesus ... took upon Himself the infirmities and bore the griefs and sorrows of humanity, and conquered in our behalf. He was made like unto his brethren, with the same susceptibilities, mental and physical. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.”<sup>85</sup> Jesus “knows by experience what are the weaknesses of humanity, what are our wants, and where lies the strength of our temptations; for He was ‘in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.’”<sup>86</sup> “God was in Christ in human form, and endured all the temptations wherewith man was beset; in our behalf He participated in the suffering and trials of sorrowful human nature.”<sup>87</sup>

Some Christians may have problems with the next question: Was Jesus of Himself, in His human nature, unable to conform to the will of God? To entertain the idea that He was not might seem almost sacrilegious. He was God, and God cannot sin! But, as Ellen White points out, Christ did not come to give us

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83 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

84 E. G. White, letter 106, 1896.

85 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Feb. 10, 1885.

86 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 71.

87 \_\_\_\_\_, in *The Watchman*, Dec. 10, 1907.

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an example of how God lives. He came to demonstrate what humanity can do when linked to divinity.

### **MARVELOUS SACRIFICE, INFINITE RISK**

It is in considering this question that we glimpse once again the totality of the humanity of our Saviour, and with wonder and awe we marvel at the great sacrifice and infinite risk that the Son of God took.

Let us note once again our phrase, so full of implications, in Hebrews 2:17: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.” If Jesus were able to overcome in His human strength alone, would He then be “in all things ... made like his brethren”? Obviously, the answer is No. No human being since the Fall has been able to conquer temptation and sin in his own strength (Romans 7:14–25). Thus, were Jesus, as a Man, able to overcome in His, He would have had an advantage over us. In that particular He would not really have been a man.

“Those who claim that it was not possible for Christ to sin, cannot believe that He really took upon Himself human nature.”<sup>88</sup>

“Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him.”<sup>89</sup> “As one with us, a sharer in our needs and weaknesses, He was wholly dependent upon God.”<sup>90</sup>

“Christ, the sinless One, upon whom the Holy Spirit was bestowed without measure, constantly acknowledged His dependence upon God, and sought fresh supplies from the Source of strength and wisdom.”<sup>91</sup>

“If Christ had a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have, Satan would have made capital of this matter. The work of Christ was to take from the

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88 E. G. White, manuscript 16, 1890.

89 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 363.

91 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 8, 1887.

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claims of Satan his control of man, and he could do this only in the way that he came—a man, tempted as a man, rendering the obedience of a man.”<sup>92</sup>

Now note especially these words: “Christ’s humanity alone could never have endured this test [the first wilderness test, based on appetite], but His divine power combined with humanity gained in behalf of man an infinite victory.”<sup>93</sup>

On the basis of these three parts of our definition of fallen human nature—Jesus’ relationship to the Fall of Adam and Eve, His susceptibility and temptation, and the inadequacy of His humanness when considered on its own—we conclude that Jesus did indeed possess a “fallen human nature.”

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92 E. G. White, manuscript 1, 1892.

93 E. G. White, *Confrontation*, pp. 66, 67.

## Examining a Difficult Concept

**T**HE thesis we are advancing in this book is that Jesus had a human nature that was indeed totally human, but also totally sinless. But His human nature, although *fully* human, was not like that of most men. It may most closely be likened to that of the person who has been born again. Such a person still has a fallen nature, of course.

In the previous chapter we explored a tentative definition of fallen human nature, and concluded that the definition described Christ's human nature. But to appreciate more fully what that nature was like—remembering that our predicament relative to sin and victory over sin is involved in that nature—we shall have to look more fully at some of the terms Ellen White used to describe the nature Christ took at His incarnation.

In reference to Spirit of Prophecy statements on the “fallen nature” of Jesus, there has perhaps been a tendency on the part of some to avoid analyzing them for fear of being pushed to uncomfortable conclusions. We may have had a disposition to explain them away, or delicately to suggest that Mrs. White did not really mean it just that way.

There is ground to be sympathetic with those fears and attitudes. Yet other puzzling biblical and Spirit of Prophecy statements have, in time, surrendered to prayerful, persistent study and disclosed useful, sometimes vital, truths.

Let us note a few of the more difficult terms that Ellen White uses to characterize the human nature of Jesus, and then seek to understand their meaning.

## Examining a Difficult Concept

“Think of Christ’s humiliation. He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, *degraded and defiled by sin.*”<sup>94</sup>

“What a sight was this for Heaven to look upon! Christ, who knew not the least taint of sin or defilement, *took our nature in its deteriorated condition.*”<sup>95</sup>

Christ “had all the *strength of passion of humanity.*”<sup>96</sup>

“In order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him where he was. He took human nature, and *bore the infirmities and degeneracy of the race.* ... He humiliated Himself to the lowest depths of human woe, that He might be qualified to reach man, and bring him up from the degradation in which sin had plunged him.”<sup>97</sup>

“Though He had no taint of sin upon His character, yet *He condescended to connect our fallen human nature with His divinity.* By thus taking humanity, He honored humanity. Having taken our fallen nature, He showed what it might become, by accepting the ample provision He had made for it, and by becoming partaker of the divine nature.”<sup>98</sup>

“*He took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature.*”<sup>99</sup>

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94 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Isa. 53:2, 3, p. 1147. (Italics supplied.)

95 E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 253. (Italics supplied.)

96 \_\_\_\_\_, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 155. (Italics supplied.)

97 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Matthew 4:1–11, p. 1081. (Italics supplied.)

98 E. G. White, *Special Instruction Relating to the Review and Herald Office and the Work in Battle Creek*, May 26, 1896, p. 13. (Italics supplied.)

99 \_\_\_\_\_, *Medical Ministry*, p. 181. (Italics supplied.)

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“Christ did in reality unite *the offending nature of man* with His own sinless nature.”<sup>100</sup>

We will consider the last statement first; it may open a window of understanding to the others.

### A DIFFICULT STATEMENT

What could the difficult phrase “offending nature” suggest?

Could it mean that Jesus’ flawless character offended those who would not accept His teachings or His way of life? That it did so offend is, of course, a fact. But the sense of the sentence, as well as the context of the article from which it is quoted, directs our attention otherwise. They are not describing the effects He had on others, but the kind of nature He had as a Man—the effects of His nature upon Himself, as it were.

What does the word “offend” mean?

The thirteen-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*, which is the most exhaustive dictionary in the English language, lists seven meanings of the word. Most of them are not applicable to our discussion. One meaning it lists as conveying the biblical thrust of the term: “To cause spiritual or moral difficulty.”

The authoritative *Webster’s New International Dictionary* gives a definition that may be applicable: “To oppose or obstruct in duty.” Combining these two we have: “to cause spiritual or moral difficulty; to oppose or obstruct in duty.”

Can it be safely suggested that Jesus had a human nature that caused Him difficulty in the area of the spiritual or moral, that tended to oppose or obstruct Him in His duty to man and His Father?

Our first reaction would probably be to answer with a firm No. But before we reject the idea out of hand, let us examine it carefully and with prayerful restraint, going no further than evidence, logic, and guidance of the Holy Spirit permit.

### THE PIVOTAL POINT

We must keep before us the concept around which our whole investigation pivots, that Jesus had a nature like that of a born-again person. He was “in all things ... behaved ... to be

100 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1900. (Italics supplied.)

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made like unto his brethren,” “yet without sin” (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15). Let us bear in mind that His human nature was “identical with our own,”<sup>101</sup> that He “assumed the liabilities of human nature, to be proved and tried,”<sup>102</sup> and that He took “upon Himself our fallen nature.”<sup>103</sup>

If this is true, if we agree that Jesus was not playacting when He became a Man, then we need to accept the concept that He had difficulties with His fallen human nature, as a human being—a born-again human being—would have.

To insist that Jesus’ human nature was less than that of a born-again person, that it was like that of an unregenerate person, is unthinkable. For instance, the unregenerate person has a natural bent toward sin. But “not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.”<sup>104</sup> (We note that “we [also] need not retain one sinful propensity.”<sup>105</sup>) On the other hand, to believe that His nature was superior to that of a born-again person is really to lift Him above humanity itself, which likewise is inadmissible. It is to claim for Him advantages that no human being can have, for the new birth is the highest spiritual stage to which mankind can attain in its present state. (“Kneeling at the cross, he [an individual] has reached the highest place to which man can attain.”<sup>106</sup>) Raise Jesus above this state, and His humanity loses meaningful touch with ours.

(Jesus, as a “born-again” Man, was spiritually Everests above the newly born-again individual. Nevertheless, that born-again person has now penetrated into the same spiritual sphere with Jesus.)

Granting that Jesus had a human nature most closely paralleling that of a regenerate man or woman, it follows that

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101 E. G. White, manuscript 94, 1893.

102 E. G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 2, 1905.

103 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 112.

104 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:1–3, 14, p. 1128.

105 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, April 24, 1900.

106 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 3:14–17, p. 1133.

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we may gain some understanding of what the term “offending nature” would mean relative to Christ, by recognizing that a born-again person also has what might be termed an offending nature.

The born-again person is still a fallen human being.

He is not free from the effects and results of sin. He has the same faculties and talents that he had before his rebirth. When a person is born again, he “is not endowed with new faculties, but the faculties he has are sanctified.”<sup>107</sup>

He has the same basic physical wants. He has emotions, likes and dislikes, ambitions, desires. He is very much a human being still. He is beset with temptations that, we must remember, are not sin; he must struggle with the flesh.

This being so, wherein lies the difference between the regenerate and unregenerate person?

### **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REGENERATE AND UNREGENERATE**

The difference is found mainly in two areas: One, in the person who is not definitely born again “all things” (2 Corinthians 5:17) have not become new, so he cannot wholeheartedly want to do God’s will and only His will. There are reservations and rebelliousness that cannot be overcome because the root from which they spring, self, is not surrendered. Most important, he has a carnal (sinful) mind (Romans 8:7) that naturally runs in sinful channels, even though he may profess to be a Christian and may genuinely desire to be one. Thus, he may want to do God’s will but is unable to because of his condition (chapter 7:15–23). He cannot naturally and comfortably obey God, and any obedience given will be legalistic and frequently done with inward tensions that generate discouragements, doubts, unhappiness, and other problems.

Conversely, the born-again person has the attitude of Jesus (see Philippians 2:5), which is to desire spontaneously and naturally to do God’s will. At the new birth his motives, tendencies, and will dramatically take a new direction. “I delight

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107 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, July 7, 1904.

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to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8).

The second difference is that the unregenerate person does not, and cannot, have the power in his life to overcome sin, even though he may have the desire to overcome (Romans 7:15, 18, 21–23). This power for full victory, which comes through the indwelling Holy Spirit, can be available only for the life that is completely surrendered to Him (chapter 8:9–13), which surrender is also possible only by the work of the Holy Spirit. “When one is fully emptied of self, when every false god is cast out of the soul, the vacuum is filled by the inflowing of the Spirit of Christ.”<sup>108</sup> “Pride, selfishness, vanity, worldliness—sin in all its forms—must be overcome if we would enter into a union with Christ. The reason why many find the Christian life so deplorably hard, why they are so fickle, so variable, is that they try to attach themselves to Christ without first detaching themselves from these cherished idols.”<sup>109</sup>

“The Holy Spirit brings power that enables man to overcome. It is through the agency of the Spirit that the government of Satan is subdued. It is the Spirit that convinces of sin, and, with the consent of the human being, expels sin from the heart. The mind is then brought under a new law—the royal law of liberty.”<sup>110</sup>

Now let us explore what might be called an offending nature in the born-again person, which has been defined as a nature that causes spiritual or moral difficulty, that tends to oppose or obstruct in one’s duty to God and man.

What fully committed Christian is there who, feeling the pull of temptation upon certain of his faculties, has not fervently wished that somehow he could have been constituted differently so that sin would not have that effect upon him? That he could be physically and emotionally insensitive to a particular stimulus? The faculty that distresses him is, in the context of our definition, an offending faculty. And such a faculty is part of

108 \_\_\_\_\_, *Gospel Workers*, p. 287.

109 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 231.

110 \_\_\_\_\_, *Our High Calling*, p. 152.

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that wholeness of man, that indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit that makes up his nature.

Commenting on Romans 6:12, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, “The instincts are good in and of themselves. ... But sin tries to turn the natural instincts into ‘inordinate affections,’ into lusts. So what the apostle asserts here is that, while we are left in this mortal body, sin will go on trying to bring that about. It will try to trip us, it will try to dominate over the body.”<sup>111</sup>

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14).

“The Christian will feel the promptings of sin, for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit; but the Spirit striveth against the flesh, keeping up a constant warfare. Here is where Christ’s help is needed.”<sup>112</sup>

“The lower passions have their *seat* in the body and work through it.”<sup>113</sup> The body itself is not sinful but may be manipulated by the lower passions situated in the body as the result of man’s nature being fallen.

### **BODY, MIND, SOUL, CHARACTER**

“The body is the only medium through which the mind and the soul are developed for the upbuilding of character. Hence it is that the adversary of souls directs his temptations to the enfeebling and degrading of the physical powers. His success here means the surrender to evil of the whole being.”<sup>114</sup>

“If permitted, they [evil angels] can distract our minds, [and] disorder and torment our bodies.”<sup>115</sup>

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111 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, an Exposition of Chapter 6* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1974), p. 153.

112 E. G. White, *The Sanctified Life*, p. 92.

113 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Adventist Home*, p. 127. (Italics supplied.)

114 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 130.

115 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Great Controversy*, p. 517.

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The human nervous system is certainly a base for manifestations of what we term an offending nature. For example, because of a variety of pressures that may be placed upon an individual, he sometimes becomes nervously tired. This tiredness tends toward a feeling of irritation, tempting him to show annoyance toward others. This is doubtless a reason why Ellen White counsels, “Guard against becoming overworn, careworn, depressed.”<sup>116</sup> The Christian will prayerfully and resolutely resist this tendency and will wish that the prompting were not there. It is distressing to him, an aspect of his nature that “tends to oppose” his Christian life and witness. It causes him “spiritual difficulty.” It is therefore offensive to him.

It is vital here that the Christian bear in mind that when promptings to give way to sin are resolutely surrendered to Jesus, they swiftly fade. “If the one in trouble and temptation keeps his eye fixed on Jesus, and draws nigh to God, talking of His goodness and mercy, Jesus draws nigh to him, and his annoyances that he thought almost unbearable vanish.”<sup>117</sup>

The faculty for righteous indignation is an important gift. The Christian who does not experience such a feeling when God’s law and His character is maligned, or when a fellow human being is wronged, is lacking in a vital area. But this capacity may be betrayed into giving way to a temptation to slip into a sinful and selfish anger. “A hasty temper, a lack of patience, an inclination to speak hastily—these are things against which the Lord’s servants must guard.”<sup>118</sup> Here again, then, is a capacity that becomes an offending faculty except as it is kept under control and is directed by the Spirit.

The appetite for food is a normal and necessary faculty. God has provided a great variety of tasty and attractive foods for our health and enjoyment. “Eating and drinking in accordance with the laws of health promote virtuous actions. But if the stomach is abused by habits that have no foundation in nature, Satan takes advantage of the wrong that has been done, and uses the

116 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 513.

117 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on James 4:7, 8, p. 937.

118 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Jan. 7, 1902.

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stomach as an enemy of righteousness.”<sup>119</sup> And how frequently and easily appetite becomes a governing force in the life. “We are often pained as we see the little moral power possessed by the professed followers of Christ. When tempted on the point of appetite, few will firmly stand the test. Many turn from light and knowledge, and sacrifice principle to indulge their taste.”<sup>120</sup>

The committed Christian will keep a guard on his appetite, which is, for many, the most offending faculty. And there may be times when he will regret having surrendered himself to its demands more than he should have.

### THE MIND, AN OFFENDING FACULTY

The mind itself may be the most offending faculty we possess. How readily it may wander into forbidden or dangerous ways. “Unless a determined effort is made to keep the thoughts centered on Christ, grace cannot reveal itself in the life. The mind must engage in spiritual warfare. Every thought must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. All the habits must be brought under God’s control.”<sup>121</sup> “Unless our eyes, our ears, our tongues, are under the control of the Holy Spirit, and guided by divine power, they cannot be trusted.”<sup>122</sup>

A conspicuous and classic example of the faculties of body and mind as offenders is seen in Christ’s exhortation in Matthew 5: “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (verses 29, 30).

Doubtlessly this is to be understood in both a literal and figurative sense. Certainly if the physical eye or hand were in some manner to be obstacles to one’s salvation, Christ would make a literal application.

119 *Ibid.*, May 27, 1902.

120 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Oct. 24, 1878.

121 E. G. White, letter 123, 1904.

122 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Aug. 13, 1895.

## Examining a Difficult Concept

But a wider meaning must be seen. Anyone of our sense faculties may become a channel by which sinful temptations find input to the mind and heart. Each, then, must be ceaselessly guarded and sometimes rigorously denied. Each is therefore an offending faculty.

It will be recalled, simply by way of illustration, that a major reason why the medieval monk kept to his solitary cloister was hopefully to eliminate, or at least greatly diminish, evil (or imagined evil) appeals that flowed to mind and heart through the eyes and ears and the other senses. The senses were seen as offending, troublesome faculties.

An understanding of Christ's words may be that the most deeply rooted instincts and desires of life must be ruthlessly crucified if they in any way come between us and our service to God. If they do come between, then they are offending faculties of our nature. (The concept we are discussing here must be understood in the proper framework. A legalistic denial of the flesh must be vigorously repudiated.)

### **GUARD THE AVENUES OF THE SOUL**

“Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices, must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The mind must not be left to dwell at random upon every subject that the enemy of souls may suggest. The heart must be faithfully sentineled, or evils without will awaken evils within, and the soul will wander in darkness.”<sup>123</sup>

These words clearly underscore the idea that our various organs are potential avenues for sin. They confirm our suggestion that our faculties are offending parts that are continually capable of causing “spiritual or moral difficulty,” that they frequently tend to “oppose or obstruct in duty.”

Paul made an observation related to the “offending nature” when he said, “But I keep under [pommel] my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:27). The Greek is vividly

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123 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 518.

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depictive. It is drawn from boxing terminology and means, “I strike myself under the eye,” or even more graphically, “I give myself a black eye.”

Ellen White, in making an observation regarding Paul’s struggle with his offending nature, prefaces the comment with these words: “We cannot allow ourselves to act from impulse. We cannot be off guard for a moment. Beset with temptations without number, we must resist firmly or be conquered.”<sup>124</sup>

Then she comments: “The life of the apostle Paul was a constant conflict with self. He said, ‘I die daily.’ ... His will and his desires every day conflicted with duty and the will of God. Instead of following inclination, he did God’s will, however crucifying to his nature.”<sup>125</sup>

The will and desires that Paul struggled with daily must not be construed as the will and desire to sin, or that his will and desires were manipulated by sin. To insist that this is so is to insist that Paul’s whole message of the sanctifying power of the gospel was a sham. “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:6). “For sin shall not have dominion over you” (verse 14). “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (chapter 8:2). “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). “I am crucified with Christ: [I am dead to sin; sin is no longer manipulating me]; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20).

The great apostle was as human as the rest of us in that his appetites sometimes tempted him to self-gratification.

We could believe that even the intrepid Paul was tempted to self-preservation when the necessity arose to fight with his malevolent foes, the “beasts at Ephesus” (1 Corinthians 15:32). But he would have beaten back the impulse that tended to obstruct him in what he saw as his duty.

We can imagine the scholarly apostle often having to resist the impulse to spend more time than he should with “the

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124 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 452.

125 *Ibid.*, pp. 452, 453.

## Examining a Difficult Concept

books, but especially the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13) when duty demanded that he travel over rough and hazardous ways to preach the gospel. To him the impulse to study under such circumstances would be opposing or obstructing him in his duty, which impulse he had to turn over to Jesus.

We wonder what part was played by offending faculties when Paul and Barnabas had their sharp contentions (Acts 15:39) over John Mark? The Greek term rendered “contention was so sharp” suggests an angry dispute.

A most interesting light is cast on the incident related in Acts 23:1–5 by the Spirit of Prophecy:

Paul was taken before the Sanhedrin to answer to the accusation of having defiled the Temple (chapter 22:30). When he made a statement that was highly offensive to the high priest, that official gave orders that the apostle be struck on the mouth. Ellen White writes that Paul “was indignant at the insult, and said, to the cruel actor, ‘Sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?’ Paul had not then become as meek and lowly as his Master.”<sup>126</sup>

This last comment is illuminating, not only in that it reveals that Paul allowed an element of his “offending nature” to arise, for which he was immediately repentant, as his response indicates when he learned that he was talking to the high priest. It also underscores an aspect of sanctification that we shall be considering in chapters to follow.

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126 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, Jan. 23, 1900.

## Christ and “The Sinless Consequences of Sin”

**B**ORN-AGAIN people have “offending natures,” which cause “spiritual or moral difficulty” and which “oppress or obstruct in duty,” to repeat the definition we have adopted.

We have offered evidence that Jesus had a nature identical with human beings—born-again human beings, that is. And Satan recognized Jesus as a real human being, as well as God. He approached Him with the assumption that He would be susceptible to the same type of temptations all men respond to, as the gospel accounts reveal. “Satan showed his knowledge of the weak points of the human heart, and put forth his utmost power to take advantage of the humanity which Christ had assumed in order to overcome his temptations on man’s account.”<sup>127</sup>

Accepting this statement, we continue consideration of the Ellen White statement that Jesus had “the offending nature of man.” Meanwhile, I would emphasize as forcefully as language can that not for a solitary moment do I wish to convey the idea that Jesus was altogether such an one as ourselves. He was the God-man (we are studying the *human* nature of Christ), and because He was this, we can never fully comprehend His nature. However, there are a few significant differences between Him and human beings that we can grasp to a degree, which underscore the dissimilarity.

Harry Johnson points up one difference with clarity, in these words: “The only kind of temptation Jesus did not face [was] *temptation that springs from previous acts of sin.*”<sup>128</sup>

127 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1875.

128 Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour*, p. 119. (Italics supplied.)

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An individual who has been born again, especially one who is in adulthood when he experiences that transformation, knows how very strong may be the opposing pull of “previous acts of sin,” of habit, particularly during the early stages of the new experience. Those habitual sins act as a sort of flywheel that keeps on spinning long after the motor has been turned off.

All of us have to some degree, this sort of “flywheel” to go against, but Jesus had none. (Yet the fact that the “flywheel” of previous acts of sin exists is no excuse for sinning.)

A second difference was suggested in the previous chapter. Jesus, in His human nature, stood at the ultimate peak of a spiritual Everest by virtue of His utter sinlessness. Born-again people are striving toward the Exemplar. Until they shall reflect His image fully, they will sometimes manifest moral flaws.

There is a third difference between Jesus and us that may be regarded as a flywheel sometimes powerfully impelling Him to act. Christ was always divine, and could use His divinity at any moment. Thus “it was as difficult for Him to keep the level of humanity as for men to rise above the low level of their depraved natures, and be partakers of the divine nature.”<sup>129</sup>

Using that divine nature would not have been sin.

But it would have been employing an advantage we do not possess. To do that would have thwarted the whole object of the Incarnation, for Christ came to show that man could overcome as man, trusting in divine power alone.

Having acknowledged these differences, we will leave a fuller treatment of them to subsequent chapters (see chapters 10–13).

Let us now look at the term “offending nature” as applied to Jesus.

Even though it is possible to show that Jesus had a nature identical with human beings, is it possible to demonstrate, on the basis of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, that He had “the offending nature of man”?

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129 The *SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Heb. 4:15, p. 930.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

### SATAN USES INNOCENT DESIRES

Jesus did have a nature, and a body, in no way different from ours. He had human faculties in no way dissimilar to ours. He had the same natural desires we have, which though innocent, may be used by Satan to tempt to wrong. And, having the same faculties and the same needs, He was subject to the same temptations we are subjected to. As E. K. A. Riehm observed, the “flesh and blood, in which Christ took part ... is the human corporeal nature weakened through the curse of sin, receptive of all outward impressions tending to tempt or to cause pain, and liable to death.”<sup>130</sup>

That Jesus might be said to possess an “offending nature” as here defined is understood as we examine the intensity of His trials, movingly and vividly described in Hebrews 5:7–10: “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; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.”

