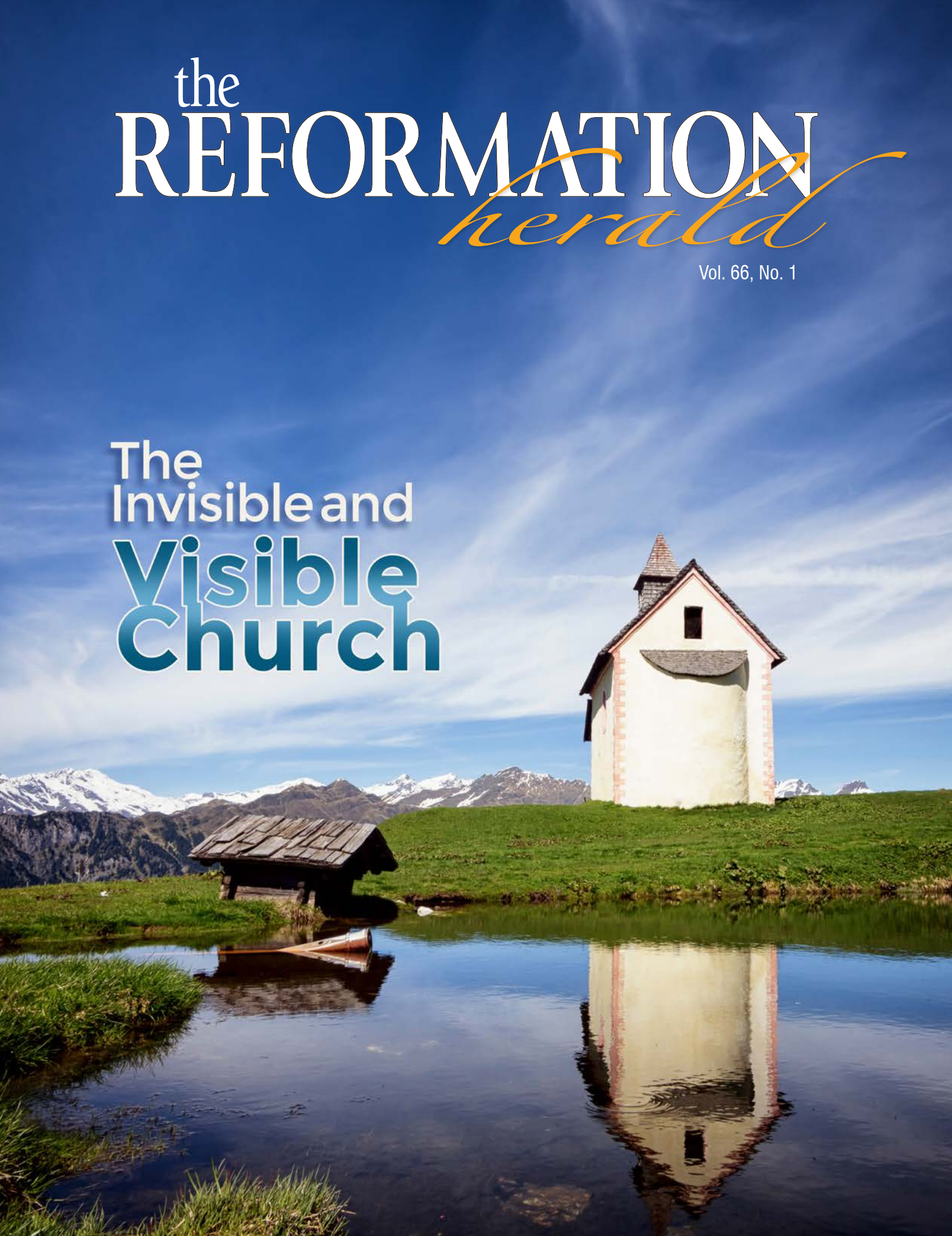
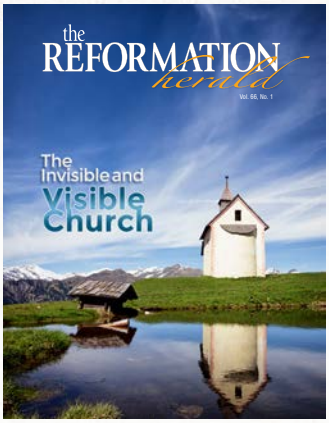
the REFORMATION herald