### INFIRMITIES AND TEMPTATION

A reason for the mental and spiritual agony of Jesus, dimly described in these words, which refer probably especially to His Gethsemane experience, is that, because He was in no way different from us, except for sin, He was able to “be touched with the feeling of our infirmities [weaknesses]” (chapter 4:15). *The International Critical Commentary* says that the “infirmities” of our text—which someone has defined as “the sinless consequences of sin”—“are the sources of temptation.”<sup>131</sup> We thus conclude that Jesus experienced as we do the trials and temptations associated with moral and physical vulnerabilities, and, as one writer commented, “probably also ... the disagreeable effects resulting from it”—all of which focuses, once again, on the suggestion

130 E. K. A. Riehm, quoted in Harry Johnson, op.cit., p. 121.

131 James Moffatt, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, *The International Critical Commentary*, p. 59.

## Christ and “The Sinless Consequences of Sin”

that Jesus’ “offending nature” was a nature with weaknesses that brought Him distressing temptations as they do to each child of God, and tended to opposition and obstruction in His duty.

*The Expositor’s Greek Testament* forcefully supports this idea in its comments on Hebrews 4:15: “The writer [of Hebrews] wishes to preclude the common fancy that there was some peculiarity in Jesus which made His temptation wholly different from ours, that He was a mailed champion exposed to toy arrows. On the contrary, He has felt in His own consciousness the difficulty of being righteous in this world; has felt pressing upon Himself the reasons and inducements that incline men to choose sin that they may escape suffering and death; in every part of His human constitution has known the pain and conflict with which alone temptation can be overcome; has been so tempted that had He sinned, He would have had a thousandfold better excuse than ever man had.”<sup>132</sup>

“It is impossible for man to know the strength of Satan’s temptations to the Son of God,” wrote Ellen White. “Every temptation that seems so afflicting to man in his daily life, so difficult to resist and overcome, was brought to bear upon the Son of God in as much greater degree as His excellence of character was superior to that of fallen man.”<sup>133</sup>

Doubtless we need not once more remind ourselves that, in all of the weight of temptations growing out of the moral and physical vulnerabilities He bore in common with us, not in one instance did He sin in the minutest degree or feel the minutest inclination to do so.

Referring to Jesus as a child, Ellen White states that although He was “enticed to evil, He refused to depart in a single instance from the strictest truth and rectitude.”<sup>134</sup> Clearly implicit in this statement is the idea that temptations pressed upon Him through His weakened “offending” faculties—offending in the sense that by them sin was able to endeavor to appeal to Him. As the Son of God, sensitive as no human being could be to

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132 W. R. Nicholl, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 4, p. 284.

133 E. G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, April 5, 1883.

134 *Ibid.*, July 30, 1896.

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the loathsomeness of sin, He would happily have been fully insulated from enticements seeking to speak to Him through His faculties. “The refined sensibilities of His holy nature rendered contact with evil unspeakably painful to Him.”<sup>135</sup> “As the sinless one His nature recoiled from evil; He endured struggles and torture of soul in a world of sin.”<sup>136</sup> “The human nature of Christ was like unto ours, and suffering was more keenly felt by Him; for His spiritual nature was free from every taint of sin. *Therefore His desire for the removal of suffering was stronger than human beings can experience.*”<sup>137</sup>

The following words, describing the experience the Christian may have, also portray the experience Christ did have: “Although there may be a tainted, corrupted atmosphere around us, we need not breathe its miasma, but may live in the pure air of heaven. We may close every door [the sinful channels of an “offending nature”] to impure imaginings and unholy thoughts by lifting the soul into the presence of God through sincere prayer.”<sup>138</sup>

### **JESUS’ FACULTIES CAUSED HIM DIFFICULTIES**

That Jesus’ faculties of body and mind might be avenues to “spiritual or moral difficulty”—as ours are—is forcefully implied in this statement: “Every enticement to evil, which men find so difficult to resist, was brought to bear upon the Son of God in as much greater degree as His character was superior to that of fallen man.”<sup>139</sup> Again, “The life of Christ was a perpetual warfare against Satanic agencies. ... Satan assailed Christ through every conceivable form of temptation.”<sup>140</sup>

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135 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Heb. 2:18, p. 927.

136 E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 93, 94.

137 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Matthew 26:42, p. 1104. (Italics supplied.)

138 E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 99.

139 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 88.

140 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Matthew 4:1–11, p. 1080.

## Christ and “The Sinless Consequences of Sin”

Perhaps the most convenient way to perceive how Jesus had an “offending nature” bringing “spiritual or moral difficulty” and situations that tended to “oppose or obstruct in duty” is to examine a number of His experiences recorded in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

Pulling back the curtain a little from “the hidden years in Nazareth,” *The Desire of Ages* describes incidents and conditions in the life of the child Jesus that suggest such problems. “While He was a child, He thought and spoke as a child; but no trace of sin marred the image of God within Him. Yet He was not exempt from temptation. The inhabitants of Nazareth were proverbial for their wickedness. ... Jesus was placed where His character would be tested. It was necessary for Him to be constantly on guard in order to preserve His purity. He was subject to all the conflicts which we have to meet, that He might be an example to us in childhood, youth, and manhood.”<sup>141</sup>

The author goes on, in the same chapter, to make a number of observations that accord with our premise: “So far as possible, He closed the door to the tempter. Neither gain nor pleasure, applause nor censure, could induce Him to consent to a wrong act. He was wise to discern evil, and strong to resist it.”<sup>142</sup>

Here the implications that Jesus had a nature with the potential for “spiritual or moral difficulty,” which could “oppose or obstruct in duty,” come through clearly. His closing of the door to the tempter can tell us nothing else than that His faculties, such as of hearing and seeing, were used by Satan to bombard Him with stimuli appealing to His “fallen human nature.” He was, then, truly tempted.

“Unless there is a possibility of yielding, temptation is no temptation. Temptation is resisted when man is powerfully influenced to do a wrong action; and, knowing that he can do it, resists, by faith, with a firm hold upon divine power. *This was the ordeal through which Christ passed.*”<sup>143</sup> (Note that this

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141 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 71.

142 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

143 \_\_\_\_\_, in *The Youth's Instructor*, July 20, 1899. (Italics supplied.)

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quotation strongly suggests that although Jesus was “powerfully influenced” to do wrong, He was not inclined to do wrong.)

We note the channels through which Satan tried to appeal to Jesus: gain, pleasure, applause, censure. These are some of the major means by which the tempter appeals to every human being, and by which we fall so easily.

“Jesus shunned display. During all the years of His stay in Nazareth, He made no exhibition of His miraculous power. He sought no high position and assumed no titles.”<sup>144</sup>

Sensing the powers He possessed as He associated with His young companions and older people, surely Jesus was tempted to display them. But as swiftly as the temptations flashed into His mind He expelled them.

Later, through the wilderness temptations, Satan brought to bear upon the humanity of the Saviour an enormity of pressure such as apparently was not repeated until three and a half years later, in Gethsemane and upon the cross.

The Gospels’ descriptions of Jesus’ contest with Satan in the wilderness are so brief and unemotionally factual (Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1–13) that we can easily fail to grasp the intensity of what He suffered.

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:1–3).

Jesus knew what to expect in the wilderness, and He dreaded it. “His human nature shrank from the conflict that awaited Him.”<sup>145</sup> On the other hand, Ellen White refers to the temptations themselves thus: “The enticements which Christ resisted were those that we find it so difficult to withstand.”<sup>146</sup>

144 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 74.

145 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

146 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

## Christ and “The Sinless Consequences of Sin”

How vividly the first quotation suggests the cravings of Jesus’ humanity to flee from what would seem to be an uneven contest. Thus, in effect, it became an obstruction to Him, an instrument to turn Him away from the path that He must tread to be the Redeemer of mankind.

On the other hand, when Satan tempted Him, he appealed to His humanity with the type of allurements that so readily bring about the downfall of men. Thus our Redeemer’s humanity was caught by the two sides of a vise, one side being a contest with the evil one against which His humanity was so frail, and the other, those allurements and challenges that were so successful in appealing to human vanity and ambition.

### **DESPONDENCY, HUNGER, AND TEMPTATION**

Satan “hoped that under the force of despondency and extreme hunger, Christ would lose faith in His Father, and work a miracle in His own behalf.”<sup>147</sup> We see here how Satan counted on Jesus’ “offending nature,” those human weaknesses that would tend to obstruct Him in His loyalty to His Father, to overcome Him. Ellen White’s comments on the temptation with respect to appetite are illuminating: “It was in the time of greatest weakness that Christ was assailed by the fiercest temptations. Thus Satan thought to prevail. By this policy he had gained the victory over men. When strength failed, and the will power weakened, and faith ceased to repose in God, then those who had stood long and valiantly for the right were overcome.”<sup>148</sup>

After illustrating her point by referring to a wearied Moses striking the rock, and a spent Elijah fleeing from Jezebel, she says: “Thus Satan has taken advantage of the weakness of humanity. ... Often the tempter comes to us as he came to Christ, arraying before us our weakness and infirmities. He hopes to discourage the soul, and to break our hold on God.”<sup>149</sup>

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147 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

148 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

149 *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 121.

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### A CONTROL STRONGER THAN DEATH

The strength of the appeal of appetite upon Jesus' "offending nature" is evidenced by these quotations: "Christ, in behalf of the race, was to overcome appetite by standing the most powerful test upon this point."<sup>150</sup> "He must show a power of control over appetite stronger than hunger and even death."<sup>151</sup> "The strength of the temptation to indulge perverted appetite can be measured only by the inexpressible anguish of Christ in that long fast in the wilderness."<sup>152</sup>

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Matthew 4:5, 6).

The first temptation was an appeal to an insistent physical need for food. In meeting the temptation Jesus showed that no matter how great His need, He would not provide for it in ways that men could not; He would not perform a miracle for Himself but would trust in His Father to supply His need. The tempter now uses that very trust as a springboard for the next temptation: "Your faith in God is laudable. Here, now, on the pinnacle of the Temple, is Your chance to prove that You do, indeed, have such faith. Just demonstrate it by jumping off. Show what You can do if You are the Son of God!"

"Jesus would not place Himself in peril to please the devil. But how many today can stand a dare?" Ellen White inquires.<sup>153</sup>

### THE TEMPTATION TO PROVE A POINT

How strong to prideful man can be the temptation to do something he knows he can do, to prove something he knows

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150 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book I, pp. 271, 272.

151 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

152 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 486.

153 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Matthew 4:5, 6, p. 1083.

## Christ and “The Sinless Consequences of Sin”

he can prove, when only inward restraints inhibit him. Similarly how strong must have been the temptation to Jesus to prove His divinity. But He saw that such an act would be presumptuous, and turned aside the temptation with a Bible text. When Satan tempts men to presumption, he succeeds “nine times out of ten.”<sup>154</sup> But Jesus subdued the human proneness to respond; He resisted the pull of those human qualities that tended to obstruct Him in His duty, and was utterly true to His Father’s will.

“Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:8, 9).

One quotation will suffice to show how potentially appealing to Jesus’ “offending nature” was the scene before Him, and how He realized the necessity of giving that nature not the slightest opportunity to obstruct Him in His task:

“The eyes of Jesus for a moment rested upon the glory presented before Him; but He turned away and refused to look upon the entrancing spectacle. He would not endanger His steadfast integrity by dallying with the tempter.”<sup>155</sup>

In these words is the key to the secret of Jesus’ success in defeating Satan and temptation—He never gave His weak, fallen nature a chance. Here is a vital lesson we must learn or we shall inevitably be defeated.

Here is one final statement in connection with the wilderness temptation of Jesus to press home the possibility of His human nature failing under the frightful pressure of temptation. “Angels of heaven were on the scene on that occasion, and kept the standard uplifted, that Satan should not exceed his bounds and overpower the human nature of Christ.”<sup>156</sup> “Human power

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154 E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 44.

155 \_\_\_\_\_, *Confrontation*, p. 52.

156 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book I, p. 95.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

was ready to fail”<sup>157</sup> But our Saviour, veiled in weak human flesh as we are in human flesh, tempted as no human being was ever tempted, with no advantages we may not have, met all the allurements, the subtleties, the pressures, that Satan could devise. And never once, never for a moment, did He fail.

Think of that again. Include all the years Jesus had to meet Satan’s other temptations, temptations that slip upon one sidewise, as it were—that seek to edge into a weak spot before one is aware of it. Or great, sledgehammer tests that aim to demolish all the barriers at once while one feels impotent to resist them. Or the eroding, day-after-day, nagging trials that tend to wear one down until there is no resistance left. Jesus suffered all of this, and infinitely more. In weak, human flesh.

When the significance of this sinks in, we are confounded, overwhelmed. For He took the risk of eternal failure for you and me.

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157 *Ibid.*

## The Offense of the Cross

THE time of Jesus' "days of his flesh" (Hebrews 5:7) moved rapidly toward a close. With the grim shadow of the cross resolving swiftly into reality, Jesus began to prepare His disciples, as much as possible, for His own death and the terrible test that would overtake them. He "began ... to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of me" (Matthew 16:21–23).

In explaining this situation, Ellen White says, "Peter loved his Lord; but Jesus did not commend him for thus manifesting the desire to shield Him from suffering."<sup>158</sup> "Satan was trying to discourage Jesus, and turn Him from His mission. ... In the wilderness, Satan had offered Christ the dominion of the world on condition of forsaking the path of humiliation and sacrifice. ... Through Peter, Satan was again pressing the temptation upon Jesus. ... The path of Christ on earth lay through agony and humiliation."<sup>159</sup>

Peter's words, instigated by Satan, were calculated to appeal to those aspects of Jesus' humanity that would cause Him to shrink from the humiliation, the scorn, the physical and mental agony, the separation from His Father, the drinking of the cup of the second death, which He clearly knew were

158 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 415.

159 *Ibid.*, p. 416.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

before Him. It was an appeal to those faculties that could tend “to oppose or obstruct in duty.” (M. L. Andreasen comments: “The sharp rebuke to Peter, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan,’ is most revealing as to Christ’s inner temptations, perhaps unsuspected by others.”<sup>160</sup>)

### **SATAN APPEALS TO JESUS’ HUMAN NATURE**

Satan was, in effect, repeating what he had suggested during the third wilderness temptation: “You know what is coming. You are going to be let down by the only so-called friends you have. You are going to be given a farce of a trial, shamed, tortured. You know what death on a Roman cross is like. That’s what is coming. Really! Do You want to go through all that when You can so easily get out of it? Don’t be foolish.”

Christ did not for a moment entertain the thought.

Firmly, immediately, He turned from the temptation, for He knew the weakness of His human nature that could divert Him from His mission.

Surely there is a clear message for us here.

The words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 16:24, which immediately follow His rebuke of Peter, are frequently used to teach the spiritual lesson of absolute self-sacrifice and self-denial. And this is certainly the cardinal lesson there. But for Jesus it had a very literal meaning also. “Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”

The cross, we are told, “was the instrument of the most cruel and humiliating form of death. The lowest criminals were required to bear the cross to the place of execution.”<sup>161</sup>

Is it possible for our imaginations to grasp the concept: the majesty of heaven, the King of kings and Lord of lords, bearing a cross in abject ignominy like the lowest criminal? The human sense of self-respect, of dignity, would find such a humiliation utterly repugnant, to say nothing of the expectation of the frightful agony of that most terrible instrument of

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160 M. L. Andreasen, *The Book of Hebrews* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), p. 180.

161 E. G. White, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

## The Offense of the Cross

torture and death. Would not that sense of dignity, or self-respect, and that frightful expectation of the cross, tempt Him to tear Himself away from the disgrace and agony, and escape, thus potentially opposing and obstructing Him in the path of duty laid out for Him? Again the words of Inspiration help us answer the question: Christ's "holy and undefined human nature was deeply sensitive to the disgrace of being 'numbered with the transgressors.'"<sup>162</sup>

"And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). This is another passage that implies Jesus had an "offending nature." Isaiah 50 contains a prophecy of the Messiah; verse 7 reads, "therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." The fulfillment of this prophecy is recorded in Luke 9:51.

The term "to set the face as a flint" denotes determination, and determination implies a resoluteness in the face of obstacles. *The Expositor's Greek Testament* tells us that Jesus went to Jerusalem "as if to meet something formidable and unwelcome."<sup>163</sup>

Clearly there comes through these ideas the concept that certain qualities in Jesus' human nature caused Him to quake inwardly at the fearful conflict before Him, and had He consulted His feelings He might have become discouraged and failed. But "He set His face steadfastly to go to persecution, denial, rejection, condemnation, and death."<sup>164</sup> "For the joy that was set before him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). He "endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (verse 3).

We come now to Gethsemane. The struggles of Jesus during His wilderness temptations were terrible. We can never appreciate how terrible. But as we read the brief but intense descriptions by the Gospel writers of the Divine Sufferer wrung

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162 \_\_\_\_\_, *Review and Herald*, Nov. 20, 1883.

163 W. R. Nicholl, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 1, p. 535.

164 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 486.

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by His mysterious agony in the Garden shadows, we are led dimly to realize that here was a woe greater even than those in the wilderness—a woe infinitely deep, beyond the scope of the imagination of any being besides God Himself. And the superhuman struggle was carried on by the Saviour in *His weak human flesh*.

Could He have borne the battle in the unfallen nature of an angel, even of an unfallen Adam, it would have been dreadful beyond thought. But it was carried on by a nature bearing “the infirmities and degeneracy of the race,”<sup>165</sup> a nature that was “identical with our own”<sup>166</sup> when we have been born again, “with the same susceptibilities, mental and physical,” that we have.<sup>167</sup> Under the impact of this thought we can only marvel in uncomprehending awe and amazement—with a gratitude inexpressible that in that nature He did not fail. What we who stand at last before the throne of our Redeemer shall owe to Him, all eternity will not be able to unfold, or our songs be able to express, into the ages of the ages!

### HUMANITY SHRINKS FROM A FEARFUL ORDEAL

“And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane. ... And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death” (Mark 14:32–34). “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:41, 42). “And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (verses 43, 44).

Commenting on this, Ellen White says, “We need to realize the truth of Christ’s manhood in order to appreciate the truth

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165 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 268.

166 E. G. White, manuscript 94, 1893.

167 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Feb. 10, 1885.

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of the above words.”<sup>168</sup> And again we are confronted with a love and a mystery that exceeds our minds and our hearts: as a Man, compassed in human weakness, the infinite God was able to take the guilt of the whole race and bear the awful penalty of that guilt. Deity suffered in humanity the retribution called for by your sins and mine. How could that be? In response we can but bow our hearts in wordless wonder, accept, and be glad. For by that He made our salvation possible.

The shrinkings and sufferings of human nature under the awful ordeal are unmistakable in these words of Luke. But beyond what is clearly sensed in the reading, no comments or analysis by exegete or Greek scholar can cast any extensive illumination on the woeful picture. For what human mind or human breast can even faintly comprehend the superhuman agony and sorrow that racked the heart of Christ? Language is utterly inadequate to picture it, and the human heart too shallow to understand the agonies of Him who tasted the sufferings of death for every man. Only words of divine inspiration can begin to reveal the effects of the torturing experience on Jesus’ human nature.

The chapter “Gethsemane” in the book *The Desire of Ages* describes with deep and moving poignancy the awful sufferings of the God-man: the sensing of the withdrawal of the Father’s presence because of the sins He bore as man’s substitute; the supernatural sadness that possessed Him; the looming up before Him of a gulf of separation from the Father “so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shudders before it.” “This agony,” we read, “He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.”<sup>169</sup>

“As Christ felt His unity with the Father broken up, He feared that in His human nature He would be unable to endure the coming conflict with the powers of darkness.”<sup>170</sup>

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168 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Luke 22:44, p. 1124.

169 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 686.

170 *Ibid.*

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Then are described the thoughts pressed upon Him by Satan that spoke so forcefully to His “offending nature”—those aspects of human weakness that would tend to turn Him away from the path of agony, sacrifice, and death upon which He had set His feet. “And what was to be gained by this sacrifice? How hopeless appeared the guilt and ingratitude of man! In its hardest features Satan pressed the situation upon the Redeemer.”<sup>171</sup>

“Terrible was the temptation to let the human race bear the consequences of its own guilt, while He stood innocent before God.”<sup>172</sup>

“The humanity of the Son of God trembled in that trying hour. He prayed not now for His disciples that their faith might not fail, but for His own tempted, agonized soul. The awful moment had come—that moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. Christ might even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man. It was not yet too late. ... The words fall tremblingly from the pale lips of Jesus, ‘O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.’”<sup>173</sup>

### “THY WILL BE DONE!”

The human nature of Christ was like unto ours, and suffering was more keenly felt by Him; for His spiritual nature was free from every taint of sin. *Therefore His desire for the removal of suffering was stronger than human beings can experience.* How intense was the desire of the humanity of Christ to escape the displeasure of an offended God ... is revealed in the words, ‘O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.’”<sup>174</sup>

In Gethsemane the decision was made, the die was cast. Jesus came forth from the awful struggle calm in the certainty that He would go through to the end, whatever it might be.

171 *Ibid.*, p. 687.

172 *Ibid.*, p. 688.

173 *Ibid.*, p. 690.

174 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Matthew 26:42, p. 1104. (Italics supplied.)

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From that time the weakness of His humanity was overborne by a will so utterly identified with the Father's that it was irresistible. No temptation, no torture, could turn Him from the way He had irreversibly chosen. And though His humanity still felt the indignity, the scorn, the taunts, the abuse, the hatred focused upon Him, never did He waver before them. Calmly, serenely, He bore it all.

Following Gethsemane, only once did the frailty of His humanity momentarily show through. The hours of torture on the cross had dragged on, and the end drew near. A cloud of dense blackness enveloped the scene. "In the thick darkness, God veiled the last human agony of His Son."<sup>175</sup> "It was a symbol of the agony and horror that weighed upon His [Christ's] heart. No eye ... could penetrate the deeper gloom that enshrouded the suffering soul of Christ. ["Even doubts assailed the dying Son of God. He could not see through the portals of the tomb."<sup>176</sup>] ... Then 'Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, ... "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"'"<sup>177</sup>

That was feeling. It was His humanity responding to the terrible gulf of separation between Himself and His Father made by the sins of humanity borne by Him.

"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46).

That was faith.

And so Jesus Christ, fully God yet fully man, triumphed in His weak humanity over all the hideous forces of demons and men arrayed against Him; He conquered even the "offending" weaknesses of His own humanity that tempted Him to turn aside from the way of suffering, separation, and death. And again we can only stand and marvel at the magnitude of that triumph in uncomprehending awe and amazement.

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175 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 754.

176 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 15, 1883.

177 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 754.

# Sin's Effects But Not Sin's Guilt

WE have been considering at length one phrase that Ellen White uses in discussing Jesus' human nature—He had “the offending nature of man.” In this chapter we shall look briefly at other terms that Ellen White used to refer to Jesus' human nature. (See chapter six.)

Christ “took upon Himself fallen suffering human nature, *degraded and defiled by sin.*”<sup>178</sup> He “took human nature, and bore the *infirmities and degeneracy* of the race.”<sup>179</sup> “Christ, who knew not the least taint of sin or defilement, *took our nature in its deteriorated condition.*”<sup>180</sup> “*He took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature.*”<sup>181</sup>

These are among the most difficult statements found in the Spirit of Prophecy relative to Christ's human nature.

In considering these statements let us reiterate and reinforce the fact that they are totally disconnected from any relationship with sin as a spiritual or moral influence. They have only to do with the effects of sin upon Christ's human nature and human body.

“The Son of God humbled Himself and took man's nature after the race had wandered four thousand years from Eden, and from their original state of purity and uprightness. Sin had been making its terrible marks

178 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Isaiah 53:2, 3, p. 1147. (Italics supplied.)

179 *Ibid.*, on Matthew 4:1–11, p. 1081. (Italics supplied.)

180 E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 253. (Italics supplied.)

181 \_\_\_\_\_, *Medical Ministry*, p. 181. (Italics supplied.)

## Sin's Effects But Not Sin's Guilt

upon the race for ages; and physical, mental, and moral degeneracy prevailed throughout the human family. ... Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man. In behalf of the race, with the weaknesses of fallen man upon Him, He was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed. ... Since the Fall the race had been decreasing in size and physical strength, and sinking lower in the scale of moral worth, up to the period of Christ's advent to the earth. And in order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him where he was. He took human nature, and bore the infirmities and degeneracy of the race."<sup>182</sup>

"For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation."<sup>183</sup>

### ILLUSTRATING EFFECTS WITHOUT GUILT

As we have seen, the nature that Christ took was one affected by sin just as fully as our natures are touched by sin, and in that sense was a sinful nature. Yet He had no sin. One sense in which this may be so is suggested by an illustration used by Raymond F. Cottrell:

A man is driving down a street in his automobile, observing all the signs and keeping below the speed limit. Suddenly, another car barrels out from a side street, its driver having ignored a stop sign, and rams into him. The first car is badly battered. Headlights are broken. The front fender and much of the side of the car is smashed. The doors are buckled and the glass shattered. Even the frame of the car is bent somewhat.

The smashed car and its driver have suffered the effects of lawbreaking, but the driver has broken no law, has incurred no guilt.

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182 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, July 28, 1874.

183 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

So with Jesus. Genuinely taking upon Himself humanity as it was affected by four thousand years of sin, He experienced the effects of sin mentally, physically, emotionally. Christ's "human nature was created; it did not even possess the angelic powers. It was human, identical with our own. ...

"A human body and a human mind were His. He was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. ... Christ came to live the law in His human character in just that way in which all may live the law in human nature if they will do as Christ was doing."<sup>184</sup>

Thus, the "fallen ... human nature, degraded and defiled by sin," the "degeneracy" He assumed, the "nature in its deteriorated condition" He had, was a human nature affected by the sins of generations of sinful ancestors, of which sins He was guiltless.

Here is perhaps the most difficult of all statements in the Spirit of Prophecy that refer to the human nature of Jesus; "Though He had all the strength of passion of humanity, never did He yield to temptation to do one single act which was not pure and elevating and ennobling."<sup>185</sup>

The first part of that statement seems to become more difficult when placed beside another: "He is a brother in our infirmities, but not in possessing like passions."<sup>186</sup> There appears to be a contradiction here.

### WHAT DOES THE TERM "PASSION" MEAN?

What is the meaning of the term "passion"? The answer that probably comes to the minds of many is something like this: a strong, compelling emotion, such as rage, lust, hatred, avarice, and so on.

But the term is basically neutral and refers primarily to feelings and emotions, as distinguished from reason.

The last week of Jesus' life before His crucifixion is sometimes called Passion Week. The term refers, of course, not to the kinds of feelings mentioned above but to the mental and

184 Ellen G. White, manuscript 94, 1893.

185 E. G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 155.

186 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 202; cf. pp. 508, 509.

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physical sufferings that Christ underwent before and during His crucifixion.

Thus, it is only in context that we know whether passion itself is good or bad, sinful or innocent.

As we have suggested, most of us are inclined to think of the word “passion” as having a negative, possibly sinful, connotation. In forming connotations, we sometimes “jump the gun,” and draw unwarranted conclusions.

Bearing in mind, then, that the term is actually a neutral one, let us consider one of Ellen White's descriptions of man as God created him: “Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character. ... His nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things. His affections were pure; his appetites *and passions* were under the control of reason.”<sup>187</sup>

This is a description of man *before* sin entered. Our first parents were endowed at creation with passions that, being under the control of holy reason, were good, pure, sinless, although they had the potential for sin if not under control.

We may perhaps illustrate this potential by contrasting normal, healthy body cells and cancer cells. Normal cells are controlled cells; cancer cells may be similar cells, but uncontrolled. The passion “cells” of Adam and Eve were, initially, controlled. It was not until our first parents disobeyed that the passions became renegade, “cells” gone awry.

Here is another Ellen White statement that should help solve our problem.

“Life is a gift of God. Our bodies have been given us to use in God's service, and He desires that we shall care for and appreciate them. We are possessed of physical as well as mental faculties. Our impulses *and passions* have their seat in the body, and therefore we must do nothing that would defile this entrusted possession. Our bodies must be kept in the best possible condition physically, and under the most spiritual influences, in order that we may make the best use of our talents.”<sup>188</sup>

187 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45. (Italics supplied.)

188 \_\_\_\_\_, *Counsels on Health*, p. 41. (Italics supplied.)

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Here again the term “passion” is used in a neutral sense, referring to feelings and emotions as previously defined. Thus, appetite itself is good and a gift of God, as is sex, a sense of self-worth, and so on. If these are properly used and not permitted to get out of hand, that is good. No defilement results. If they are permitted to get out of hand, there is defilement.

Very well. We have seen that man was created with passions that could be good or bad, depending on his own choices. Now, let us consider one more word, “strength.” Let us say that man was created with “strength of passion.”

When the word is considered as a neutral term, we have no problem. It does not connote sin to us. It simply tells us that man had, and still has, strong passions. The direction they take depends on his control of them.

### PASSION AND SELF-CONTROL

But now we come full circle to the problem statement we noted at the beginning: Christ, “had all the strength of passion of humanity.” In the sense of our study, they were neutral passions. The direction those passions took depended upon His control of them. And we have clearly seen that His was a life of absolute control of those attributes that He inherited through His forebears, attributes that *could* manifest themselves in feelings or acts of sin. Never did those passions take a sinful direction because never did He permit the temptations showered upon Him to tip them in the direction of sin in any particular.

We must still consider the second statement quoted above, that seemed to contradict the first: “He is a brother in our infirmities, but not in possessing like passions.”

It seems that the word is used here, not in a neutral sense, but in the sense of *sinful* passions. For immediately after that statement, Ellen White added, “As the sinless One, His nature recoiled from evil.” The same idea is expressed in connection with a similar statement made on pages 508 and 509 of the same volume.

When we experience difficulty with the phrase “all the strength of passion of humanity” as applied to Jesus, it is because of inaccurate connotation on our part; it does not imply any bent toward wrongfulness on the part of Jesus. It does reiterate His humanness.

# PART 3

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## Implications Applications Explanations



# Where Men and Jesus Meet

**J**ESUS CHRIST came to our earth as a unique being, from the viewpoint of His humanity alone and even without taking into account His virgin birth. In His uniqueness He was at the same time *like* the unfallen Adam and *unlike* the unfallen Adam. He was *like* us and *unlike* us.

He was *like* the unfallen Adam in that both were sinless, without a taint of sin. “The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him.”<sup>189</sup> “There were no corrupt principles in the first Adam, no corrupt propensities or tendencies to evil”<sup>190</sup> And the second Adam did not “for one moment [possess] ... an evil propensity.”<sup>191</sup> “He was unsullied with corruption, a stranger to sin.”<sup>192</sup>

Jesus was *unlike* the unfallen Adam in that He came with a “fallen human nature.” “He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin.”<sup>193</sup> Adam was created totally unaffected by sin in any respect.

Jesus was *like* the rest of humanity in that He did join the race with a fallen human nature such as we have. He was *unlike* us in that He was without a taint of sin. “His spiritual nature was free from every taint of sin.”<sup>194</sup>

189 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:1–3, 14, p. 1128.

190 E. G. White, letter 191, 1899.

191 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:1–3, 14, p. 1128.

192 E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 508.

193 \_\_\_\_\_, in *The Youth's Instructor*, Dec. 20, 1900.

194 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Dec. 9, 1897.

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Through a life of continual victory, possible because He depended implicitly upon His Father, Jesus preserved Himself from all sin in order that we, like Him, might be partakers of His Spirit and overcome every propensity to sin. “We need not retain one sinful propensity.”<sup>195</sup>

### MAKING OUR RESCUE POSSIBLE

Through His death and resurrection He was no longer encumbered by His fallen human nature, so subsequently, as a Man, He was forever glorified. By those experiences He made it possible for us, by dying to self and being recreated in Him, to be rescued from our fallen human natures and be glorified at last with Him.

Our comparison of the nature of man with the human nature that Jesus possessed may be expressed in another way. Man was like the human Jesus in one respect—both possessed “fallen human natures.” He was unlike Jesus in another respect—“Christ did not possess the same sinful, corrupt, fallen disloyalty we possess.”<sup>196</sup>

But the reason why Jesus condescended to become like us in the first respect is that we might become like Him in the second: “By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ.”<sup>197</sup> “What Christ was in His perfect humanity, we must be: for we must form characters for eternity.”<sup>198</sup>

### BY NATURE THE NEW-BORN MAN

In the foregoing three chapters we presented evidence to show that Jesus was, in His human nature, in no respect different from us, that He had “an offending nature” that permitted temptation and the infirmities of the flesh to affect Him as we are affected.

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195 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on 2 Peter 1:4, p. 943.

196 E. G. White, manuscript 94, 1893.

197 E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 506.

198 *Ibid.*, p. 173.

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From this point we turn again to our thesis that Jesus, in His humanity, may be described best as being like a born-again person. In chapter three we quoted a German theologian as saying that Jesus was “the true Son of man—needing no new birth, but by nature the new-born man.”

Jesus, with His “fallen human nature,” His “offending nature,” was yet the Apotheosis, the glorified Ideal, the perfect Type, of the born-again person: the ultimate, quintessential pattern Man of what man is to be and what he may become during this present life. “His life and character were the unfolding or representation of the perfection of the character that man may attain by becoming a partaker of the divine nature, and overcoming the world through daily conflicts.”<sup>199</sup> Christ “came not to our world to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater, but as a man to obey God’s Holy Law, and in this way He is our example.”<sup>200</sup>

Jesus became like us by taking our fallen human nature that we might become like Him in character by His imparting His character to us through His indwelling Spirit. “Through faith in Christ, every deficiency of character may be supplied, every defilement cleansed, every fault corrected, every excellence developed.”<sup>201</sup> Christ’s “perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.”<sup>202</sup>

How is it possible for this to take place? By an individual becoming a new person through the work of the Holy Spirit. The book *Steps to Christ* outlines the way clearly and logically: the Holy Spirit brings conviction, which leads to repentance, confession, and consecration, or surrender. And “when we submit [surrender] 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.”<sup>203</sup> When we surrender we are justified. “God

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199 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 114.

200 \_\_\_\_\_, *Our High Calling*, p. 48.

201 \_\_\_\_\_, *Education*, p. 257.

202 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664.

203 \_\_\_\_\_, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 312.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place.”<sup>204</sup>

### COMMON GROUND

Before a person is born again, Jesus draws him by His Spirit to the cross. When he is converted he meets his Saviour at the cross. It is at this point that Jesus' fallen human nature becomes meaningful for him. In his born-again condition, but still in his fallen human nature, he finds common ground with Jesus in *His* fallen human nature. The regenerated person is thus placed on vantage ground and can begin to live the kind of life Jesus lived. “Christ laid hold of the nature of man, and partook of the divine attributes, and planted His cross between humanity and divinity, bridging the gulf that separated the sinner from God.”<sup>205</sup>

Let us see how man's fallen human nature and Jesus' “fallen human nature” meet as man is lifted up and finds a new spiritual dimension through the new birth.

In the chapter “Divinity and Humanity Combined” I offered a description of the new birth: “The new birth is an experience which brings a total renunciation of self and a willing abandonment to God, permitting the Holy Spirit to pervade fully and direct completely the life. It brings an attitude of heart and mind in which God's way is happily sought and contentedly followed, of the individual's own volition as well as from a sense of loving obligation. In it is experienced a shunning and increasing abhorrence of sin in every known aspect. In the born-again person there is a recognition that full dependency on God is vital for sustained and complete victory.

“It is an experience in which it may be said that humanity and divinity have met in an individual” Note how readily, with a few grammatical modifications, that description may be applied to Christ:

In Christ we find a total renunciation of self and a willing abandonment to God, which permitted the Holy Spirit to pervade fully and direct completely His life. He had an attitude of heart and mind in which God's way was happily sought

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204 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 366.

205 *Ibid.*, p. 261.

## Where Men and Jesus Meet

and contentedly done of His own volition as well as from a sense of loving obligation. In His life was a recognition that full dependence on God was vital for sustained and complete victory. In Him humanity and divinity met.

### PARALLELS

We may emphasize the parallels in the attitude and experience of Jesus and the born-again person by a few biblical and Spirit of Prophecy quotations. We note a similarity:

**In the attitude of denial of self and abandonment to God:** “For even Christ pleased not himself” (Romans 15:3). “The life of Christ was one of poverty, self-denial, and privation.”<sup>206</sup> Christ’s “life was one of strict self-denial”<sup>207</sup>

To the born-again person, “there will be no self-denial or self-sacrifice that is grievous, for the heart delights in doing for Christ. ... When God has control of the affections, the mind will not be selfish, nor shrink from sacrifices.”<sup>208</sup> “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

**In being filled with the Holy Spirit:** “For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (John 3:34). “As a man He supplicated the throne of God till His humanity was charged with a heavenly current [by the Holy Spirit] that should connect humanity with divinity.”<sup>209</sup>

“His experience is to be ours.”<sup>210</sup> For those who consecrate themselves to God, “the inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind.”<sup>211</sup>

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206 \_\_\_\_\_, *Messages to Young People*, p. 79.

207 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 92.

208 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 2, 1875.

209 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

210 *Ibid.*

211 *Ibid.*, p. 827.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

**In both seeking to know God's way and in following it:** "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). "So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans."<sup>212</sup>

For the true Christian, "the will of God has become his will, pure, elevated, refined, and sanctified."<sup>213</sup>

**In an abhorrence of sin:** "As the sinless one His [Jesus'] nature recoiled from evil"<sup>214</sup> "Hating sin with a perfect hatred, He yet gathered to His soul the sins of the whole world."<sup>215</sup>

"In the renewed heart there is hatred of sin and determined resistance against it."<sup>216</sup> Youth who would give themselves to God "would learn to hate sin and to shun it, not merely from hope of reward or fear of punishment, but from a sense of its inherent baseness."<sup>217</sup>

**In a full dependence upon God:** "Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19). "Jesus lived in dependence upon God and communion with Him."<sup>218</sup> "Christ was dependent upon the Father, even as humanity is now dependent upon God."<sup>219</sup>

The truly born-again Christian will say, in total dependence, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). "He who learns of Christ is emptied of self, of pride, of love of supremacy, and there is silence in the soul. Self is yielded to the disposal of the Holy

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212 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

213 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on 1 Thess. 5:23, p. 909.

214 E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 93, 94.

215 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 322.

216 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Great Controversy*, p. 508.

217 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 601, 602.

218 \_\_\_\_\_, *Education*, p. 80.

219 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, July 3, 1907.

## Where Men and Jesus Meet

Spirit.”<sup>220</sup> In men and women who choose the will of God “it is no more themselves that live and act, but it is Christ that lives and acts through them.”<sup>221</sup>

**In both, humanity is combined with divinity:** “In Christ, divinity and humanity were combined.”<sup>222</sup>

God has given the Christian precious and very great promises, “that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). “Divinity and humanity are blended in him who has the spirit of Christ.”<sup>223</sup>

There are numerous other illustrations that might be noted to show how the regenerate person is like Jesus. But these must suffice. We realize that in each of these areas Jesus was unflawed while the born-again Christian sometimes falls short. We shall discuss this matter in the next two chapters.

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220 \_\_\_\_\_, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 15.

221 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 215.

222 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 408.

223 \_\_\_\_\_, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 24.

## The Meeting at the Cross

**B**Y concentrating mainly on one Spirit of Prophecy statement, that Jesus had an “offending nature,” and demonstrating what such a nature involved, I have tried to show that He did, indeed, possess a “fallen human nature” in every way like ours, except for sin. Because He had this very nature in common with man, He could meet man in a saving way. By taking “fallen human nature” Jesus could thereby meet with man on common ground in a redemptive manner, when a man became born again. That condescension of Jesus in the “days of his flesh” (Hebrews 5:7) makes it possible for Him to meet man today when the sinner responds to divine love and allows himself to be drawn to the cross.

The only place where Jesus can truly meet with man is at the cross. He can appeal to the sinner while he is far from Calvary; He can speak to him by the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit while other voices are clamoring loudly for, and receiving, attention; He can stretch out imploring arms wherever man may be. But the sinner can meet Jesus only when he comes to the cross.

When the sinner allows himself to be drawn to Calvary in repentance, confesses his sin, and surrenders to Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, he is justified. The Father then accepts that individual as He accepts the Son. The sinner has been raised from the tomb of transgression where he has been dead in sin; he has been lifted from the gulf of separation from God and made to stand with Christ.

God, “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath *raised us up together*, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5, 6, emphasis added). Or, as Phillips renders it, God “gave us life together with Christ ... and has

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

*lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with him in Christ Jesus in the Heavens.”*

### RAISED FROM THE DUST

“Through the cross the sinner was drawn from the stronghold of sin. ... At the cross he leaves his sins, and through the grace of Christ his character is transformed. The Redeemer raises the sinner from the dust, and places him under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>224</sup>

“After the fall, it had been impossible for man with his sinful nature to render obedience to the law of God, had not Christ, by the offer of His own life, purchased the right to *lift up the race where they could once more work in harmony with its requirements.*”<sup>225</sup> Obedience becomes possible, then, only through a miracle that changes the desires, inclinations, and motives.

Christ “was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed. ... And in order to elevate man, Christ must reach him where he was. He took human nature, and bore the infirmities and degeneracy of the race. ... He humiliated Himself ... *that He might be qualified to reach man and bring him up from the degradation in which sin had plunged him.*”<sup>226</sup>

In several previous chapters in this book, we have been concentrating on Jesus in His sinless but “fallen human nature.” We have been highlighting the salient fact that He had “to be made like ... his brethren [in all things]”, and was “in all points tempted like as we are” (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15). We have emphasized that He took all of the human faculties we have, as we have them, weakened by many thousands of years of transgression by His ancestors—that He took our “infirmities

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224 E. G. WHITE, in *Signs of the Times*, June S, 1893. (Italics supplied.)

225 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, Sept. 27, 1881. (Italics supplied.)

226 *Ibid.*, July 28, 1874. (Italics supplied.)

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

and degeneracy”<sup>227</sup> —and “assumed the liabilities of human nature, to be proved and tried.”<sup>228</sup>

To state it another way, we have been emphasizing Jesus’ nature as being on the level of the born-again experience of man—the level at which Christ came down to meet man. We have made the point that He assumed that nature to redeem us from the pit into which we have fallen, that we might walk in harmony with God’s requirements. But we now come to the juncture where we shift our attention and begin to examine more closely the significance for us of the fact that although Jesus was “in all things ... made like unto his brethren,” and was “in all points tempted like as we are.” He was nevertheless without sin (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15).

I suggest that Jesus was born with a spiritual nature and a will as unfallen as that of Adam before the Fall.

When Adam, the first man, was created, his “nature was in harmony with the will of God. ... His affections were pure; His appetites and passions were under the control of reason. He was holy and happy in bearing the image of God and in perfect obedience to His will.”<sup>229</sup> “The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him.”<sup>230</sup> “There were no corrupt principles in the first Adam, no corrupt propensities or tendencies to evil. Adam was as faultless as the angels before God’s throne.”<sup>231</sup> “In all his emotions, words, and actions, there was a perfect conformity to the will of his Maker.”<sup>232</sup> He “was a noble being, with a powerful mind, *a will in harmony with the will of God*, and affections that centered upon heaven.”<sup>233</sup>

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227 *Ibid.*”

228 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 2, 1905.

229 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

230 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:1–3, 14, p. 1128.

231 E. G. White, letter 191, 1899.

232 E. G. White, *Confrontation*, p. 18.

233 \_\_\_\_\_, *Temperance*, p. 11. (Italics supplied.)

## The Meeting at the Cross

### ADAM, JESUS, AND MATURE CHARACTERS

Both Adam and Jesus began with faultless characters and with wills in harmony with God's, and both were required to mature the flawless characters given them. Thus it was that Jesus "learned ... obedience by the things which he suffered" being "made perfect" thereby (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

The key to whether Adam would retain his pristine purity and sinlessness resided in his will. He possessed free will, the power to choose.

The key to Jesus' sinlessness resided in *His* will. Like Adam before the Fall, Jesus possessed an unfallen will. Herein was the main difference from the born-again person. The born-again person has a fallen will. Jesus did not. But this does not really place the born-again person at a disadvantage, for these reasons:

Although Jesus had an unfallen will, it would seem that that will was as human as ours, and that He retained His allegiance by the same means by which we gain victory over sin. The picture, given throughout the Gospels, of Jesus' unceasing looking to His Father for strength confirms His own words that "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30).

Christ "overcame in human nature, relying upon God for power."<sup>234</sup> "Christ was dependent upon the Father, even as humanity is now dependent upon God for divine power."<sup>235</sup> "Christ took humanity with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man with the possibility of yielding to temptation, and He relied upon divine power to keep Him."<sup>236</sup> "In behalf of the race, *with the weakness of fallen man upon Him*, He [Jesus] was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed."<sup>237</sup>

A quotation from the book *The Humanity of the Saviour*, by Harry Johnson, speaks of the relationship between Jesus' "fallen human nature" and His sinlessness: "The position advocated

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234 \_\_\_\_\_, in *The Youth's Instructor*, April 2S, 1901.

235 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, July 3, 1907.

236 \_\_\_\_\_, quoted in *General Conference Bulletin*, vol. 1, Feb. 2S, 1895.

237 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, July 28, 1874. (Italics supplied.)

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here [in Johnson's book] is that 'fallen human nature' refers to that which was assumed by the Son of God at the Incarnation, and that 'sinlessness,' understood in terms of obedience and an unbroken relationship with God, refers to the incarnate life of Jesus. He assumed what was imperfect, but He wrought out of it a life that was perfect."<sup>238</sup>

Johnson further lucidly states, "Jesus assumed 'fallen human nature,' but He never added to this nature His will, and so there was no break in fellowship between Himself and His Father."<sup>239</sup>

### THE ENIGMA OF THE GOD-MAN

These statements help us to understand something of the enigma that was Jesus, the God-man. He was a man with a "fallen human nature," which was "degraded and defiled by sin," in a "deteriorated condition," "with the same susceptibilities, mental and physical," that sinful man has, being subject to "the weaknesses of humanity," yet without Himself being sinful, and therefore without guilt. He was sinless, guiltless; His will was unremittingly in concord with the Father's.

Jesus "could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity."<sup>240</sup>

Once again, in these words, we have confirmation of our thesis of the foregoing chapters. A tension is seen in the possession of an "offending nature," one that tended to "spiritual or moral difficulty" in One who "was in all points tempted like as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). with a will that tended ever to do the will of His heavenly Father.

And once again there is a lesson for us: as there was a tension in Jesus against sin, so there will be in one who has been born again. He will see something of the sinfulness of sin and will detest it after the manner of Jesus' hatred for sin. This attitude will contribute toward the eliminating of propensities for sin, which are of the mind and heart, from him also.

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238 Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour*, p. 27.

239 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

240 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:1-3, 14, p. 1128.

## The Meeting at the Cross

As we have had set before us the frailties of the humanity that Jesus assumed, and in which He met all the massed might of the prince of the power of the air, whose efforts were sharpened by the knowledge that he was battling for his very existence, we are awed by the wonder of it all—by the eternal risks Jesus took, the supernatural battles He had to fight, for us.

### THE PRACTICAL CRUX OF THE SUBJECT

We now need to consider another question. Jesus humbled Himself and assumed man's "fallen human nature" so that He might sympathize with man and help him. The question we must now ask is, Is He now able to lift man up to the spiritual level of full obedience and fellowship with God that He Himself enjoyed *as a Man*? Is He able to change man so that man may live the perfect human life He Himself lived on earth? *This question, in essence, is the practical crux of the whole subject of righteousness by faith.*

To ask it yet another way: Did Jesus live a perfect, sinless life only that that life might be imputed to man, and that man cannot be expected, ever, while on earth, to live fully the kind of life Jesus lived? Or does Christ, while imputing that life, also offer to impart it to cooperating, believing man so that he may advance "from glory to glory" until he lives the kind of quality life Jesus lived on earth?

We shall consider these questions.

# Synapses, Shoestrings, and Sin

**B**OUTON is the French word for button. But we are not going to be discussing either French or buttons, as such, in this chapter. Rather, we shall be taking a look at a concept vitally connected with our discussion of victory over sin, tied in with this word “bouton.” The boutons we are thinking about have to do with habits.

In *Insight* magazine, April 8 and 15, 1975, E. M. Chalmers, in a two-part article entitled “How to Start a Good Habit,” described what neurologists and other medical scientists have discovered about the fascinating manner in which habits are formed.

In the brain (which, we are told, operates on about one tenth of a volt of electricity, approximately one fifteenth the voltage of an ordinary flashlight battery) are vast numbers of specialized nerve cells or neurons. Each neuron has to do with one of the innumerable thought, feeling, or action patterns we go through. From the membrane around each neuron run little fibers called dendrites, which receive messages, and a single long fiber called the axon, which sends messages to other cells. The space between the sending fiber of one cell and the receiving fiber or body of another cell is called a synapse. On the sending fibers at these spaces are minute enlargements that, under the electron microscope, look like buttons of varying sizes and shapes. Hence the name “boutons.”

## PROGRAMMED HABIT CENTERS

It has been discovered that thoughts and actions, repeated, build up, at the ends of some types of nerve fibers, these little boutons that program the thought or action for ready repetition. In other words, these boutons are actually programmed habit

## Synapses, Shoestrings, and Sin

centers. Each one indicates a habit we have developed or are developing.

Let us illustrate how this works. Little 4-year-old Jimmy needs a pair of new shoes. He and mother go to a shoe store, where they find a pair that happens to have shoelaces. When they get home, mother takes Jimmy's hands and guides them through the motions of tying laces. As Jimmy tries to cooperate with her, a very weak impulse is made at the synapse in his brain that involves such motions. But the effort that he makes in cooperation with his mother causes the building up of a protein molecule at the site where the bouton will develop.

Dr. Chalmers tells us that it takes only one second to form the molecule. "When a strong enough stimulus hits a nerve cell, the cell nucleus sends a message into the surrounding fluid to tiny threadlike substances with instructions to build protein molecules from certain amino acids. And it all happens in just one second of time!

"Of course, it takes thousands of molecules to form a bouton. But the stronger your decisiveness, the more energy you invest in your actions, the *faster* the nerve impulses travel down the pathway to build a new habit or block a repetition of the old."

The second time mother guides Jimmy in tying the laces, he is just as inept as at the first try. But after perhaps a dozen tries, he is able to make what is at least recognizable as a bow. This is because thought and muscle actions have been sending the proper kind of electrical impulses to the involved axons. Each repeated impulse has made a path for the one to follow—made it easier for it to get through—and has begun to fix a habit pattern in a developing bouton. From that point Jimmy learns quickly, until after a time he can tie his shoes without thinking about it. A bouton has developed at the involved synapse, ready to tell the respective nerves and muscles to perform the habit it is programmed to trigger.

The same process takes place in every habit pattern we develop.

We have been considering a simple habit with no moral implications. Many of our habits, the most important ones,

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involve morality. In other words, from childhood we develop either bad or good moral habit patterns, each of which forms its own particular bouton. We learn, to varying degrees, honesty or dishonesty, self-indulgence (in its multiple forms) or self-control, purity or impurity, selfishness or unselfishness. We develop a good share of bad habits, depending on our upbringing, habit tendencies we inherited, our own attitudes, and so on, because by nature we are prone to sin. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). “The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man’s experience. There is in his nature a bent of evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist.”<sup>241</sup> “Bad habits are more easily formed than good ones and are given up with more difficulty.”<sup>242</sup>

### LINES THAT CANNOT BE EFFACED

Dr. Chalmers quotes from *Child Guidance* to cap a point: “What the child sees and hears is drawing deep lines upon the tender mind, which no after circumstances in life can entirely efface. ... Repeated acts in a given course become habits. These may be modified by severe training, in afterlife, but they are seldom changed.”<sup>243</sup>

After a habit has been established, the proper stimulus automatically sets the appropriate nerve for firing the electrical impulse that will cause us to react and perform the habit.

Explaining this, Dr. Chalmers tells us that it takes at least ten millivolts of energy to cause a brain cell to fire. Whether that much energy is involved depends on our choice.

He illustrates how it works:

“Have you ever been tempted with a piece of cake when you promised yourself you were on diet? You thought, My, that looks good! Immediately the coded message backed by, say, thirty millivolts of energy says to your brain action cell, ‘Fire!’

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241 E. G. White, *Education*, p. 29.

242 \_\_\_\_\_, *Child Guidance*, p. 202.

243 *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 200.

## Synapses, Shoestrings, and Sin

“Just at that moment, you add the thought, No, I’d better not! Immediately the chemical gaba [a substance secreted by the brain that inhibits an action] is secreted by another pathway coming to your brain action cell. This one is backed by, say, forty millivolts of energy with the message, ‘Don’t fire!’

“The hostess is handing the cake your way, but you’ve already decided, weakly, by just ten millivolts of energy. And so, half-hesitantly you say, ‘No, thanks.’ ...

“In this case, your action cell did some quick algebraic summations, Thirty millivolts to fire, forty millivolts not to fire. Net difference: ten millivolts not to fire!”

There are some people in whom the force of bad habit is so strong that it is impossible for the will of itself to generate enough millivolts to override the action. Many alcoholics are such total slaves to their habit that their wills are virtually destroyed. They perhaps cannot develop any millivolts to exert in opposition to the liquid tyrant.

Human beings are “sinaholics.” “Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. Without a personal acquaintance with Christ, and a continual communion, we are at the mercy of the enemy, and shall do his bidding in the end.”<sup>244</sup>

### **SIN OF PRINCIPLE, SIN OF PRACTICE**

So we may put it this way: escaping from sin is more than a matter of forming good habits. As someone has pointed out, there is the sin of principle and the sin of practice. A child may be taught from babyhood to develop many good habits, and an adult may substitute many good habits for bad. But in both individuals the sin principle still resides. And in some way in the growing child it will come out. Some habits will begin to

244 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 324.

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develop that show inherited tendencies—pettishness, perhaps, or heedlessness, defiance, temper, or the disposition to follow his own inclinations. When a child first uses his will, it is almost a foregone conclusion that he will do so in a direction he is told not to.

Because of the prayers and careful training of Christian parents, the good habits that start in children will tend to develop until the child becomes old enough to make that childish decision to commit himself to Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit can take over entirely in a totally willing life. Such a child could be a tremendous example of what God can do through a life fully and early committed to Him.

*“To allow a child to follow his natural impulses is to allow him to deteriorate and to become proficient in evil. ... Such a downward course can be prevented only by surrounding them with influences that will counteract evil.”*<sup>245</sup> As parents we should “teach our children that willing obedience to the will of God proves whether those claiming to be Christians are Christians indeed.”<sup>246</sup> In other words, when a child gets to the place where he no longer follows inclination but willingly and lovingly chooses those things he is taught to do as a Christian, he may be regarded as being born again.

How do these facts fit into the picture of Jesus’ tendencies and character?

First, Jesus had no tendencies to sin, as all other human beings do in their natural condition of sinfulness.

All human beings must say with David, “I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). “The heart [unregenerated] of the sons of men is full of evil” (Ecclesiastes 9:3); in our natures derived from fallen Adam we are “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3).

Jesus was “that holy thing” (Luke 1:35); He “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “Jesus ... had no personal acquaintance ... with it.”<sup>247</sup> He committed no sin (Hebrews 4:15).

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245 \_\_\_\_\_, *Child Guidance*, p, 491. (Italics supplied.)

246 *Ibid.*, p, 489.

247 A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4, p. 233.

## Synapses, Shoestrings, and Sin

### PURE AND HOLY TENDENCIES

In Jesus there were from babyhood absolutely no tendencies to “deteriorate and to become proficient in evil” as there are in us. Because He was incarnated with a nature like that of a born-again, fully committed person, He tended always toward purity and holiness. “His inclination to right was a constant gratification to His parents.”<sup>248</sup> “Not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.”<sup>249</sup> So it may be with us.

Second, because Jesus committed no sin, He formed no bad habits that had to be overcome.

Let us take a look at the inferences of this observation.

We have already seen that a young child, dedicating himself to God, would have very few bad habits to overcome. And even if he had some bad habits to eradicate, they would not be so deeply established that they could not be relatively easily conquered.

We have also seen that the habits an adult has formed over long years are firmly established and, in many cases, impossible for him to overcome. This is reflected in Paul’s words in Romans 7: “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (verses 19–24). This is, of course, a description of more than habit—it describes the practice of sin. More prominent in Paul’s lamentation is the indwelling principle of sin. But habit is definitely involved.

Did not Christ have an advantage over us because He came into the world with no propensities, no hankerings, for sin, and went through life with no bad habit patterns to overcome?

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248 E. G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 134.

249 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:1–3, 14, p. 1128.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

Our initial answer is Yes, there were definite advantages. But although He had advantages in one respect, He had great disadvantages in far more significant respects.

Perhaps the most significant to consider is the fact that if we trespass, we may receive forgiveness (see 1 John 2:1). But what if Jesus had sinned, even in a minor way and only once? “Could Satan in the least particular have tempted Christ [so as to cause Him] to sin, he would have bruised the Saviour’s head. ... Had the head of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished. Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope.”<sup>250</sup>

### JESUS, TEMPTATION, AND SIN

Another point is that the effects sin, temptations, and suffering had upon Jesus were infinitely greater than any man will ever be called upon to suffer, or even could suffer.

“As the sinless one His nature recoiled from evil.”<sup>251</sup> A. H. Strong describes Jesus’ sensitivity to sin and suffering: “In Christ all the nerves and sensibilities of humanity met. He was the only healthy member of the race. When life returns to a frozen limb, there is pain. So Christ, as the only sensitive member of a benumbed and stupefied humanity, felt all the pangs of shame and suffering which rightfully belonged to sinners; but which they could not feel, simply because of the depth of their depravity.”<sup>252</sup>

“It is impossible for man to know the strength of Satan’s temptations to the Son of God. Every temptation that seems so afflicting to man in his daily life, so difficult to resist and overcome, was brought to bear upon the Son of God in as much greater degree as his excellence of character was superior to that of fallen man.”<sup>253</sup>

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250 E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p, 256.

251 \_\_\_\_\_, *Steps to Christ*, pp, 93, 94.

252 A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p, 760.

253 E. G. White, *Confrontation*, p, 31.

## Synapses, Shoestrings, and Sin

As to man's past sin, God made a plan, simple in its operation but infinitely profound in its meaning, that judicially permitted them to be blotted out. He said, "I will send My Son to the world to live a perfectly sinless life. Then I will accept that life in the place of the sinful life of the person who surrenders and accepts my Son as his Saviour. Having surrendered and repudiated sin, all he will have to do is acknowledge the gift as his own, and I will look upon him as though he had never committed a sin."

Romans 5:18 tells us that this is so: "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

Thus, we will not be held responsible for the situation we find ourselves in through cultivated or inherited sins if we accept Jesus. But if we reject Him we deserve to be held responsible, for we have refused God's most wonderful Gift, Jesus, and eternal life.

This is a most marvelous aspect of the plan of salvation. There is another aspect that also is marvelous. And in that study we get back to boutons. In doing so, we will be looking at the permanent nature of habits, how God has provided for the sinner to deal with them, why the Christian sometimes has problems with habits, and how they will be finally and permanently resolved.

## Until We Shall Be Changed

IN this chapter we will take a look at how God deals with bad habits. To begin with, let's go back to Dr. Chalmers and his discussion of boutons.

Writing of the permanency of boutons, which are diminutive habit centers, Dr. Chalmers states, "At present there is no evidence that boutons ever diminish or go away because they are not used.

"It seems that habits form in the brain a permanent pathway that probably never can be erased."

He continues, "Habits can be changed, but only by developing other habits that are stronger than those a person wishes to overcome."

We see a problem area here. We have referred to the alcoholic, whose habit has such a steely hold upon him that no amount of desiring, or wishing, or trying, can break it. There are certain bad habits we establish that are so strong our wills cannot command the millivolts necessary to inhibit them. And if a habit cannot be inhibited, new impulses cannot be started through new pathways to build up new boutons to replace it. It is necessary to stop one kind of impulse from going down one pathway before we can send another opposite kind of impulse down another pathway. We can't, for example, be gluttonous and temperate at the same time.

### THE SIN PREDICAMENT

Here is one reason why a sinner is a helpless pawn of many of his habits. Our helplessness in the sin predicament and our need for outside, supernatural, help, comes home to us with great force, for the change that is needed involves the

## Until We Shall Be Changed

modifying of the very cells of our brains, with physical entities that are the very pith of our being, that govern our lives in every aspect.

In this context the marvel and reality of the new birth takes on a new dimension as we understand that God seems to work upon the very dendrites, axons, boutons, and neurons of our brains to bring that experience about. In this respect Paul could not know as we do the significance of his words, “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).

### **THE NEW BIRTH AND A NEW DIMENSION**

In the new birth, which comes when the soul surrenders to Christ, God changes the trend of the mind. In this changing He gives new desires, tendencies, motives, attitudes, ambitions. He writes His law on the heart. This is conversion, the turning around, in which the born-again person begins the sanctified life.

The new and differently directed will that God gives us is also a stronger will, in that He blends His own omnipotent will with our weak, limited wills. In this way the will of the born-again person becomes, in the words of Inspiration, omnipotent.<sup>254</sup>

Referring to our flywheel idea of chapter seven, some people think that the flywheel of their inherited or cultivated sins is so established as to be irresistible and irreversible. But the irreversibility lies in our own hearts and wills. If we will not fully surrender to Jesus, if we will not have faith that He can help, we effectively make it impossible for Him to help. But with his sanctified, God-empowered, God-directed will, man is able to control every wrong habit he has ever cultivated and every tendency he has inherited, no matter how strong or iniquitous they may have been. “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20). So Paul could exclaim, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Philippians 4:13).

But in accomplishing this his will must ever be submitted to and blended with the will of God. The moment the will is no longer in this relationship, the old boutons begin to be

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254 E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p, 333.

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reactivated. Thus “it is this [God’s grace] that enables him [man] to break the bondage of evil habit. This is the only power that can *make him and keep him steadfast* in the right path.”<sup>255</sup>

Just as it is said, “Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic,” in the same way it may be said, “Once a sinaholic, always a sinaholic.” The reformed alcoholic may need to take only one drink to be once again a captive of his old habit. And a Christian may need to permit himself to indulge only one sin that formerly had a strong hold on him to find himself once again a captive to his old way of life. But he need never indulge that sin. “There is no excuse for sin.”<sup>256</sup>

### DECISIONS BY DEFAULT

“If the heart is not kept under the control of God, if the Holy Spirit does not work unceasingly to refine and ennoble the character, the old habits will reveal themselves in the life.”<sup>257</sup> “Unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. We must inevitably be under the control of the one or the other of the two great powers that are contending for the supremacy of the world. It is not necessary for us deliberately to choose the service of the kingdom of darkness in order to come under its dominion. We have only to neglect to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light. If we do not cooperate with the heavenly agencies, Satan will take possession of the heart, and will make it his abiding place. The only defense against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness. Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender

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255 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 115, (Italics supplied.)

256 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 623.

257 \_\_\_\_\_, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 50.

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of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. Without a personal acquaintance with Christ, and a continual communion, we are at the mercy of the enemy, and shall do his bidding in the end.”<sup>258</sup>

What happens to the boutons in a born-again person? To repeat a quotation of Dr. Chalmers, “Habits can be changed, but only by developing other habits that are stronger than those a person wishes to overcome.”

“In this way,” Dr. Chalmers continues, “a person can build new pathways on the brain by consciously choosing to make a different response to a given situation than he has been used to making. He must make that conscious choice so many times that he builds more boutons on the new pathway than he has on the old.

“Then when the nerve impulses come flowing through the brain, it will be easier to take the new route than the old. It’s like this. From the main sending fiber of every cell there are many branching fibers. These are alternative pathways for us to use.”

The picture is this: When a person is born again and is thus in Christ (see Romans 8:1–13), the will that before was too weak to overcome the stronger sins in the life (see Romans 7:15–21) is purified and strengthened and thus enabled not only to make choices but also to carry through on them. “The experimental knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent, transforms man into the image of God. It gives to man the mastery of himself, bringing every impulse and passion of the lower nature under the control of the higher powers of the mind.”<sup>259</sup> “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 garments of His righteousness.”<sup>260</sup>

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258 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 324.

259 \_\_\_\_\_, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 114.

260 *Ibid.*, p. 312.

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### AN ILLUSTRATION

Let us picture a particular situation that will help us to understand what happens.

Mary Smith has had a real problem with appetite most of her life, which shows up in her large size. Since she was a child she has indulged her taste buds so that automatically, when she sees food, forty millivolts or more of energy fires the signal “Eat!” in her brain.

For a number of years she has tried to control her eating habits, but with no permanent success. She is sometimes able to cut down for a period, but when she is confronted with her favorite casserole or chocolate cake or what have you, her willpower collapses, and her appetite takes control.

Then one day Mary surrenders to her Saviour. It is totally sincere, complete. Knowing her great weakness to overindulge, Mary says, “God, I have surrendered to You. I give my terrible habit of overeating to You. You know my weakness. I know I can’t possibly overcome it in my own strength. Help me!”

There comes the inevitable time when Mary is invited out to dinner. At dessert time the hostess appears from the kitchen with Mary’s favorite kind of cake.

Immediately the old, wide-open bouton readies to fire, as it has hundreds of times before. But Mary sends up a fervent prayer for help, blends her willpower with her Lord’s and the inhibiting chemical gaba signals the bouton, “Don’t fire!” And Mary says “No” to dessert, probably for the first time in her life.

So much for the “eat cake” bouton.

### WE ARE NEVER SAFE

When Mary determined to get on top of her appetite, she also decided to switch to fruit desserts. By doing this she started a nerve impulse along a new channel, and there is the beginning of a new bouton. In time, by much prayer, much commitment, and much perseverance, this new bouton is fully built and operative. Mary has become a temperate fruit fan. But the old chocolate-cake bouton is still there. And should she ever take her eyes off Jesus and slide back, she would be into her cake again and quite possibly become more of an addict than she was previously.

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Commenting on the seed that fell among thorns in Christ's parable of the sower and the seed, Ellen White says, "If there is not a moral transformation in the human heart, if old habits and practices and the former life of sin are not left behind ... the wheat crop will be choked."<sup>261</sup> "The indulgence of one known sin will cause weakness and darkness, and subject us to fierce temptation."<sup>262</sup>

"Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel. The prevalence of a sinful desire shows the delusion of the soul. Every indulgence of that desire strengthens the soul's aversion to God. The pains of duty and the pleasures of sin are the cords with which Satan binds men in his snares. Those who would rather die than perform a wrong act are the only ones who will be found faithful."<sup>263</sup>

### EASIER FOR SOME THAN OTHERS

Some people, because they have inherited good qualities from their parents, and because they have not established very bad habits, have an easier time living the Christian life than others. "Some have a much better organization than others. While some are continually harassed, afflicted, and in trouble because of their unhappy traits of character, and having to war with internal foes and the corruption of their nature, others have not half so much to battle against."<sup>264</sup> This statement is also noteworthy: "In some children the moral powers strongly predominate. They have power of will to control their minds and actions. In others the animal passions are almost irresistible. To meet these diverse temperaments, which frequently appear in the same family, fathers, as well as mothers, need patience and wisdom from the divine Helper."<sup>265</sup>

261 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

262 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 58.

263 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 53.

264 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 74.

265 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Dec, 20, 1877.

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At the same time we should remember that “angels are ever present where they are most needed, with those who have the hardest battles with self to fight, and whose surroundings are the most discouraging. Weak and trembling souls who have many objectionable traits of character are their special charge.”<sup>266</sup>

Let us return for a moment to the overcoming of sin and reinforce what we have been saying by taking an example that has to do with the inner sins, sins of the mind and heart, which many times are the most difficult to overcome.

Consider the case of resentment. Suppose that over a period of time I have built up a large reservoir of resentment toward a certain person. But now I have surrendered to Jesus, and a new heart is mine. I have new desires, motives, inclinations, choices. However, I find that the next time I meet the object of my resentment, the old feelings begin to well up because the old buttons are still operative. Distressed, I pray, “But, Lord, I don’t want that attitude! I gave it to You. Please take it away!”

When I thus reach out for help I feel the inward prompting of resentment miraculously begin to subside. The temptation will probably recur a few times, but eventually it will die. Because I have repudiated it, Christ gives me victory. In a gratifyingly short time, because the Holy Spirit is at work, the feeling is gone. Meanwhile, because I have steadfastly repudiated the prompting, I have not sinned, for temptation itself is not sin.

### HELP THAT GOD ALONE CAN GIVE

“The newly converted soul often has fierce conflicts with established habits or with some special form of temptation, and, being overcome by some master passion or tendency, he is guilty of indiscretion or actual wrong.”<sup>267</sup> But “those who put away iniquity from their hearts, and stretch out their hands in earnest supplication unto God will have the help which He alone can give them.”<sup>268</sup>

And so the Christian goes on, day by day, working out his own salvation with fear and trembling, knowing always that “it

266 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 105.

267 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 604, 605.

268 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 8, 1883.

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is God which worketh [inspiring] you both to will and to do of his good pleasure [chosen purpose]" (Philippians 2:13).

In this experience, "under the influence of divine grace, every good quality would be gaining strength, while evil traits would as steadily lose their power."<sup>269</sup> In these words Inspiration is describing the reinforcing of the good impulses set up in the new boutons, and the overpassing of the old boutons.

In the light of these thoughts the question inevitably arises: If this is the way God operates in giving us victory over chocolate cake and resentment, so that ultimately we will not be tempted by cake or moved by resentment, does not the same apply to every other sin and weakness in the life?

Note these words: "Through continued exercise it [the mind] will become strong to battle with internal foes and to subdue self, *until there is complete transformation, and the passions, appetites, and will are brought into perfect subjection.*"<sup>270</sup>

Here, surely, is a picture of a person who has so melded his life with Christ's life, so fully committed himself into his Master's hands, so utterly cooperated with the Holy Spirit in every attitude, action, and word, that every bouton that operates is now triggering responses just as God would have it. The old boutons are never permitted to fire. In the power of the Holy Spirit they are under total control. And they need not fire ever again. Through Jesus they can be kept in subjection at all times.

"By beholding Jesus we receive a living, expanding principle in the heart, and the Holy Spirit carries on the work, and the believer advances from grace to grace, from strength to strength, from character to character. He conforms to the image of Christ, until in spiritual growth he attains unto the measure of the full stature in Christ Jesus. Thus Christ makes an end of the curse of sin, and sets the believing soul free from its action and effect."<sup>271</sup>

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269 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on 1 Samuel 15:17, p. 1017.

270 E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p, 507. (Italics supplied.)

271 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 395.

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When does this character transformation take place?

“When He comes He is not to cleanse us of our sins, to remove from us the defects in our characters, or to cure us of the infirmities of our tempers and dispositions. If wrought for us at all, this work will all be accomplished before that time. ... No work will then be done for them [the unsanctified] to remove their defects and give them holy characters. The Refiner does not then sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done in these hours of probation. It is *now* that this work is to be accomplished for us.”<sup>272</sup>

### WHEN OLD HABITS RETURN

We have seen that scientific evidence apparently shows what experience affirms—that even though new actions build new boutons, the old boutons are not thereby eliminated. They are still there, ready to begin triggering old actions and reactions at any time. Hence backsliding.

To those who are merely surface Christians, “the old habits return; quick temper, suspicion, jealousy, judgment of others—all manifest that they are not controlled by the grace of Christ. ... They may observe fasts, practice voluntary humility, and manifest apparent devotion; but they do not have real humility, they do not find rest and peace and joy. Their accustomed habits control them; and when they fail to manifest a Christlike action, they throw the blame and responsibility upon the circumstances which surround them or the people with whom they are brought in contact.”<sup>273</sup>

If a Christian neglects prayer, or slips into dead, formal prayer, if he fails to maintain a close contact with the Word, if he permits his eyes to turn away from Jesus, his old ways soon reassert themselves. He very shortly finds himself getting into his old habits. And if he does not immediately respond to his danger and turn purposefully to Jesus, he will soon be a helpless

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272 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 355.

273 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, June 5, 1894.

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captive of his old sins. “By a momentary act of will, one may place himself in the power of evil.”<sup>274</sup>

Thus, even the person whose “passions, appetites, and will are brought into perfect subjection” may nevertheless fall back into his old ways of sin. It is unlikely that this would happen. But it could. No one is safe this side of death or Jesus’ coming. So we are warned that “so long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience.”<sup>275</sup>

Thus even the Christian who has his passions, appetites, and will under perfect subjection in the power of Christ is not finally secure. He must keep them committed daily, he must depend on Jesus from moment to moment, to maintain that continual subdual, because self that is dead (Romans 6:1, 2, 6–11, et cetera) is always subject to resurrection. This is what we would call backsliding. (See Jeremiah 15:6; Luke 9:62; Galatians 4:9; 2 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 10:39, et cetera.) The old boutons are like a gun loaded and ready to be fired by self as soon as it comes to life. “Just as soon as a man separates from God so that his heart is not under the subduing power of the Holy Spirit, the attributes of Satan will be revealed.”<sup>276</sup>

### THE DAY OF RELEASE

If the boutons of the old, sinful habits remain viable at the synapses of our brains, and if the sinful self may potentially come to life “so long as Satan reigns,” which is until the close of the history of this present age, when will they be finally eliminated?

Apparently not until the return of “the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body [literally, “the body of our humiliation”] that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:20, 21).

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274 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 313.

275 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 560, 561.

276 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 78.

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The body of the righteous person that goes down to the grave “is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:43, 44).

Of those who do not experience death, we read that they “shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (verse 51, 52).

In connection with Philippians 3:21, Ellen White says, “While sin is forgiven in this life, its *results* are not now wholly removed. It is at His coming that Christ is to ‘change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body’” (Philippians 3:21).<sup>277</sup> “The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect.”<sup>278</sup>

For the totally surrendered person who is “alive and remain,” who has settled “into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so that [he] ... cannot be moved [this is the sealing],”<sup>279</sup> all of the boutons tending to sinful impulses and acts have been superseded by others that prompt only to impulses and acts like Jesus’. But until he is changed, he will still have a profound awareness that he is a fallen being. He will know that although self is dead (Romans 6:1–11), he can never let down his guard, for to do so is to make its resurrection virtually certain. He will have a painful realization that, compared with his peerless Saviour, he is an imperfect creature indeed, totally unworthy. He will know that his only trust is in the Lord, for merit with God, for daily strength and for eventual glorification.

During the time of trouble, when he must stand alone without an Intercessor<sup>280</sup> but not without the continuous sustaining presence of God,<sup>281</sup> he will know that his only hope is in Jesus.

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277 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 33. (Italics supplied.)

278 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on 1 Corinthians 15:42–52, p.1093.

279 *Ibid.*, on Ezekiel 9:2–4, p. 1161.

280 E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 614.

281 *Ibid.*, pp, 626, 627.

## Until We Shall Be Changed

Then will come the inexpressibly heavenly moment of release and relief when “the last lingering traces of the curse of sin will be removed, and Christ’s faithful ones will appear in ‘the beauty of the Lord our God,’ in mind and soul and body reflecting the perfect image of their Lord.”<sup>282</sup>

What a deliverance that will be! To know that our fallen human natures, from which the results of sin have been finally removed, have been restored to Edenic perfection. To realize that no shadow of the dark enemy, self, will ever again fall across our pathway. To realize that not only does the sin principle no longer have dominion over us, but that the gloomy corner where it lurked is at last empty. Torn from its place, it is gone forever. To know that the hateful habit patterns are eradicated that have before generated anxiety in our hearts for fear that, under some circumstances of stress or provocation, a bouton be activated and a word spoken or an act performed that would misrepresent the Lord. That will indeed be a freedom transcending imagination! It is an experience awaiting all God’s faithful ones.

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282 *Ibid.*, p. 645.

## May We Live as Jesus Lived?

IS Jesus able to lift man up from his fallen plane and finally transform him so that he can begin to live, here and now, a life in which all sin is subdued, the kind of life Jesus Himself lived on earth?

Irenaeus said of Jesus, “He became what we are to make us what He is.” Perhaps this Church Father did not intend the statement to have a here-and-now meaning. But the concept of the Christian fashioning a character like Jesus’ in this life has biblical support.

Paul appears to be looking to the time when the ideal would be fulfilled when he wrote in Ephesians 4 that the various gifts of the Spirit to the church would remain with it until those who composed it (and we must think of those who are truly Christians, rather than mere professors) attain to “a perfect man,” which he further defines as “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (verse 13). The latter term obviously refers to spiritual stature— “attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ” is the way *The New International Version* translates it.

We cannot think that the apostle envisioned this merely as a theoretical possibility. Paul regarded this spiritual attainment as the goal that the people of God could and would reach.

Ellen White quotes Matthew 5:48, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,” then illuminates the text by observing, “As God is perfect in His sphere, so man may be perfect in his sphere.” Immediately she adds, “The ideal of Christian character is Christlikeness.”<sup>283</sup>

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283 E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 64.

## May We Live as Jesus Lived?

“As God is pure in His sphere, so man is to be pure in his. And he will be pure if Christ is formed within, the hope of glory; for he will imitate Christ’s life and reflect His character.”<sup>284</sup>

Men and women in their sphere are, then, to reach the stage of spiritual and moral maturity, completeness, perfection, in which the Ideal, Christ, lived on earth as the God-man.

In another place Ellen White picks up the words quoted above—“The ideal of Christian character is Christlikeness”—and adds the thought “As the Son of man *was perfect in His life*, so His followers are to be perfect in their life. ... His character is to be ours.”<sup>285</sup> (For a discussion of the statement “We cannot equal the pattern. ...” See Appendix B, p. 187.)

### THE POSSIBILITY OF BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

We must understand that statements such as the above refer not merely to Christ’s character imputed to us. Impartation is meant. There are scores of statements in the Spirit of Prophecy writings that hold up the imperative and emphasize the possibility of Christians becoming like Jesus the Man. Here are some:

“God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ’s character. In His humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance to evil, the Saviour showed that through cooperation with Divinity, human beings may in this life attain to perfection of character. This is God’s assurance to us that we, too, may obtain complete victory.”<sup>286</sup>

“Perfection of character is attainable by everyone who strives for it.”<sup>287</sup>

“What Christ was in His perfect humanity, we must be; for we must form characters for eternity.”<sup>288</sup>

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284 \_\_\_\_\_, *Gospel Workers*, p. 366.

285 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 311. (Italics supplied.)

286 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 531.

287 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p 212.

288 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 173.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

“His life and character were the unfolding or representation of the perfection of character that man may attain by becoming a partaker of the divine nature, and overcoming the world through daily conflicts.” “He showed that it is possible for man perfectly to obey the law.”<sup>289</sup> “His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.”<sup>290</sup> “Exact obedience is required, and those who say that it is not possible to live a perfect life throw upon God the imputation of injustice and untruth.”<sup>291</sup>

Perhaps we should add at this point that the attainment of “perfection of character” referred to is not just for the 144,000. The person who thinks that it is, who feels that he does not need to aim as high as the 144,000 must aim, that he will be satisfied with just making it to the inside of the gates of heaven, is assuming a very perilous attitude. God’s demands for the 144,000 are not different from that which He makes for all people. All must strive to live as Christ did. This is the imperative laid upon us as Christians. Whether we will be among that group who will not see death lies hidden within the omniscience of God.

### **MUST WE BECOME LIKE JESUS IN ALL WAYS?**

Nothing here must be interpreted as saying that to develop characters like Jesus’ must mean becoming like Him in every possible way, in His divinity as well as in His humanity.

There were times when Jesus manifested His divinity. He read minds. He healed. He raised the dead. He forgave sin. Those aspects of His life we are not required to exhibit in reflecting the character of Jesus perfectly. (However, it will be remembered that there were occasions when His disciples, by the Holy Spirit, did practically all that He did, except forgive sin.) Between Jesus’ *divinity* and us there is obviously a great, and eternal, gulf fixed. Between His *humanity* and us there is a commonality. We can become like Him as *He was as a Man*, within the perimeters of our individualities, gifts, and capacities. Let us develop this thought.

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289 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 114.

290 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664.

291 \_\_\_\_\_, quoted in *Review and Herald*, Feb. 7, 1957.

## May We Live as Jesus Lived?

There are ways in which we never could equal Him as a Man. We will never be able to develop personalities to equal His. We cannot equal the charisma He had as a Man. We could not possess the consciousness of power Jesus had. We will never be as wise as He was, nor do any of us possess the talents He had. He had all the gifts of the Spirit in superabundance. Some of us have only one, because that may be the limit of our capacity.

*We are to equal Him* in having victory over every sin and, in the Holy Spirit, to develop our own characters to reflect His in *our own individualities*. This is the whole thrust of this book.

### THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

Jesus' whole experience on earth was lived with reference to you and me, personally. He lived according to His Father's will, but it was for us. From the hour of His incarnation to the moment when He cried out, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" (Luke 23:46), He lived every minute for our benefit. And so whether the humanity He assumed and the life He lived during those thirty-three years was our humanity and our life is a vital subject. In this book have been set forth reasons for believing He was in every respect like us, except for sin.

But the whole thing would be almost pointless if only an academic, intellectual exercise were accomplished. The focus of this volume is an effort to demonstrate that Jesus lived the kind of life *we too may live*.

And so we come to the very important question, so far as we human beings are concerned: If we can live the kind of life Jesus lived as a Man—and consequently are *expected* to live that quality life—what makes it possible for us to live such a life?

We address ourselves to this question in the next chapter.

## We Can Be Like Jesus If ...

**T**HE Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy indicate that it is possible, by the grace of our heavenly Father, for us to live the quality life the Lord Jesus Christ lived on earth as a Man. We then inquire, What makes it possible to live such a life?

The answer is at the same time very simple and very difficult. It is simple in the requirement, but difficult in the doing. It is simple in that it asks of us only one thing; it is difficult in that that one thing is the hardest thing in the world for us to do. It is simple in that when we fulfill the one requirement, the only real obstacle to the fulfillment of the victorious life is removed; it is evidently difficult because most people do not want to remove the obstacle.

I look back at an experience I had when I was only about 12 years old that clearly underlines the truth of those observations to me now. (I did not realize that at the time. Perhaps I was not old enough to understand it all.)

I had heard a sermon that convicted me that I was a sinner and that I needed to confess my condition and get right with God. Under this conviction I went to my bedside and prayed. I may have stayed there an hour, wrestling with myself and God. I remember that tears flowed that day. I wanted forgiveness. I wanted to be accepted.

But when I finally arose from my knees I knew in my heart that I was not forgiven. No, it was not a lack of faith that made me know this. It was because of an attitude of my own. It was because I knew that “in the back of my mind, “ as we say, I had made a reservation. I had not been willing to turn *everything* over to God. Looking back, I can’t segregate any particular thing I wouldn’t give up. It was rather a sort of nebulous thought or

## We Can Be Like Jesus if ...

attitude that I wanted to keep a hand in my own affairs. That attitude made it impossible for God to do what I desired, for I wanted it on my conditions, not His.

On a number of occasions Jesus made clear what was required in order truly to be a follower of His. On one occasion He said, “Whosoever ... of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

### WHAT “ALL” INCLUDES

Most of us, when considering this requirement to renounce all that we have, think in terms of things. In truth, that is almost a miniscule matter relative to what is really demanded. All includes far more than the pocketbook, or house, or any other material thing. All takes in self and the manifold forms it assumes: self-sufficiency, self-dependence, self-love, self-will. It encompasses pride, envy, faultfinding, a boastful attitude, temper, all wrong feelings and attitudes. All means every attitude, every potential impulse, every aspect of the intelligence, every sense, every faculty, and every operation of every faculty that we have.

When we thoroughly grasp the implications of this concept, when we understand this in terms of what God asks of us, it is human nature to back off. We are unwilling to cut loose entirely from self in every respect. We don't want to admit that we can't make it on our own, at least in some respects. In fact, some of us don't really believe that we can't, so self-sufficient, so independently minded, are we.

This insistence on retaining self on the part of many—not all—who desire to be Christians is one reason why God sometimes has to allow us to get to the end of our rope.

Peter was quite a self-sufficient fellow. On one occasion he realized that to do a certain act he had to depend on Jesus. He knew that he couldn't walk on water without special help. So he asked Jesus to make it possible to do that.

As he was walking along, his old self-sufficiency came to the fore. Forgetting how much he was dependent on Jesus, he turned his eyes on himself. Immediately his own resources failed him, the waters began to close over him, and in panicky desperation he cried, “Lord, save me.”

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

In effect, that was renouncing self, which may be translated as losing confidence in his own capabilities, turning fully to Jesus in his need, and desperately asking for help.

Let's take a real but illustrative person whom we shall call Bonnie Blackmore. Bonnie had been a Seventh-day Adventist but had gradually drifted from the church in spirit, and then in body. She got caught up in many habits that were wrong and unhealthful, one of which was smoking.

Years went by, and then the Holy Spirit began to get through again to Bonnie. Conviction gripped her, and after a time she determined to give up her bad habits and go back to church.

But she couldn't give up smoking. She tried every possible way to drop the practice. She became almost desperate. Finally, totally defeated, absolutely discouraged, she cried out in despair, "O God, I can't do it. You'll have to do it for me."

Immediately, at that very moment, she experienced an oral disgust at the taste of tobacco. Her craving for cigarettes was gone.

But notice this. Bonnie still had problems with other habits, habits that did not preclude her from rejoining the church. For example, she was much inclined to overeating. And, forgetting the significance of her experience with cigarettes, she started a running battle with appetite, only to suffer chronic defeat.

She was becoming much discouraged over this situation until one day, in talking with another woman, she told the story of how she had quit smoking.

"*That's it!*" the other woman exclaimed. "Don't you see it? You had come to the end of your rope with the cigarettes, so you gave up to God. Now, don't wait to come to the end of your rope again. You don't need to. Give your overeating to Him now."

There are a number of lessons to be learned from Bonnie's experience. In her great desire to give up cigarettes, she became desperate. And God worked for her in her desperation. That desperation was not faith, but God accepted it as faith, as it were, *because it caused her to let go of that particular habit and drop into His arms*. She had come to the place where there was nothing else she could do.

*This is the very essence of faith* as applied to a situation such as this. This is what God wants us to do under such circumstances—let go of everything and drop into His arms.

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Faith is, of course, much better and greater than desperation in letting God work for us. In faith we place no dependence in any resources we may feel we have in ourselves. In desperation we are forced to the conclusion that we have no resources. So God may allow us to come to the desperate place to teach us the lessons of faith He cannot teach us any other way. But He expects us, by that one experience, to make application to all areas. He probably will not keep on bringing us to hard straits in every area. He does not operate that way.

There is another lesson for us in Bonnie's experience—an eminently important one. *God will help us with anything that we give over to Him.* He wants very much to lead us the whole way, so He takes advantage of any opening He can find. He leads us step by step by these means, hoping that we will go the whole way. So, when Bonnie actually renounced her cigarettes, He rescued her. But He couldn't help her with her appetite until she had renounced that also. And when we give up all, when we surrender self—totally—which is all-inclusive, then we have gone all the way, and God can help us in every area of our lives.

We need to recognize, of course, that God does not always, or even generally, eliminate a habit as He did for Bonnie in that particular case. But when we look to Him in total commitment, He always gives the grace for victory over every sin and weakness.

### **SO FAR BUT NO FURTHER**

“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33) In our Bible there are many illustrations of people who permitted Jesus to lead them so far, to help them so much, but they would not go all the way. At one time or another these people “went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66). It is quite possible that some whom Jesus had healed were part of the mob that screamed, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” And there are those whom God is leading today who will prove unwilling to go the whole way, who will eventually turn against Him and His faithful ones.

The danger of our misunderstanding God's blessings, which are intended to draw us to Himself in full surrender, is seen in these words: “How often we misinterpret God's blessings, and flatter ourselves that we are favored on account of some

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goodness in us! God cannot do for us that which He longs to do. His gifts are used to increase our self-satisfaction, and to harden our hearts in unbelief and sin.”<sup>292</sup>

How, then, are we to obtain the purity of character that is like the character Jesus had as a Man?

By holding onto nothing, by protecting nothing of self, by excusing nothing, by rationalizing nothing.

“It is not only at the beginning of the Christian life that this renunciation of self is to be made. At every advance step heavenward it is to be renewed. All our good works are dependent on a power outside of ourselves; therefore there needs to be a continual reaching out of the heart after God, a constant, earnest confession of sin and humbling of the soul before Him. Perils surround us; and we are safe only as we feel our weakness and cling with the grasp of faith to our mighty Deliverer.”<sup>293</sup>

We have observed that when we consider the implications of the self-renunciation God requires, we are inclined to back off. Some, however, react in another way. Realizing what the implications of self-denial are by way of Christian living, the standards that God expects, they lose heart. Consulting their own feelings, looking at their own weaknesses, failings, and frailties, they wilt and exclaim, “It’s absolutely no use. Never could I reach that standard. I couldn’t, in a million years, even begin to live the kind of life Jesus lived on earth.”

They are right, of course. Never in an eternity could you, or I, begin to live the life Jesus lived. But you and I, connected with Divine Omnipotence, can. “Where sin abounded [and this includes every weakness and frailty that is an effect of sin], grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20).

Are you weak? “The angels have special charge of weak and trembling souls, those who have many defects, many objectionable traits of character.”<sup>294</sup>

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292 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 106.

293 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 455, 456.

294 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, April 16, 1895.

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“Christ connects man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power.”<sup>295</sup>

### THOSE WHOM GOD MAKES STRONG

“The Lord can work most effectually through those who are most sensible of their own insufficiency, and who will rely upon Him as their leader and source of strength. He will make them strong by uniting their weakness to His might, and wise by connecting their ignorance to His wisdom.”<sup>296</sup>

“Satan is well aware that the weakest soul who abides in Christ is more than a match for the hosts of darkness.”<sup>297</sup>

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

It is because through Him there is no sin, no weakness, no besetment—of thought, action, word, impulse, or feeling—that we cannot overcome—(“There is no excuse for sinning”<sup>298</sup>) that God requires so much of us. “All, who profess godliness are under the most sacred obligation to guard the spirit, and to exercise self-control [of every kind] under the greatest provocation. ... God has made ample provision for His people; and if they will rely upon His strength, they will never become the sport of circumstances. The strongest temptation cannot excuse sin. However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act. It is not in the power of earth or hell to compel anyone to do evil. Satan attacks us at our weak points, but we need not be overcome. However severe or unexpected the assault, God has provided help for us, and in His strength we may conquer.”<sup>299</sup> So no matter what our

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295 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 184.

296 *Ibid.*, p. 553.

297 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Great Controversy*, p. 530.

298 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

299 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 421.

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besetments, weaknesses, or flaws may be, they may be met and conquered through Christ.

How is it possible for these things to be? Through complete surrender. Surrender to Jesus makes justification possible. Justification makes possible the channeling of the transforming love of God into the life, changing the attitudes, desires, motives, and making the Christ-life possible.

“Love is the basis of godliness. Whatever the profession, no man has pure love to God unless he has unselfish love for his brother. But we can never come into possession of this spirit by *trying* to love others. ... When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously.”<sup>300</sup> “Love is of God. The unconverted heart cannot originate or produce this plant of heavenly growth, which lives and flourishes only where Christ reigns.”<sup>301</sup>

On many occasions Jesus expressed in various ways the imperative of unreserved surrender. Let us ponder Matthew 16:24: “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

What is self? It may be defined as that part of me whatever that may be—that I am naturally inclined to put before everything and everyone else, including God and His will. It is that element of me that I am prone to consult and please before anything else, that I seek to protect and defend under any circumstances. (We have put aside the idea of physical self-preservation as not being germane in this context.)

Denying self, then, goes far beyond the usual meaning we give the words: “OK, Self, you have had enough cookies.” “No more pie for now.” “Self, you’ve got enough dresses (or ties, or suits, or what have you).” “Self, that’s it! You’re not watching that TV program!”

### THE TOTALITY OF DENYING SELF

That is part of denying self, but only a small part of a far greater whole. The denial of self Jesus is talking about is a total thing, involving the whole personality. Paul discusses this in Romans 6, which we can only touch upon here.

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300 \_\_\_\_\_, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384.

301 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 135.

## We Can Be Like Jesus if ...

“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11). “Look upon yourselves as dead”, “Think of yourselves as dead”, and “Regard yourselves as dead to sin” is the way it is translated in other versions of the Bible.

The word “dead” is a strong one. It suggests that, as far as sin, which is manifested in selfishness, is concerned, the Christian must be as though it did not exist (see chapter 16, “He Can Keep You From Falling”).

Ellen White writes to a brother who was not “dead to sin”: “You have repeatedly said: ‘I can’t keep my temper.’ ‘I have to speak.’ You lack a meek, humble spirit. Self is all alive, and you stand guard continually to preserve it from mortification or insult. Says the apostle: ‘For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.’ Those who are dead to self will not feel so readily and will not be prepared to resist everything which may irritate. Dead men cannot feel. You are not dead. If you were, and your life were hid in Christ, a thousand things which you now notice, and which afflict you, would be passed by as unworthy of notice; you would then be grasping the eternal and would be above the petty trials of this life.”<sup>302</sup>

When we say we must deny self, does this include the “good” self, as well as the “bad” (“good” referring to such things as acts of generosity or kindness that all but the most abandoned may sometimes perform)? For example, we may hear that a hardened gangster would “give you the shirt off his back.” Were such a man, by the grace of God, to be converted, would that good habit he presently has have to be denied?

The fact is that there is no such thing in God’s sight as an act by an unconverted person done from totally pure motives. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18).

A French writer, Gustave Flaubert, was candid when he said: “If you refrain from doing something vile, if you show consideration in something, do you know why? It is to be able to tell yourself, as you look in your mirror, ‘This is the man, the wonderful man, who did that.’”

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302 *Ibid.*, p. 425.

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Arthur C. Custance insists that “the difference between ‘good people’ and ‘bad people’ is not ... spiritual at all but cultural, and depends in a secondary way upon certain inherited factors in the structure of individual personality. ‘Goodness’ is thus an accident, an accident that is in part circumstantial and in part genetic, part nurture and part nature. Goodness in no way inheres in human nature as though the process of growing up had the sad effect of destroying it; the effect of growing up is to reveal human nature for what it really is, not to destroy some supposed original sinlessness. Any chance appearance of goodness exists only because circumstance has contributed to the sublimation of its opposite. It is not that some men are good and some bad, but rather that some men are not so bad as others and by default of opportunity give the appearance of being what they really are not.”<sup>303</sup>

Selfishness, then, tarnishes everything done by the one who is not in Jesus. The secret question is, What do I get out of that? Praise, credit, self-satisfaction, is craved. That is human nature in the person who is not dead in Christ.

Self, the “good” and bad, must die, be abased, for “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

### **SELFISHNESS MUST BE ROOTED OUT**

“If a fiber of selfishness is left, it will spring forth again, and bear a harvest after its kind.”<sup>304</sup> “If you are ambitious for self-preferment, you must overcome, or you will never enter the courts of heaven. Let selfishness be rooted out of the heart. In the life of Christ there was no fiber of selfishness. He lived not to please himself.”<sup>305</sup> “Not one thread of selfishness must be drawn into the fabric of character we are weaving.”<sup>306</sup>

This one fact we must clearly understand. If we have any reservation of heart or life, in any form, we have placed a barrier

303 Arthur C. Custance, *Man in Adam and in Christ, The Doorway Papers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1975), vol. 3, p. 31.

304 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, April 11, 1893.

305 *Ibid.*, Nov. 30, 1897.

306 E. G. White, letter 120, 1898.

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between us and Christ that makes it impossible for Him to reproduce the perfection of His own character in us. And if we allow a reservation to creep in, we erect a barrier where before there was none. "Let none deceive themselves with the belief that God will pardon and bless them while they are trampling upon one of His requirements. The willful commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Spirit, and separates the soul from God."<sup>307</sup>

Ellen White tells of an old woman who had smoked a pipe for many years but had become convicted that she ought to give up the degrading habit. However, after a struggle, she "made the statement that if she must give up her pipe or heaven she would say, 'Farewell heaven; I cannot overcome my love for my pipe.'"<sup>308</sup>

Achan said, in effect, "Farewell, heaven; I cannot give up the garment and the gold."

The rich young ruler said, "Farewell, heaven; I cannot give up my possessions."

Judas said, "Farewell, heaven; I cannot give up my selfishness."

Demas said, "Farewell, heaven; I cannot give up the world."

There are many in the remnant church who are, appallingly, in danger of making decisions such as those, not as forthrightly, probably, but just as decisively:

"Farewell, heaven; I cannot give up my pride." "Farewell, heaven; I cannot give up my resentment." Or, I cannot give up my television watching, or my fascination for sports, or my coffee or cake, or my concentration on dress, or my envy, or selfishness, or jealousy, or my penchant for gossip, or my self-love, or my reaching for social status, or my own plans, my own will, my own ways.

It all reduces to the fact that so many cannot give up everything for God. We must have our reservations. And those reservations will certainly mean our eternal loss, unless we change. (See Galatians 5:19–21.)

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307 E. G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 114.

308 \_\_\_\_\_, *Counsels on Health*, p. 68.

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### SIX SPECIFICS

What is required of us that we might attain to living the kind of life Jesus lived among men? The answer is complete self-renunciation, full self-surrender. Here are some specifics that will emphasize that answer.

1. **God's love is for all, without reservation; it is all-compassion, all-forgiveness.** "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3); "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4). "How broad and deep and measureless is the love of God manifested to man! No words can describe this love; it surpasses all thought and imagination, but it is a reality that you may learn by experience; you may rejoice in it with joy unspeakable and full of glory."<sup>309</sup> Christ "came to show that His gift of mercy and love is as unconfined as the air, the light, or the showers of rain that refresh the earth."<sup>310</sup>

2. **Through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, God forgives past sins in those who repent and surrender, then writes His laws upon their hearts so that they will desire to obey Him.** "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:24–26). "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:33, 34).

3. **Although God is loving and merciful, He cannot ignore even the smallest sin.** Any sin held onto, unrepented of, unforsaken, is a barrier between us and God. "I must speak the truth to all. Those who have accepted the light from God's Word are never, never to leave an impression upon human

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309 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 458.

310 *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 190.

## We Can Be Like Jesus if ...

minds that God will serve with their sins. His Word defines sin as the transgression of the law.”<sup>311</sup> “Do not flatter yourself that He does not denounce the particular sins that you love. Do not imagine that by some means you can enter into life without being free from moral pollution. If we would live with Jesus in the mansions that He has gone to prepare, we must be like Him here in this world. We must be diligent to set our hearts in order. Let us greatly fear self-deception.”<sup>312</sup> “Every transgression brings the soul into condemnation and provokes the divine displeasure.”<sup>313</sup>

“The Lord has not given us a list of graded sins, so that we may reckon some as of little consequence, and say that they will do little harm, while others are of greater magnitude and will do much harm.”<sup>314</sup>

**4. God expects perfect obedience of us, as He did of Adam.** “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.”<sup>315</sup> “God has spoken, and He means that man shall obey. He does not inquire if it is convenient for him to do so. The Lord of life and glory did not consult His convenience or pleasure when He left His station of high command to become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. ... Jesus died, not to save man in his sins, but from his sins. Man is to leave the error of his ways, to follow the example of Christ, to take up his cross and follow Him, denying self, and obeying God at any cost.”<sup>316</sup> “There should be a clear

311 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 115.

312 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, June 5, 1884.

313 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 623.

314 \_\_\_\_\_, *Messages to Young People*, p. 91.

315 \_\_\_\_\_, *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

316 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 250, 251.

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understanding of that which constitutes sin, and we should avoid the least approach to step over the boundaries from obedience to disobedience.”<sup>317</sup>

“Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess” (Deuteronomy 5:32,33).

**5. God expects perfect obedience because He can enable us to obey perfectly.** “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13). “By faith and prayer all may meet the requirements of the gospel. No man can be forced to transgress. Our own consent must first be gained; the soul must purpose the sinful act, before passion can dominate over reason, or iniquity triumph over conscience. Temptation, however strong, is never an excuse for sin. ‘The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.’ Cry unto the Lord, tempted soul. Cast yourself, helpless, unworthy, upon Jesus, and claim His very promise. The Lord will hear. He knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart, and He will help in every time of temptation.”<sup>318</sup> “Not one that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy’s power. The Saviour is by the side of His tempted and tried ones. With Him there can be no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat; we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. When temptations and trials come, do not wait to adjust all the difficulties, but look to Jesus, your helper.”<sup>319</sup> “By *faith* you become Christ’s, and by faith you are to grow up in Him—by giving and taking. You are to give all—your heart, your will, your service—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements; and you must *take* all—

317 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Galatians 3:24, p. 1109.

318 E. G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 67.

319 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 490, 493.

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Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper—to give you power to obey.”<sup>320</sup> “There are many who think that it is impossible to escape from the power of sin, but the promise is that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. We aim too low. The mark is much higher. Our minds need expansion, that we may comprehend the significance of the provision of God.”<sup>321</sup>

**6. God put everything He had into our salvation; He requires that we put everything we have into our salvation.**

“Those who would overcome must put to the tax every power of their being. They must agonize on their knees before God for divine power.”<sup>322</sup> “The Christian life is a warfare. The apostle Paul speaks of wrestling against principalities and powers as he fought the good fight of faith. Again, he declares, ‘Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.’”<sup>323</sup> “Wrong habits are not overcome by a single effort. Only through long and severe struggles is self mastered.”<sup>324</sup> “God will test you, brethren, and some will prove to be chaff and some precious grains of wheat. Yield not to the power of the tempter. He will come as a strong man armed; but give him no advantage. Nerve yourselves for duty, and dispute every inch of ground. Instead of retreating, advance; instead of becoming weak and nerveless, brace yourselves for the conflict. God calls on you to engage with all your powers against sin in every form.”<sup>325</sup> “Let no one imagine that it is an easy thing to overcome the enemy and that he can be borne aloft to an incorruptible inheritance without effort on his part. ... Few appreciate the importance of striving constantly to overcome. They relax their diligence and, as a result, become selfish and self-indulgent. Spiritual vigilance is

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320 \_\_\_\_\_, *Steps to Christ*, p. 70.

321 \_\_\_\_\_, “*That I May Know Him*,” p. 302.

322 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Matthew 4:1–11, p. 1082.

323 E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 222.

324 *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 612.

325 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 309.

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not thought to be essential. Earnestness in human effort is not brought into the Christian life.”<sup>326</sup>

In a word, then, How may we live a life like that of Jesus?

“Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that man may not have through faith in Him. *His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.*”<sup>327</sup>

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326 *Ibid.*, pp. 539, 540.

327 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664. (Italics supplied.)

## He Can Keep You From Falling

**I**MAGINE that you and another person, an expert mountain climber, are making your way up a steep and hazardous peak. As you cling to the rock face, you glance down and see a sheer drop of one thousand feet below you. You are a novice but the other has been over the way many times before. You are roped together so that if you slip, your companion will take the weight and save you. He will keep you from falling.

This, William Barclay suggests,<sup>328</sup> is a picture that might be seen in the words of Jude 24, in which Christ is described as “him who is able to keep you from falling.” The constantly and completely committed Christian is roped to Jesus, as it were, in his upward climb. Does Jesus fall? If He doesn’t, and the Christian continues to be “roped” to Him, he doesn’t either.

In our analogy of the mountain climbers, the only way in which the lower climber can fall is by becoming detached from his guide. He himself can untie the rope or in some other way remove its support. Otherwise he does not fall.

There are a number of Bible passages that repeat the idea of Jude. We shall examine some of these texts in this chapter.

### **“WHOSOEVER IS BORN OF GOD DOTH NOT COMMIT SIN”**

John the apostle makes a strong statement that comports with it: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin” (1 John 3:9). We may legitimately paraphrase these words, No one born of God falls into sin. The whole text reads “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed

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328 William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), pp. 244, 245.

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[nature] remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” There are, of course, some very real theological problems connected with this text, with which Bible students have wrestled for centuries.

Some questions that have been asked are, Must we take John literally here? Does he really mean in the absolute sense that the born-again person does not sin? If so, what must we understand by his term “sin”? And if he does mean in the absolute sense that the regenerate person does not sin, does he not contradict himself in chapter 2, verse 1, of the epistle: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”?

Let us once more go to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy for help in understanding these questions.

Sakae Kubo, formerly of Andrews University, has made a study of John’s usage of the term “sin” in these difficult passages of 1 John.<sup>329</sup> He has concluded that in the historical context 1 John 3:9 must be understood in the absolute sense, that the apostle is saying that the person who is truly born again does not commit any sin at all. Vincent<sup>330</sup> seems to agree with Kubo that John is writing in the absolute sense. The term “cannot sin,” he says, is “conceived as a perfect ideal, [and] life in God excludes the possibility of sin.”

In 1 John 3:9, then, we have a timeless principle stated: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” And we must know its import for us today.

The same idea is expressed in 1 John 2:1. That the ideal John has in mind in the verse calls for no sin in the absolute sense is emphasized by *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* in its comments on the text: “**Sin not.** The Greek tense shows that John is here speaking of specific acts of sin. ... John would have his readers avoid committing even a single act of sin. ...

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329 Sakae Kubo, “1 John 3:9, Absolute or Habitual?” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 1969, vol. 7 pp. 47–56.

330 M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 349.

## He Can Keep You From Falling

Complete freedom from sin is the goal set before God's children, and every provision has been made for them to reach it."—Page 636. Ellen White asserts, "Christ came to make us 'partakers of the divine nature,' and His life declares that humanity, combined with divinity, does not commit sin."<sup>331</sup>

How may we understand the meaning of this statement in 1 John 3:9 as applying to ourselves?

### WHAT IS SIN?

Let us look at John's definition of sin. He gives it only a few verses earlier, so we know what he has in mind. His definition is short, to the point: "Sin is lawlessness" (verse 4), or, as the King James Version has it, "Sin is the transgression of the law." We may therefore understand our text this way: No one born of God transgresses His law; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot break the law because he is born of God. (The implications of these words go infinitely deeper than a mere outward transgression. They plumb to the very depths of motives, desires, inclinations, and attitudes.)

The idea of "complete freedom from sin" in this life is, for most of us, hard to accept. To arrive at an understanding of its meaning, let us go to an experience of Moses, and the Spirit of Prophecy explanation of the experience.

The end of the forty years of Israel's wandering was at hand. God sought to prepare the people to cross the Jordan and take possession of the Land of Promise. To give them an opportunity to strengthen their faith in Him, He stopped the water He had miraculously given them from the rocks as they moved from encampment to encampment.

But the people seemed to have learned nothing. For as soon as they needed water and found none, they began to complain and blame.

Moses and Aaron took the problem to God, who instructed them to assemble the nation and in their presence speak to a rock, which would then give forth water.

"And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels;

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331 E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 180.

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must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (Numbers 20:10–12).

### ANALYZING MOSES’ FAILURE

Ellen White’s description of the background of this incident of Moses’ falling is interesting and extremely significant, in view of our attempt to understand 1 John 3:9. Note carefully the emphasized portions:

“Wearied with the continual murmuring and rebellion of the people, Moses had lost sight of his Almighty Helper, and without divine strength he had been left to mar his record by an exhibition of human weakness. The man who might have stood pure, firm, and unselfish to the close of his work *had been overcome at last.* ...

“Moses and Aaron had felt themselves aggrieved, losing sight of the fact that the murmuring of the people was not against them but against God. It was by looking to themselves, appealing to their own sympathies, that they unconsciously fell into sin. ...

“Had Moses and Aaron been cherishing self-esteem or indulging a passionate spirit in the face of divine warning and reproof, their guilt would have been far greater. But *they were not chargeable with willful or deliberate sin; they had been overcome by a sudden temptation,* and their contrition was immediate and heartfelt.”<sup>332</sup>

“Moses had spoken from *irritated feelings*; his words were an expression of human passion rather than of holy indignation because God had been dishonored.”<sup>333</sup>

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332 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 418, 419. (Italics supplied.)

333 *Ibid.*, p. 417. (Italics supplied.)

## He Can Keep You From Falling

“Had not the life of Moses been marred with that one sin, in failing to give God the glory of bringing water from the rock at Kadesh, he would have entered the Promised Land, and would have been translated to heaven without seeing death.”<sup>334</sup> (Let us note that, to God, “the transgression of His law in a single instance, in the smallest particular, is sin.”<sup>335</sup>). The fact that Moses was a candidate for translation tells us that he must have had an experience resembling Enoch’s whose thoughts and heart and conversation “were in heaven.”<sup>336</sup>

Ellen White describes the death of Moses. Taking leave of the nation he had led so long, he climbed Mount Nebo and there he reviewed his life. And “as he looked back upon his experience as a leader of God’s people, *one wrong act* marred the record.”<sup>337</sup>

Elsewhere, touching on the character of Moses, Ellen White says he “was naturally impatient, but had taken hold firmly of the grace of God and so humbly implored wisdom from heaven that he was strengthened from God and had overcome his impatience so that he was called of God the meekest man upon the face of the whole earth.”<sup>338</sup>

Moses was prepared for the great task and tests before him by his years as a shepherd. “In the solitude of the mountains he learned that which all his instruction in the king’s palace was unable to impart to him simple, unwavering faith, and constant trust in the Lord.”<sup>339</sup> “He became united to, submerged in, the Holy One of Israel. ... His life became so closely linked with heaven that God talked with him face to face.”<sup>340</sup>

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334 *Ibid.*, p. 478. (Italics supplied.)

335 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 15, 1898.

336 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 87.

337 *Ibid.*, p. 472.

338 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 168.

339 \_\_\_\_\_, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 342.

340 *Ibid.*, p. 343.

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### VICTORY OVER EVERY TENDENCY TO SIN

The import of these statements is that Moses had gained the victory over every tendency to sin in his life, as Enoch had gained the victory over every such tendency.

Let us now pull these ideas together and note their significance:

1. Moses, during his forty years as a shepherd, developed a complete trust in, and learned to look constantly to, God. Consequently, his relationship grew until he finally talked with God face to face. His faith and concentration on God gave him victory over every sin. This is illustrated by the fact that he so submerged his natural impatience in Christ that he became the meekest man on the earth.

2. Ellen White strongly suggests that Moses had become so fully linked to the Source of his strength during his forty years' leadership of Israel that he did not once fall during that long period, until Kadesh.

3. This being so, with the exception of that one fall, which we shall examine, Moses' life was an illustration of our text, that "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1 John 3:9)

Commenting on the first part of this verse, Ellen White says that he who is born of God "feels that he is the purchase of the blood of Christ and bound by the most solemn vows to glorify God in his body and in his spirit, which are God's. The love of sin and the love of self are subdued in him."<sup>341</sup> In this context, note well this statement: "He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God."<sup>342</sup>

4. Moses finally fell because, after forty years of keeping his eyes fixed on Christ, he looked at himself, and sinned.

5. Moses' sin was not deliberate, or willful. It was occasioned by a sudden surge of irritated feeling.

6. These steps lead to a difficult conclusion, a concept with wide and serious implications.

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341 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 220.

342 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, March 10, 1904.

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- a. Moses, on the spur of the moment, gave way to impatience.
- b. “When we give way to impatience, we drive the Spirit of God out of the heart, and give place to the attributes of Satan.”<sup>343</sup>
- c. If this is so, Moses, by his brief and undeliberate sin, was separated from God. The Holy Spirit could not, at that time, control his life.

### A DIFFICULT CONCEPT

It follows—and here is the most difficult part—that we also, if we are overcome by sin in a similar way, are separated from God by that sin; the Holy Spirit cannot, at that time, control our lives.

To get used to this idea, let us back up a step. Can a sinner be accepted by God if he has one known sin in his life unconfessed and unforsaken? “The righteousness of Christ is not a cloak to cover unconfessed and unforsaken sin.”<sup>344</sup> If one known, unconfessed, unforsaken sin in the life makes it impossible for God to justify the sinner, can we insist that, once he has been justified, a sin coming into the life—let us say, the same sin—does not again separate him from God? Does sin that is unacceptable in the unjustified somehow become acceptable in the justified? Must we not recognize that this includes sin of any kind, at any time?

It is not, then, the manner in which we sin that decides whether we are in Christ. It is the sin itself. Sin, whether it be large or small, separates us from God until it is made right. (Ponder this sentence: “In order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.”<sup>345</sup>)

There is a paragraph on page 64 of *Steps to Christ* that illuminates this area. The author writes of those who have had their sins pardoned and who want to be God’s children, but who realize their faultiness and thus question their own conversion. They sometimes slip (just as Moses slipped) and become discouraged. Addressing such, Ellen White says, “Even if we

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343 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 236.

344 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 555, 556.

345 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 366.

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are *overcome* by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God.” (Italics supplied.) (God did not turn away from Moses because he fell into that one sin; Moses did have to repent and be reinstated). Then she goes on: Christ “desires to *restore* you to Himself, to see His own purity and holiness reflected in you. And if you will but yield yourself to Him, He that hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward to the day of Jesus Christ.” (Italics supplied.)

Peter’s experience of walking on the water is helpful at this point. Keeping his eyes on Jesus, he walked safely. When he momentarily took his eyes off his Master, he began to sink, illustrating our sinking into sin for the same reason. Crying out to Jesus, he was rescued, and restored to his former relationship. And we, having fallen, when we turn again to Christ are restored to our former relationship.

At this point 1 John 2:1 is applicable: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

God makes it possible for the born-again person to avoid sinning. Actually, God intends that from the moment of conversion he live an unflawed life. If he fastens his eyes continually upon his Master and never looks to self, if he listens constantly to His directing and draws his strength from Him, he need not fall.

### **LOOKING AT SELF, WE SIN**

But Christians fail so often in these things. We look to self, we consult our own feelings and conditions, we fall back on our own strength. And so we sometimes slip into sin.

But if we sin in any respect, whether it be deliberate or unintentional, we need an Advocate. We need an Advocate because sin in any order or degree comes between us and God. The Advocate is needed to clear the obstruction.

Do not the ideas we have been discussing drive home to us the thought that even we who are Christians are sometimes inclined to take sin, the so-called “little sins,” too lightly? “Jesus stands in the holy of holies, now to appear in the presence of God for us. There He ceases not to present His people moment by moment, complete in Himself. But because we are thus

## He Can Keep You From Falling

represented before the Father, we are not to imagine that we are to presume upon His mercy, and become careless, indifferent, and self-indulgent. Christ is not the minister of sin. We are complete in Him, accepted in the Beloved, only as we abide in Him by faith.”<sup>346</sup>

“If one who daily communes with God errs from the path, if he turns a moment from looking steadfastly unto Jesus, *it is not because he sins willfully*; for when he sees his mistake, he turns again, and fastens his eyes upon Jesus, and the fact that he has erred, does not make him less dear to the heart of God.”<sup>347</sup>

“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 suffering of the Son of God.”<sup>348</sup>

“We shall fail often in our efforts to copy the divine pattern. We shall have to bow down to weep at the feet of Jesus, because of our shortcomings and mistakes; but we are not to be discouraged; we are to pray more fervently, believe more fully, and try again with more steadfastness to grow into the likeness of our Lord.”<sup>349</sup>

### **NOT A MORAL OR MENTAL STRAITJACKET**

The term “doth no commit sin” in 1 John 3:9 is not to be construed as meaning that one is not able to sin, or that he is set in a sort of moral or mental straitjacket so that an act or thought of sin is impossible. It may be thought of in terms of Joseph’s reaction when tempted by Potiphar’s wife. He exclaimed, “How ... can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? [I cannot!]” (Genesis 39:9).

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346 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Hebrews 9:24, p. 933. (Italics supplied.)

347 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, May 12, 1896.

348 \_\_\_\_\_, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 360.

349 *Ibid.*, p. 337.

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In other words, sin is totally contrary to the way a truly born-again person will live.

The term may also be considered in the context of this statement; Satan “cannot cause to sin the one who will accept by faith the virtues of Him who was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. ... He who repents of his sin and accepts the gift of the life of the Son of God, cannot be overcome.”<sup>350</sup>

In the context of this discussion, the question is often asked, sometimes incredulously, “Do you mean that God, who is a God of love and mercy, will separate from us just because of one little sin?”

But the questioner has asked the wrong question. It is not a matter of God separating from us. It is, as we have already suggested, a matter of we ourselves doing the separating. And can one little sin do that?

We have a continuing flow of electricity to our homes.

But it would be a very easy matter to halt the flow. We have but to throw a switch that is readily available, and the power is gone. Can we believe that a small sin is like throwing a switch that separates us from God?

Isaiah didn’t say that because of our sins God cut Himself off from us. He wrote, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God” (Isaiah 59:2). The separation is not made by God, but by us, as we sin.

“There should be a clear understanding of that which constitutes sin, and we should avoid the least approach to step over the boundaries from obedience to disobedience.”<sup>351</sup> “It is [the] ... little sins, so common that they are often unnoticed, that Satan uses in his service.”<sup>352</sup>

### A DARKNESS AND A SADNESS

The individual whose conscience has been sensitized by the Holy Spirit knows that he has done something to his relationship with God when he sins, even a small sin. He immediately senses

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350 *Ibid.*, p. 224.

351 *Ibid.*, p. 234.

352 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Romans 12:3, p. 1080.

## He Can Keep You From Falling

a darkness and a sadness descend. His conscience begins to smite him. Guilt surges over him. He feels condemned. He knows that he must immediately make things right with God, and with anyone he may have wronged.

If the sin is unintentional, the born-again person may quickly, and relatively easily, make it right with God. Repentance comes immediately. It is spontaneous, as in the case of Moses. Not so with deliberate sin, not so much because God is more reluctant to forgive that kind as that the heart has turned away from Him under the circumstances. Satan presses his accusations. There is a discouraging sense of self-distrust. Repentance becomes hard. There must then come a great struggle in the soul to suppress pride, turn back in humility, acknowledge the sin, truly repent, and make a new and complete surrender once again.

In all of this let us remind ourselves once again that our God is a God of immeasurable love. He wants so very much to save everyone of us. That is why He went to the absolute limit and sent His Son to die. And He will stretch every point He possibly can to give us eternal life. *But He cannot excuse sin in any degree.* Unless we are willing and cooperative in expelling every sin from our lives, in infinite sadness God will finally be compelled to remove our names as candidates for His kingdom. This must not be with your name, must it?

The purpose of this chapter is to show that because Christ came and lived as a man, without a trace of sin, He can now give us the power, through our constant looking to Him, to overcome every sin in our lives and to live as He lived. One text, 1 John 3:9, posed some special problems so that it was necessary to devote several pages to its discussion. Now we can go into an examination of some other texts.

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13). “There is too little confidence in the power which God stands ready to give. ... Immeasurably inferior is the part which the human agent sustains; but if he is linked with the divinity of Christ, he can do all things through the strength that Christ imparts.”<sup>353</sup> “Most professed Christians have no sense of the spiritual strength they might obtain were they as ambitious,

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353 E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 82.

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zealous, and persevering to gain a knowledge of divine things as they are to obtain the paltry, perishable things of this life. The masses professing to be Christians have been satisfied to be spiritual dwarfs.”<sup>354</sup>

Paul, writing to the Galatians, who were being led astray by Judaizers, stated wistfully, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (chapter 4:19). Vincent observes of these words, “The forming of Christ in them, their attainment of the complete inner life of Christians, is the object of the new birth. By their relapse they had retarded this result and renewed Paul’s spiritual travail.”<sup>355</sup> *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology* comments on the text: “Christ Himself is to be formed in them in the reality of His being.”<sup>356</sup> “The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”<sup>357</sup> The object of Jesus was “the restoration of the image of God in the soul.”<sup>358</sup>

### FITTED FOR HEAVEN NOW

We must understand that this restoration is to be done during probationary time. “We cannot enter heaven with any deformity or imperfection of character, and we must be fitted for heaven now in this probationary life.”<sup>359</sup>

By means of His “glory and virtue [excellence]” God has “given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:3, 4). “We must learn of Christ. We must know what He is to those He has ransomed. We must realize that through belief in Him

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354 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 266.

355 M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies on the New Testament*, vol. 4, p. 147.

356 Colin Brown, gen. ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1975), vol. 1, p. 708.

357 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

358 \_\_\_\_\_, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 436.

359 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 15, 1892.

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it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, and to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin, all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity.”<sup>360</sup>

“So perfect is the character represented which men must have in order to be Christ’s disciples that the infidel has said that it is not possible for any human being to attain unto it. But no less a standard must be presented by all who claim to be children of God. Infidels know not that celestial aid is provided for all who seek it by faith. Every provision has been made in behalf of every soul who shall seek to be a partaker of the divine nature and be complete in Jesus Christ. Every defect is to be discerned and cut away from the character with an unsparing decision.”<sup>361</sup>

### “POSSIBLE ... TO CEASE TO SIN”

“Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The point has been made innumerable times; it needs to be made innumerable times more: The Lord Jesus took upon Himself human flesh, lived an unflawed life, died a propitiatory death, and came forth in a triumphant resurrection, not simply that man might have these things credited to him. By these things Christ made it possible that man might be separated totally from every sin of act and attitude, cultivated or inherited. “Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.”<sup>362</sup> “Christ died to make it possible for you to cease to sin.”<sup>363</sup>

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360 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on 2 Peter 1:4, p. 943.

361 E. G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 201.

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

363 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, Aug. 28, 1894.

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Looking at one's own life and tendencies, and pondering the history of the human race, a person might well ask, "How can these things be?" But seeing what God has done for us, realizing the victories He has given, the changes He has made in us, we can know that "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

"Let none ... regard their defects as incurable. God will give faith and grace to overcome them."<sup>364</sup> "If we will trust Him, and commit our ways to Him, He will direct our steps in the very path that will result in our obtaining the victory over every evil passion, and every trait of character that is unlike the character of our divine Pattern."<sup>365</sup>

Let us remember that Christ is "mighty to save" (Isaiah 63:1).

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364 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Great Controversy*, p. 489.

365 \_\_\_\_\_, *Our High Calling*, p. 316.

# PART 4

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# Conclusions



## Heights That May Be Attained

 UR reason for believing Jesus had a nature best described as being most like that of a spiritually perfect, mature, born-again person, may most aptly be summarized by repeating a paragraph found on page 53:

“To insist that Jesus’ human nature was less than that of a born-again person, that it was like that of an unregenerate person, is unthinkable. For instance, the unregenerate person has a natural bent toward sin. But ‘not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.’<sup>366</sup> ... On the other hand, to believe that His nature was superior to that of a born-again person is really to lift Him above humanity itself, which likewise is inadmissible. It is to claim for Him advantages that no human being can have, for the new birth is the highest stage to which mankind can attain in its present state. ... Raise Jesus above this state, and His humanity loses meaningful touch with ours.”

It would seem that no acceptable alternative to this remains without making Jesus something we cannot be. But we read that “Christ declared, Where stands Satan’s throne, there shall stand my cross, the instrument of humiliation and suffering. No single principle of human nature will I violate.”<sup>367</sup> And He was “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren” (Hebrews 2:17).

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366 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on John 1:1–3, 14, p. 1128.

367 E. G. White, manuscript 165, 1899.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

If the above position is true, then it appears that every Christian, every Seventh-day Adventist, is confronted with a sweepingly significant, vastly solemn, and inescapable question that must vitally affect his attitude toward his total living, namely: If the Man, Jesus Christ, filled with the Spirit, lived a life absolutely without sin, if He lived that life with a nature like that of a truly born-again person, if He had absolutely no advantage we may not receive, if He lived that life to be an Example of what we might be by His enabling grace—and we have seen that all these things are so—*what excuse does a professed Christian, who may also be filled with the Spirit through the new birth, have for continuing in sin in any way or in any degree?*

The implications bound up in this concept border on the incredible for many. “How can this be?” they ask.

Ellen White takes up that thought. “How man can be a counterpart of Jesus Christ is beyond human comprehension.”<sup>368</sup> But “the life that Christ lived in this world, men and women can live through His power and under His instruction.”<sup>369</sup> And “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.”<sup>370</sup>

“Scarcely can the human mind comprehend what is the breadth and depth and height of the spiritual attainments that can be reached by becoming partakers of the divine nature.”<sup>371</sup> “The principles of divine truth, received and cherished in the heart, will carry us to a height of moral excellence that we had not deemed it possible for us to reach.”<sup>372</sup>

This truth, emphasized so frequently and forcefully in the Spirit of Prophecy, is questioned by some. The questioning is generally made on two counts. The first is that weak, fallen,

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368 E. G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 34.

369 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 22.

370 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, March 10, 1904.

371 \_\_\_\_\_, *Our High Calling*, p. 60.

372 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 294.

## Heights That May Be Attained

sinful man cannot possibly equal the Pattern Man, Jesus Christ (see Appendix B, p. 187); indeed, that it is sacrilegious for him to think it possible.

We have written at length offering evidence to show that it is possible. However, we would invite our readers to examine independently and thoroughly all the material in the writings of Ellen White. She strongly affirms the possibility many times. **We point out that if we do not have faith to accept the fact that this is so, God cannot work to make it so.**

A second argument used against the concept that Christians may, by the indwelling Spirit, “be a counterpart of Jesus Christ,” to quote Ellen White once more, is that when an individual accepts this as a possibility and goal, it directs faith and attention away from Jesus as the objective ground of salvation, which resided in His life and death, to the state of the believer’s own heart and life. Thus, it is claimed, it becomes salvation by character, or imitation, rather than salvation by grace. It is also argued that when the subscriber to that concept discovers that he fails, as he might on occasion, it could lead to terrible discouragement and potentially an entire loss of faith and hope.

There is, of course, the constant danger that a Christian *may* take his eyes off Christ. There is always the risk that a Christian may begin to look to himself rather than Jesus. But it does not follow that the person who believes he may, through Christ, “attain to perfection of character”<sup>373</sup> is in danger of looking at self, while the individual who does not believe this is not in such danger. No matter what concept of salvation one may have, self is a constant, lurking threat, always to be guarded against.

This particular problem may be seen as pivoting around the question of introspection. The individual who subscribes to the idea of developing a character like Jesus’ character tends constantly to look inward to keep tab on his progress, it is held. The implication seems to be that the nonsubscriber does not practice introspection.

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373 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 123.

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### SHOULD SELF-EXAMINATION BE PRACTICED?

The question may be asked: Is the Christian wrong in evaluating his life and growth? The Bible specifically directs him to do so. Prior to partaking of the Lord's Supper he is to examine himself (1 Corinthians 11:28). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* comments on this text that the believer "may well ask himself whether day by day he has an experience of death to sin and new birth to the Lord, whether he is gaining in the battle against besetting sins, and whether his attitude toward other men is right. Words, thoughts, and deeds should be inspected, as well as habits of personal devotion; indeed, everything that has a bearing on progress toward the attainment of a character that reflects the image of Jesus."<sup>374</sup>

To the Galatian Christians Paul wrote: "But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another" (chapter 6:4). This is quite explicit. And to the Corinthians he wrote, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove [test] your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). Ellen White quotes this text, then comments, "Closely criticize the temper, the disposition, the thoughts, words, inclinations, purposes, and deeds. How can we ask intelligently for the things we need unless we prove by the Scriptures the condition of our spiritual health?"<sup>375</sup>

Observe this statement, written to ministers but applicable for all: "Every follower of Christ should daily examine himself, that he may become perfectly acquainted with his own conduct. There is with nearly all a neglect of self-examination. This neglect is positively dangerous in one who professes to be a mouthpiece for God."<sup>376</sup> "The daily review of our acts, to see whether conscience approves or condemns, is necessary for all who wish to arrive at the perfection of Christian character."<sup>377</sup>

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374 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on 2 Corinthians 11:28, p. 765.

375 E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 89.

376 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 511.

377 *Ibid.*, p. 512.

## Heights That May Be Attained

The Christian who truly sees righteousness by faith in its wholeness, who understands it as comprehending imparted as well as imputed righteousness, does not look to himself for confirmation of his position before God. Neither does he measure his success in terms of attainment of character acceptable to God. For example:

### **THE FATHER, THE BOY, AND THE BOX**

A little boy has a heavy box he wants moved. He struggles and strains at it, but gets nowhere. Finally, recognizing that he can't do the job, he calls his father. Father comes and says "OK, I'll help you. But you will have to lift as hard as you can also." So father takes hold, the boy takes hold, and the box is moved.

Now, consider. Is that boy going to exclaim, "Say, I'm strong! I did all that on my own!"? Hardly.

The moral is obvious. When the Christian finds that Jesus is helping him move out of his life<sup>378</sup> some sins that he has been trying, without success, to get rid of for a long time—resentment, envy, anger, jealousy, or whatever—he certainly doesn't crow, "Now I'm making it!" So greatly does he appreciate the fact that God has taken hold in his life, he doesn't dream now of taking the credit himself. Furthermore, he is fully aware of the fact that the moment he begins to take credit for himself he will fail, miserably, just as Peter failed the moment he took his eyes off Jesus.

Moreover, his self-examination is not to gauge growth but to evaluate words, actions, thoughts, and motives in their relation to his God, as noted above. He asks himself, Did I truly honor my Saviour in the image I projected to others today? And did I, in my inner life (which truly represents the character being molded for eternity), exemplify the mind of Jesus? Or did I fail my Lord?

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378 "God does nothing for man without his cooperation."

—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 381.

"The part man is required to sustain is immeasurably small, yet in the plan of God it is just that part that is needed to make the work a success."

—Manuscript 113, Sept. 8, 1898.

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His motive, you see, is to vindicate God's law in his life and to demonstrate the transforming power of Christianity. He wishes to permit his Lord to show through his life what the Holy Spirit can do with a person totally committed to God. "The greatest work that can be done in our world is to glorify God by living the character of Christ."<sup>379</sup>

And when the Christian fails, he does not think, dejectedly, Well I'm not going to get much credit in heaven for this day's work. I didn't progress much in perfection today.

True, he does feel sad. But his sadness is mainly because he failed God. He thinks, I let my Saviour down today. I opened myself to the possibility of someone saying, "So *there* is a Christian for you! Where is the power of Christianity now?"

Ellen White makes a similar point in a comment on 2 Peter 1:5, in which the apostle lists what is sometimes termed "Peter's ladder": "All these successive steps are not to be kept before the mind's eye, and counted as you start; but fixing the eye upon Jesus, with an eye single to the glory of God, you will make advancement."<sup>380</sup>

Thus, "Those who are really seeking to perfect Christian character will never indulge the thought that they are sinless. Their lives may be irreproachable, they may be living representatives of the truth which they have accepted; but the more they discipline their minds to dwell upon the character of Christ, and the nearer they approach to His divine image, the more clearly will they discern its spotless perfection, and the more deeply will they feel their own defects."<sup>381</sup>

### THE CHRISTIAN DOES NOT DESPAIR

Nor does the true Christian, who looks to Jesus as his Exemplar, despair because he may sometimes fail and fall. He does not deliberately sin, but he may slip; he may sometimes be trapped by the adversary into taking his eyes off Jesus, and consequently fall. There may be times when he is sorely tempted to become depressed and discouraged. But he knows that "the

379 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 439.

380 \_\_\_\_\_, *Messages to Young People*, p. 45.

381 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Sanctified Life*, p. 7.

## Heights That May Be Attained

fact that he has erred, does not make him less dear to the heart of God.”<sup>382</sup>

Ellen White makes a statement—a very familiar one—that, by the very balance of its grammatical construction, shows that imparted righteousness is as necessary as imputed righteousness: “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.”<sup>383</sup> (Both of these “are found in the righteousness of Christ.”<sup>384</sup>)

The vitalness of having both may be illustrated by an experience my family and I had several years ago.

Traveling back to our home in Canada for a furlough from mission service, we spent a few days in Rome. Among our list of musts to see in the Eternal City was, of course, St. Peter’s Cathedral.

Arriving at the cathedral, we discovered, to our great dismay, that that day was a special day, and that tickets were required for entrance. After briefly discussing the situation, we were turning away to leave, feeling greatly disappointed, when a young American, who had overheard our discussion, handed us some tickets, explaining that some of his party had not shown up and that we might as well make use of the tickets.

The gratitude with which we accepted his offer can perhaps be imagined. His tickets were our title, given to us by grace, as it were, that got us into St. Peter’s.

But let us go another step. Shortly after that time, the miniskirt came into vogue, and women began to appear at St. Peter’s in that scanty attire. Believing that such dress was out of place in the cathedral, the ecclesiastics in charge decided to bar women who were what they considered indecently clothed. To ensure that their directions would be carried out, they stationed a strong-willed nun at the door to screen all female entrants.

Now, there were two women in our party when we visited St. Peter’s. Suppose that we had gone there at the time the miniskirt was under interdict (perhaps it still is) and that those

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382 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, May 12, 1896.

383 \_\_\_\_\_, *Messages to Young People*, p. 35.

384 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 300.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

two women were wearing such skirts. Attempting to enter, the two would have been stopped by the nun. Suppose we had then pointed out that we had tickets, entitling them to enter. No doubt the nun would have insisted that they could not enter. For although they would have had the *title* to enter, they would not have been *fit* to enter.

### TITLE AND FITNESS

The lesson is clear, is it not? Granting that one may have imputed righteousness, entitling him to enter heaven, he must also have the imparted righteousness, character, fitting him for heaven.

“When the voice of God awakens the dead, he will come from the grave with the same appetites and passions, the same likes and dislikes, that he cherished when living. God works no miracle to re-create a man who would not be re-created when he was granted every opportunity and provided with every facility. During his lifetime he took no delight in God, nor found pleasure in His service. His character is not in harmony with God, and he could not be happy in the heavenly family.”<sup>385</sup>

“If you would be a saint in heaven, you must first be a saint on earth. The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection. You will come up from the grave with the same disposition you manifested in your home and in society. ... The work of transformation must be done now. Our daily lives are determining our destiny.”<sup>386</sup>

“We cannot enter heaven with any deformity or imperfection of character, and we must be fitted for heaven in this probationary life.”<sup>387</sup>

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385 \_\_\_\_\_, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 270.

386 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Adventist Home*, p. 16.

387 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 15, 1892.

## Heights That May Be Attained

“The characters formed in this life will determine the future destiny.”<sup>388</sup> “God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ’s character. In His humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance of evil, the Saviour showed that through cooperation with Divinity, human beings may in this life attain to perfection of character. This is God’s assurance to us that we, too, may obtain complete victory.”<sup>389</sup>

Salvation, then, is not a matter of justification over sanctification, or sanctification over justification. It is always justification *and* sanctification.

There is a question that will come to the mind of many readers: If only perfect characters are accepted in heaven, how about those born-again people who died centuries, years, even weeks past, who, it would seem, did not have a fully matured character? We cannot understand that they will be excluded from heaven, so what must we understand? For a discussion of this problem, see Appendix C, p. 187.

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388 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 429.

389 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 531.

## “First the Blade, ... Then ... the Full Corn in the Ear”

**T**HE major purpose of this book is to show that the pure life Jesus lived on earth as a Man may be, and should be, duplicated through the grace of God in the lives of men and women now living.

The question may be asked, Why an emphasis on now? Have we any valid reason for expecting such lives to be lived in our day when it would seem that few indeed have done this in the past? Is not this a farfetched, impossible idea that even the Bible does not sustain?

But the Bible does in fact set forth this standard, as we have seen in previous chapters.

### **PAUL AND SINLESSNESS**

It is recognized that Paul, more than any other Bible writer, crystallized and defined the teachings of Christianity. Read what a famous conservative New Testament scholar of the first decades of this century, J. Gresham Machen, avers about Paul's teachings regarding sin and the Christian:

“A Christian ... is saved by God not in order that he may continue in sin, but in order that he may conquer sin and attain unto holiness.

“Indeed so earnest is Paul about this matter that at times it looks almost as though he believed Christians even in this life to be altogether sinless, as though he believed that if they were not sinless they were not Christians at all.”

Dr. Machen goes on to observe that it is true that Paul “recognized the presence of sin even in those within the household of faith.” Nevertheless, “the fact is profoundly significant that in the great doctrinal passages of the Epistles Paul makes very little reference (though such references are not

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altogether absent) to the presence of sin in Christian men. How is that fact to be explained? I think that it is to be explained by the profound conviction of the Apostle that although sin is actually found in Christians it does not belong there; it is never acquiesced in for one single moment, but is to be treated as a terrible anomaly that simply ought not to be.”<sup>390</sup>

If we remember that generally Paul was preaching and writing to Gentile Christians who, for the most part, came out of virtually raw heathenism, we will understand something of the impact this teaching might have had on them.

If some people today consider impossible the concept of total victory over every sinful tendency, think how Paul’s teachings on the subject must have hit his far less enlightened first-century hearers.

### ENOCH A TYPE

As to the question whether anyone has lived a life such as Jesus lived, note this statement: “Some few in every generation from Adam resisted his [Satan’s] every artifice and stood forth as noble representatives of what it was in the power of man to do and to be—Christ working with human efforts, helping man in overcoming the power of Satan. Enoch and Elijah are the correct representatives of what the race might be through faith in Jesus Christ if they chose to be. Satan was greatly disturbed because these noble, holy men stood untainted amid the moral pollution surrounding them, perfected righteous characters, and were accounted worthy of translation to Heaven. As they had stood forth in moral power, in noble uprightness, overcoming Satan’s temptations, he could not bring them under the dominion of death.”<sup>391</sup> “Enoch’s life and character ... represent the lives and characters of all who will be translated when Christ comes.”<sup>392</sup>

A further question may be asked: Is there any reasonableness, any logic, to the teaching that a large group of people is expected to live lives like Jesus’ in this degenerate age when only a relatively

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390 J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), pp. 206, 207.

391 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, March 3, 1874.

392 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Signs of the Times*, Nov. 11, 1886.

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few have done so through the ages? We shall consider this query, but first let us realize that no one is qualified to say that there are no individuals living at this moment who have reached this condition. There may be people of our acquaintance who have reached it, but we, in our blindness, do not recognize the fact. We must realize that the Perfect One Himself was accused of being something less than perfect—in fact, of being possessed by a devil.

### TWO FACTORS IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Now to our question. Spiritual growth depends on two factors: depth of commitment, and knowledge. An individual may be fully committed to God, and controlled by the Holy Spirit so far as his understanding permits. (And we do not forget that “God can teach you more in one moment by His Holy Spirit than you can learn from the great men of earth.”<sup>393</sup>) Nevertheless, God usually works within human limitations. A totally surrendered denizen of the jungle may not understand God’s requirements as perfectly as we who read these words, considering our background and information.

“Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. ... Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly ... yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required.”<sup>394</sup>

To the Jews were entrusted the oracles of God, but we have greater light than they had. “*With every generation increased light has shone*, and we are responsible for the use that we make of this light.”<sup>395</sup>

“We are not in the place where our fathers were. Advanced light is shining upon us in these last days. We

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393 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 119.

394 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.

395 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, May 21, 1895. (Italics supplied.)

## “First the Blade, ... Then ... the Full Corn in the Ear”

cannot be accepted of God; we cannot honor Him by rendering the same service, doing the same work that our fathers did. In order to be accounted guiltless before God, we must be as faithful in our time in following and obeying our light, as they were faithful in following and obeying the light that shone upon them.”<sup>396</sup>

We dare not, then, confine ourselves to the light Luther, Calvin, Wesley, or William Miller had, or even that which our early Seventh-day Adventist forefathers had. We accept the facets of truth they saw and reflected on to us. But we must not insist that they understood all truth, or that they even grasped in its fullness all aspects of the truth they did receive. (Concerning Christ’s disciples we read, “Of the spiritual truths spoken by the prophets they had a clearer understanding than had the original writers themselves.”<sup>397</sup>) If we do not understand some truths more clearly than the early Adventists did, we have failed to tread in the path of advancing light.

Moreover, Seventh-day Adventists have the Spirit of Prophecy. In these writings the science of salvation has been unfolded with clarity greater than that given to any other people. In them are sunbursts of spiritual light, clarifying truths as they have never been clarified before. And from those writings new gleams continue to penetrate into minds and hearts as men and women study prayerfully, seeking, with open, committed attitudes to understand God’s will and ways.

### VINDICATING GOD’S NAME AND LAW

Because this is so, God requires us—Seventh-day Adventists—to live the kind of lives that few have envisioned, and probably fewer have lived, in the past. He expects us to vindicate His name and His law, to demonstrate to the world and the universe what He can do with a people who know His ways and who are completely surrendered to Him.

This is His challenge to you. This is His challenge to me.  
We shall now consider the how of this.

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396 *Ibid.*, April 25, 1893.

397 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 494.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

When a person meets all the conditions for conversion and in faith fully submits himself to Jesus, a miracle of divine grace takes place in his heart and life. “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).

Jesus used another figure to illustrate what happens in the life when one is spiritually re-created. It is, He said, like being a branch on an olive vine. A branch can never produce the fruit independently of the vine. The fruit is borne by virtue of the life sap flowing from the vine: “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4).

“All who are really in Christ will experience the benefit of this union. The Father accepts them in the Beloved, and they become objects of His solicitude and tender, loving care. This connection with Christ will result in the purification of the heart and in a circumspect life and faultless character. The fruit borne upon the Christian tree is ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.’”<sup>398</sup>

### WHEN THE SEED IS SOWN

As soon as an individual is united to Jesus through the new birth the Holy Spirit takes possession of the life, the seeds of the fruit of the Spirit are sown, and immediately begin to develop.

Like all fruit, it takes time for spiritual fruit to mature. “First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mark 4:28). Nevertheless, the fruit is found in the new Christian from the first. He experiences a Christlike love, joy, and peace; he manifests a patience and kindness that he did not know before. There is seen in him a gentleness and self-control that will be different from the nature he showed before the Spirit came into his life.

But, again, the fruits of the Spirit are not fully developed immediately in all their strength and beauty. It may take years for them to reach a full fruition. In fact, it is really the first steps in a growth that will continue throughout eternity (for a discussion of this concept, see my book *How to Be a Victorious*

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398 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 355.

“First the Blade, ... Then ... the Full Corn in the Ear”

*Christian*, pp. 130–132). But continually the love will grow stronger, the joy deeper, the peace fuller, the long-suffering, or patience, more enduring, the gentleness more tender, the faith more dependable, the meekness more unassuming, the temperance, or self-control, more serene.

In the words of *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, “The germ of the divine life has been implanted in our souls, and it grows—a gradual process and subject to occasional retardations, yet sure, attaining at length to full fruition.”<sup>399</sup> We note also that “as the members of the body of Christ approach the period of their last conflict, ‘the time of Jacob’s trouble,’ they will grow up into Christ, and will partake largely of His Spirit.”<sup>400</sup> (“Jesus, considered as a man, was perfect, yet He grew in grace. Luke 2:52: ‘And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.’ Even the most perfect Christian may increase continually in the knowledge and love of God.”<sup>401</sup>)

Yet the Christian need not sin because he has not reached full maturity. Paul tells us that God does not allow tests to be applied to us that are beyond our stage of development. “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Thus, there is no excuse for sinning.

As the Christian goes on “from strength to strength” (Psalm 84:7) in the imparted strength of his Lord, as he progresses from “glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18)—in other words, from one degree of spiritual strength and maturity of character to another—God permits tests to come proportionate to the strength he has attained, to try his character, to strengthen him further, and to temper him for ever greater tests.

### WHEN PERFECTION IS ATTAINED

Full maturity in this life is attained when the fruit has developed in the life of the individual so that, under all

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399 W. R. Nicholl, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 5, p. 185.

400 E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 353.

401 *Ibid.*, pp. 339, 340.

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circumstances, even the most trying that human nature could possibly bear, godly self-control of thoughts and feelings, gentleness, patience, and kindness are seen, and the peace and love of God experienced. “What does this [the Christlike character Jesus calls upon us to perfect] mean? It means keeping the heart and soul and mind and strength in conformity to the will of God. It means obeying the principles of righteousness in this life, keeping the commandments of God.”<sup>402</sup> This, I submit, is, in our context, THE STANDARD OF PERFECTION THE BIBLE AND THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY HOLD BEFORE US. Those who reach this maturity will stand in their time of supreme trial as Christ stood before Pilate and Herod, because they will stand in His strength. “There will be a people who hold so fast to the divine strength that they will be proof against every temptation.”<sup>403</sup>

Thus the totally mature Christian will be one upon whom God can permit Satan to press the weight of his trials and temptations after the sealing and close of probation. “Even after the saints are sealed with the seal of the living God, His elect will have trials individually. Personal afflictions will come; but the furnace is closely watched by an eye that will not suffer the gold to be consumed. The indelible mark of God is upon them. God can plead that His name is written there. The Lord has shut them in. Their destination is inscribed—‘GOD, NEW JERUSALEM.’ They are God’s property, His possession.”<sup>404</sup>

The Christian, then, will have learned to look so fully to Christ, with his will so blended with the will of Christ, and he will be so moved and empowered by the Spirit, that under all the circumstances God chooses to allow to come to him, he will be able to stand. That there will be such a people is the subject of our concluding chapter.

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402 \_\_\_\_\_, *Special Testimonies*, Series B, No.7, p. 26.

403 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 472.

404 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 446.

## “Who Shall Be Able to Stand?”

**W**E have come to the climactic point of our book, to the close of the story of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, which is yet to be completed. It is on the verge of fulfillment. That fulfillment will be brought about through a people. To meet those people, we turn to the book of Revelation.

The stage for the introduction to this people by whom the last act in the great controversy will be played is set in Revelation, chapter six. The people are introduced in the context of a scene in which the whole of nature is being sundered apart. Around them the earth is engulfed in a crashing, consuming tumult of fire and smoke, exploding cities, dissolving civilizations, globe-erupting earthquakes, groaning, sinking mountains, and tortured seas roaring as they swallow up great islands in their awful depths.

The very heavens, which have been wrapped about the earth in comforting security from the first days of Creation, vanish “as a scroll when it is rolled together” (Revelation 6:14).

But as terrifying beyond telling as those events are, there is something still more terrifying that takes place. Amid the dazzling glare of stabbing lightnings and the frightening cannonades of thunder the Son of man is seen descending toward the reeling earth. Seated upon a great glowing cloud, wrapped about with a glory like consuming fire, He draws nearer and nearer.

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (verses 15–17).

*“And who shall be able to stand?”*

The answer to that question depends on the preparation of those who profess to be God’s children today, in this time of the investigative judgment, the antitypical time of the day of atonement. Those who shall stand as living saints in the time of supreme test at Jesus’ coming are preparing for it now.

### A TIME TO AFFLICT OUR SOULS

“We are now living in the great day of atonement. In the typical service, while the high priest was making the atonement for Israel, all were required to afflict their souls by repentance of sin and humiliation before the Lord, lest they be cut off from among the people. In like manner, all who would have their names retained in the book of life should now, in the few remaining days of probation, afflict their souls before God by sorrow for sin and true repentance. There must be deep, faithful searching of heart. ... There is earnest warfare before all who would subdue the evil tendencies that strive for the mastery. The work of preparation is an individual work. We are not saved in groups ... Everyone must be tested and found without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.”<sup>405</sup>

“Many do not realize what they must be in order to live in the sight of the Lord without a high priest in the sanctuary through the time of trouble. Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully.”<sup>406</sup>

Ellen White goes on to say that those who neglect the needful preparation, who “fail to purify their souls in obeying the whole truth,” who “believe that their condition is far better

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405 E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 489, 490.

406 \_\_\_\_\_, *Early Writings*, p. 71.

## “Who Shall Be Able to Stand?”

than it really is,” will come to the time of the falling of the plagues and then realize their loss. Then she states, “I saw that none could share the ‘refreshing’ unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action. We should, therefore, be drawing nearer and nearer to the Lord and be earnestly seeking that preparation necessary to enable us to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord. Let all remember that God is holy and that none but holy beings can ever dwell in His presence.”<sup>407</sup>

We add another quotation: “Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth.”<sup>408</sup>

### A TERRIBLE SOLEMNITY

The importance of that preparation, of that purification, will thrust home with a terrible solemnity to the heart and mind of each human being whose eyes are fixed upon the nearing cloud of the coming Jesus.

Some who look will have made that preparation. Multitudes more will not have.

“Who shall be able to stand?”

The events we have described at the opening of this chapter come when the sixth of seven seals are opened. “Now there is a pause in the opening of the seals,” *The SDA Bible Commentary* observes, “for a question must be answered.”<sup>409</sup> The answer is given in chapter 7, and in that chapter a people are described—

407 *Ibid.*

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

409 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, on Revelation 6:17, p. 780.

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the 144,000. They are depicted as being sealed with the “seal of the living God” (chapter 7:2). Ellen White defines this seal as “not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved.”<sup>410</sup>

The seventh-day Sabbath is sometimes referred to as the seal of God. This is true in that it is the outward sign of an inward commitment. “The sign, or seal, of God is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.”<sup>411</sup>

In Revelation, chapter 14, the characters of the 144,000 are described. They have the name of the Lamb and the Father written in their foreheads, which reminds us of the sealing “upon the foreheads” referred to in chapter 9. These words of chapter 14 had great significance for the Christians who first read this letter, for the name of a person had far more meaning for the ancients than for us. For us, a name generally is little more than a means of distinguishing one person from another. But to the Jews, for example, a person’s name often described the nature, personality, and character of that individual. Thus, to have the name of the Lamb and Father written in the forehead was to have characters reflecting theirs.

Of the 144,000 Ellen White writes, “They bore the signet of heaven. They reflected the image of God. They were full of the light and the glory of the Holy One.”<sup>412</sup>

They are also described as singing a song no one else could learn, they “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (chapter 14:4), and in their mouth is no lie, “for they are without fault” (verse 5). The Greek term translated “without fault” is the same word used by Peter to describe Jesus’ character; He was “without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

The 144,000 of Revelation 14 are the same as the “remnant” of Revelation 12:17: “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed,

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410 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Eze. 9:2–4, p. 1161.

411 E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 117. (Italics supplied.)

412 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Revelation 14:1–4, p. 978.

## “Who Shall Be Able to Stand?”

which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

We note especially that the Greek term here translated “keep,” as applied to the commandments of God, implies a keeping fully by careful watching. This would certainly be more than a superficial, outward adherence. Such means nothing to God. “Keeping” would be a conforming to His will in heart and mind; the company described are utterly committed to Him and are thus led by His Spirit.

### THE ANSWER

Here, then, is the answer to the question “Who shall be able to stand?” The answer is: There will be a people, whom the Revelator refers to as the 144,000, who will have developed in their lives to a full maturity all the fruits of the indwelling and empowering Spirit of Jesus. Under the full pressure of trial and temptation Satan can apply to them, and standing with a total faith in their Saviour, they will not manifest sin in their lives in any respect. They will be like their Master. In them the character of Christ is perfectly reproduced<sup>413</sup> so that He can return to claim them as His own, for they are worthy.

They are worthy, not in themselves, but in the merits and through the grace of Him who has done all things for them. Their *title* to the life of never-ending happiness that they shall now begin comes through the life He lived and the sacrifice He made for them, and offered freely to them by imputation as their own. Their *fitness* for heaven comes because He, in His omnipotence, has acted in concert with them in their small but wholehearted efforts and faith, to fashion their lives like His. They are saved through Him, and well they know it. So they exclaim, in exalting adoration: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing,” “Salvation [belongs] to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.” “Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 5:12; 7:10, 12).

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413 E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

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Over the past few pages we have been thinking in terms of many people—144,000. But now let that whole company fade from view until there is only one person standing, alone—you, who read this. Now, consider: “If you would be a saint in heaven, you must first be a saint on earth. The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection [or, we add, at translation]. ... The work of transformation must be done now. Our daily lives are determining our destiny.”<sup>414</sup>

“God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ’s character. In His humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance of evil, the Saviour showed that through cooperation with Divinity, human beings may in this life attain to perfection of character. This is God’s assurance to us that we, too, may obtain complete victory.”<sup>415</sup>

“To those who receive Him, He [Christ] gives power to become the sons of God, that at last God may receive them as His, to dwell with Him throughout eternity. If, during this life, they are loyal to God, they will at last ‘see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.’ Revelation 22:4. And what is the happiness of heaven but to see God? What greater joy could come to the sinner saved by the grace of Christ than to look upon the face of God and know Him as Father?”<sup>416</sup>

“In the whole Satanic force there is not power to overcome one soul who in simple trust casts himself on Christ.”<sup>417</sup>

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And so we end our study. In retrospect, we marvel at what God has done for His people through His Son, at what the Son, Christ, our Elder Brother, has done for us, and at what He is still waiting to do.

We are still at the place of waiting at this hour. That waiting on Jesus’ part is not, we are convinced, primarily for His church

414 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Adventist Home*, p. 16.

415 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 531.

416 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 267, 268.

417 \_\_\_\_\_, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 157.

## “Who Shall Be Able to Stand?”

to rise up and, in concert, go out in missionary zeal to persuade multitudes, vitally important though such witnessing is. It is that His people will so believe in Him, and surrender to Him so fully, that He can reproduce His character faithfully in them. *He can do this!*

And when this fuller work is truly begun, when Christ's Spirit is molding His people unimpeded by anything of self, they *will* witness to the world. They will not be silent, they will not be inactive. They will be moved by the Spirit to tell others what Jesus has done for them in banishing sin from their lives. “The gospel is to be presented, not as a lifeless theory, but as a living force to change the life.”<sup>418</sup> And *this* is the message for which the world is waiting. The rest will follow.

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418 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 826.



# PART 5

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# Appendices



## Did Jesus Manifest Anger? \* 419

WE find in the Gospels only one reference to Jesus showing anger during His earthly ministry. It is given in connection with the healing in the synagogue at Capernaum of a man with a withered arm (Mark 3:5). We note that He is not recorded as having shown anger on the two occasions when He cleansed the Temple (first cleansing, John 2:13–17; second cleansing, Matthew 21:12–16; Mark 11:15–18; Luke 19:45, 46).

In Mark 3:5 we read, “And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand.—And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole.”

What occasioned the look of anger? An examination of the previous verses reveals that it was the inhumane attitude of the onlooking Pharisees toward relieving human suffering on the Sabbath. To the Pharisees any act not, in their view, absolutely necessary on the Sabbath was a violation of the day. The case of the man in question they regarded as not being urgent. He would not die if the healing were postponed one day.

In Matthew’s record of the incident (Matthew 12:9–13), we read that Jesus reproved their attitude by asking, “What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep?” (verses 11,12). By asking this question, Jesus showed His enemies that they were degrading man below the level of the brute. They placed property value above human value.

The words “being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” tell us much regarding Jesus’ anger. The Greek term translated “grieved” means a deep compassion, a great sadness. It suggests

419 \*Adapted from two editorials written by the author, which appeared in the May 3 and May 10, 1973, issues of the *Review and Herald*.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

a profound pity at the Pharisees' condition of spiritual and moral blindness. It denotes an absence of resentment, antagonism, rage, bitterness, or any other kind of selfish sensitivity that accompanies what we think of as anger.

Although the biblical record does not refer to Jesus' feelings during the two occasions on which He cleansed the Temple, they are described in *The Desire of Ages*. Of the first cleansing we read, "As He beholds the scene, *indignation*, authority, and power are expressed in His countenance."<sup>420</sup> Of the second cleansing we read that "the *indignation* of Jesus was stirred."<sup>421</sup>

What is indignation? Webster defines it as "the feeling excited by that which is unworthy, base, or disgraceful; righteous anger"; "anger aroused by something unjust, unworthy, or mean."

In another connection we read that "When He [Jesus] saw the hypocrisy, the deception, and the wicked devising of the priests and rulers, when He saw them misleading the people by the false interpretations of the Scriptures, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men, He was indignant at their boldness and their false statements. ... He had a holy wrath against the prince of darkness, but He manifested no irritated temper."<sup>422</sup>

Of Jesus' attitude when on trial before Annas, we read that His "calm answer came from a heart sinless, patient, and gentle, that would not be provoked."<sup>423</sup>

"Jesus did not suppress one word of truth, but He uttered it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He spoke the truth, but always in love. He denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity; but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes."<sup>424</sup>

420 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 157. (Italics supplied.)

421 *Ibid.*, p. 590. (Italics supplied.)

422 \_\_\_\_\_, in *Review and Herald*, March 18, 1902.

423 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 700.

424 \_\_\_\_\_, *Steps to Christ*, p. 12.

## Appendix A

“It is true that there is an indignation that is justifiable, even in the followers of Christ. When they see that God is dishonored, and His service brought into disrepute, when they see the innocent oppressed, a righteous indignation stirs the soul. Such anger, born of sensitive morals, is not a sin. But those who at any supposed provocation feel at liberty to indulge anger or resentment are opening the heart to Satan. Bitterness and animosity must be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven.”<sup>425</sup>

In discussions of the Christian and anger, Paul’s words in Romans 12:18 are sometimes referred to: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” It has been suggested that this gives the Christian the right to show anger on some occasions. But the apostle does not mean, Be at peace *if* the other person is not insufferable, or *if* he does not cross you, or *if* you can contain your temper. His words do not give license for unchristian words or conduct under any circumstances. We believe it means: Live at peace with all men if you can do so without sacrificing principle. Because of your Christianity men may not live at peace with you, but you must have an attitude of peace toward them.

One other text requires our examination: “Be ye angry, and sin not” (Ephesians 4:26). Of these words *The SDA Bible Commentary* says, “The simplest solution [to an understanding of this command] seems to be to regard the anger here spoken of as righteous indignation. [See *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 101.] A Christian who is not aroused to the point of indignation by manifest wrongs and injustices may be insensitive to some things that ought to concern him. Righteous indignation has a most important function in stimulating men in the battle against evil.”<sup>426</sup>

If Christ, our Example, did not manifest what we might call unrighteous anger, has the Christian any excuse for doing so?

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425 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 310.

426 *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Ephesians 4:26, p. 1027.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

There are few Christians, we believe, who would deny that they sometimes show this kind of anger. Anger, or temper, seems to be one of the most common weaknesses to which we are heir. This may be one reason for our sometimes seeking for loopholes to excuse it.

When we demonstrate bad temper we sometimes justify ourselves by saying, "But Jesus was God; He was sinless. Thus He could refrain from a show of temper."

Note the following points:

1. *Jesus exercised no advantage the Christian cannot enjoy.* "Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was."<sup>427</sup> "As one with us, a sharer in our needs and weaknesses, He was wholly dependent upon God, and in the secret place of prayer He sought divine strength, that He might go forth braced for duty and trial. ...

"As a man He supplicated the throne of God till His humanity was charged with a heavenly current that should connect humanity with divinity. Through continual communion He received life from God, that He might impart life to the world. His experience is to be ours."<sup>428</sup>

2. *He empowers us to overcome as He overcame.* "This power [to overcome] is not in the human agent. It is the power of God. When a soul receives Christ, he receives power to live the life of Christ."<sup>429</sup> This power to be like Jesus comes on the basis of a condition that is emphasized over and over in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy: surrender, submission to God. "His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, *if they will be in subjection to God as He was.*"<sup>430</sup>

3. *Only the person who surrenders entirely to Jesus can receive this power to overcome.* Grace, power, force of character

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427 E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664.

428 *Ibid.*, p. 363.

429 \_\_\_\_\_, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 314.

430 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664. (Italics supplied.)

## Appendix A

“is received through unreserved surrender.”<sup>431</sup> “The surrender must be complete. Every weak, doubting, struggling soul who yields fully to the Lord is placed in direct touch with agencies that enable him to overcome.”<sup>432</sup>

4. *“Temptation cannot excuse sin.” “Transgression is our own act.”* “All who profess godliness are under the most sacred obligation to guard the spirit, and to exercise self-control under the greatest provocation. The burdens placed upon Moses were very great; few men will ever be so severely tried as he was; yet this was not allowed to excuse his sin. God has made ample provision for His people; and if they rely upon His strength, they will never become the sport of circumstances. The strongest temptation cannot excuse sin. However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act. ... However severe or unexpected the assault, God has provided help for us, and in His strength we may conquer.”<sup>433</sup>

5. *Failure comes when we take our eyes off Jesus.* Why do we sink into envy, jealousy, hatred, irritations, deceit, spiritual indifference, bad temper? Because we take our eyes off Jesus.

“Those who fail to realize their constant dependence upon God will be overcome by temptation. We may now suppose that our feet stand secure, and that we shall never be moved. We may say with confidence, I know in whom I have believed; nothing can shake my faith in God and in His word. But Satan is planning to take advantage of our hereditary and cultivated traits of character, and to blind our eyes to our own necessities and defects. Only through realizing our own weakness and looking steadfastly unto Jesus can we walk securely.”<sup>434</sup>

In Galatians, chapter five, two of the “works of the flesh” manifested by the unregenerate are wrath and strife (verses 19,20). Part of the “fruit of the Spirit” is the opposite of these, longsuffering and temperance (verses 22,23). God expects Christians to produce this fruit.

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431 \_\_\_\_\_, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 219.

432 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 299.

433 \_\_\_\_\_, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 421.

434 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 382.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

He says, I command you to love even your worst enemy, because I can give you love. I expect you to overcome appetite, because I can enable you to do it. I want you to be without jealousy, because I can take it out of your life. And I expect you to overcome temper, because I can remove every angry feeling from your heart. "All His biddings are enablings."<sup>435</sup>

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

## APPENDIX B

# “We Cannot Equal the Pattern”

“WE cannot equal the pattern; but we shall not be approved of God if we do not copy it and, according to the ability God has given, resemble it.”<sup>436</sup>

When Spirit of Prophecy statements are offered to show that God has provided that man may live a life such as Jesus lived on earth, the above quotation is sometimes used to counter the observation. It is suggested that, inasmuch as Ellen White would be contradicting herself were she to claim in one place that we “cannot equal the pattern,” and in another that we can, her statements that we can must be understood as meaning something other than what they say.

We should bear in mind that Mrs. White would, under some circumstances, make an observation suitable to the occasion; under other circumstances she would make other observations that suited the particular need. Superficially, the second observation might seem to contradict the first, or be one-sided. So it is necessary to look at the whole spectrum, and, in case of uncertainty, accept the clearest evidence.

While studying the problem raised by the above quotation, I went to the sources immediately available and, in a few minutes, was able to find no less than twenty Spirit of Prophecy statements that clearly state that it is possible to live a Christlike life here and now. For example: “Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.”<sup>437</sup> “What Christ was in His perfect humanity, we must be; for we must

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436 E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 549.

437 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664.

## Was Jesus Really Like Us?

form characters for eternity.”<sup>438</sup> These twenty quotations by no means exhaust the number.

If Ellen White many times made statements to the effect that Jesus’ “perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess,” should we understand that the quotation that *appears* to suggest the opposite cancels out all the rest? We think that no one would agree with such a position.

Nevertheless, we must still inquire, What is the meaning of the words “We cannot equal the pattern”?

Let us read the statement in context. After exhorting ministers to imitate Jesus, Ellen White writes: “He laid aside His glory, His dominion, His riches, and sought after those who were perishing in sin. He humbled Himself to our necessities, that He might exalt us to heaven. Sacrifice, self-denial, and disinterested benevolence characterized His life. He is our pattern. ... We cannot equal the pattern; but we shall not be approved of God if we do not copy it and, according to the ability which God has given, resemble it.”

The same thought appears in at least three other places in her writings: in *Testimonies*, volume 2, pages 170 and 628, and in *Signs of the Times*, September 2, 1886. The *Signs* statement, which varies slightly from the others, is as follows: “Sacrifice, self-denial, toil, and disinterested benevolence characterized the life of Christ, who is our example in all things. He laid aside the glory, His high command, His honor, and His riches, and humbled Himself to our necessities. The work and character of a true laborer will be in accordance with the life of Christ. We cannot equal the example, but we should copy it. Love for souls for whom our Lord made this great sacrifice should stimulate His people to self-denying effort for their salvation.” (The same idea is expressed in the other two references.)

It is seen, then, that the two quoted passages are essentially identical: They say that Jesus sacrificed, denied Himself, laid aside His glory, His heavenly position, all His divine prerogatives and possessions, and humbled Himself to our position. The words strongly remind us of Philippians 2:6–8: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

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438 \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 173.

## Appendix B

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Viewed in this context, the problem of the passage disappears. The theme is *sacrifice*. I could not possibly equal the example of financial sacrifice that a billionaire might make, for I don't happen to have a billion dollars. Similarly, we can never equal the example, the pattern, of Jesus' self-sacrifice and self-denial. He was the Lord of the universe. All things were His. Any possessions we have are infinitely small by contrast. But as we are called to be perfect in our sphere as God is perfect in His, so we are called to be self-denying in our sphere as Jesus was in His.

There is one more thought that should be added, for clarification: Sin, as such, is not involved in the context of the quotation. In other words, when Ellen White says, “You cannot equal the pattern,” she is not saying, “You cannot live the life of total victory over sin such as Jesus lived.” (As we have seen, she has many times said that we may.) What she is saying is that it is impossible for us to equal Him in sacrifice.

## APPENDIX C

# What About Christians Who Died With “Imperfect” Characters?

IF God requires a perfect, imparted character for one to be acceptable as a candidate for heaven, how about fully committed Christians who have died through the centuries who did not have fully developed characters? Were they thus imperfect, and so to be excluded from heaven?

The answer is, of course, No. They will have a place in heaven. “The moment we surrender ourselves to God, believing in Him, we have His righteousness.”<sup>439</sup> Having that righteousness, we are right with Him. And “if you are right with God today, you are ready if Christ should come today.”<sup>440</sup>

But while this tells us that all who accept Jesus in faith and surrender will be saved, it does nothing to solve our problem about the necessity of having perfect characters. We shall, therefore, seek an answer to this question.

At conversion, all sin is expelled from the life through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>441</sup> The Spirit then comes into the life and brings with Him those attributes that marked Jesus’ life. “The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ. It imbues the receiver with the attributes of Christ.”<sup>442</sup> These attributes come into the life of the born-again person *immediately at conversion*.

On page 32 of this book we described the life and experience of the regenerated individual. Then, on pages 90 and 91 we demonstrated that the same attributes described Christ also, thus helping to confirm the above point. Our position then, is, that when a person is born again through unreserved surrender to Jesus, when he receives the Holy Spirit into the life, the Spirit implants the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

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439 E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, July 25, 1899.

440 \_\_\_\_\_, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 227.

441 \_\_\_\_\_, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 466.

442 *Ibid.*, p. 805.

## Appendix C

These are the attributes that comprised the human character of Christ. Thus, it does not take years for the individual to get love, long-suffering, gentleness, and the other attributes that are Jesus' attributes. They come into the life *immediately at conversion*.

This being so, the converted person has the character of Jesus, incipiently, embryonically, as soon as he is born again. He has but to mature in that character as fully as is possible in this life (see p. 169) just as the physically born baby will mature in keeping with the attributes it received from its parents.

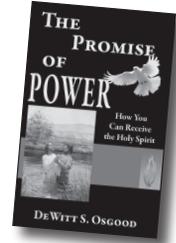
The born-again person who dies before he is spiritually mature still has the perfect, if unmaturing, characteristics of Jesus. He had them from the moment he was born again. Having that perfect spiritual inheritance from his heavenly Father, he is a child of the heavenly kingdom.

There is a final point we would make; it has to do with another reason why maturity is required. In chapters 18 and 19 we considered a people who, through the grace of the Saviour, will have developed those fully mature characters. This full development is in order that the character and law of God might be vindicated before the world and the universe. (For a fuller treatment of this subject, see my book, *How to Be a Victorious Christian*, pp. 120–136). Through that people God will prove that His law is reasonable, and can be kept completely by human beings who totally commit themselves to, and cooperate with, Him.

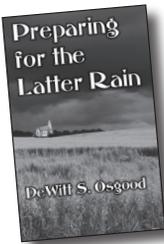
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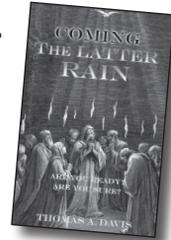
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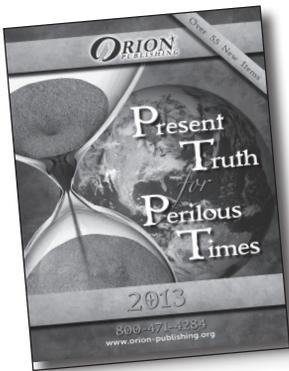
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