Vol. 66, No. 1

The Invisible and Visible Church



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Have you ever thought of distributing *The Reformation Herald* among those you meet or already know? More and more, this magazine is being designed to answer the real spiritual hunger of people in today's society, tapping into the exact train of thought being triggered by current events. As Bible prophecy unfolds before our eyes, why not keep some of these magazines on hand in a large ziplock bag, ready to share with honest, thinking people who fear God and are eager to know what in the world is going on?

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"The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold."—*Education*, p. 57.

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POOR AND AFFLICTED — OR CLAIMING TO BE RICH?

Living as we do in the final period of church history known as the Laodicean era, most of us are well familiar with the message of the True Witness to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:14–21. What's wrong with the Laodiceans? They are lukewarm. Jesus finds them to be so tasteless that He warns that if they don't change their nauseating ways, He will spew them out. What admonition should we take from this today?

"The figure of spewing out of His mouth means that He cannot offer up your prayers or your expressions of love to God. He cannot endorse your teaching of His word or your spiritual work in anywise. He cannot present your religious exercises with the request that grace be given you.

"Could the curtain be rolled back, could you discern the purposes of God and the judgments that are about to fall upon a doomed world, could you see your own attitude, you would fear and tremble for your own souls and for the souls of your fellow men. Earnest prayers of heart-rending anguish would go up to heaven. You would weep between the porch and the altar, confessing your spiritual blindness and backsliding."[1]

A contrasting attitude

The Laodiceans say they're rich and don't need anything; they are not aware of their spiritual wretchedness. But there is an interesting example of a person in Scripture who felt exactly the opposite. Remember when Jesus "saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:1–4).

What was going on in the mind of this humble servant of God? Let's see:

"[Christ's] countenance lighted as He saw a poor widow approach hesitatingly, as though fearful of being observed. As the rich and haughty swept by, to deposit their offerings, she shrank back as if hardly daring to venture farther. And yet she longed to do something, little though it might be, for the cause she loved. She looked at the gift in her hand. It was very small in comparison with the gifts of those around her, yet it was her all. Watching her opportunity, she hurriedly threw in her two mites, and turned to hasten away. But in doing this she caught the eye of Jesus, which was fastened earnestly upon her.

"The Saviour called His disciples to Him, and bade them mark the widow's poverty. Then His words of commendation fell upon her ear: 'Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all.' Tears of joy filled her eyes as she felt that her act was understood and appreciated. Many would have advised her to keep her pittance for her own use; given into the hands of the well-fed priests, it would be lost sight of among the many costly gifts brought to the treasury. But Jesus understood her motive. She believed the service of the temple to be of God's appointment, and she was anxious to do her utmost to sustain it. She did what she could, and her act was to be a monument to her memory through all time, and her **joy in eternity**."[2]

In eternity! Here we are assured that this widow will be saved. That's the kind of people who will be in Heaven. If you and I are there, this is the kind of person we will meet. This is the kind of person we will be.

God declares: "I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord" (Zephaniah 3:11, 12).

Are we ready to be totally satisfied with the experience of the remnant? May the Lord help us!

References:

[1] *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 408.
[2] *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 614, 615.



BELIEVING "IMPOSSIBLE" THINGS

By Brandon Balbach

Perfection

When it comes to studying the Bible, there are some things that people just don't like to talk about. There are some subjects that people are almost afraid of. Probably one of the most common of these is the topic of *perfection*. Just the mere mention of the word can make people shudder. And if you look at most of the advice out there outside of a spiritual context, it says: "don't be perfect." "You don't need to be perfect." "You can't be perfect!" Buddhism[1], *Psychology Today*[2], Harvard University[3], and many other[4] self-help sources teach that even trying to be perfect is more harmful than helpful. For the most part, I would agree: this is really good advice. But does the same hold true in our spiritual life? It's an important question, because the Bible has a great deal to say on the subject.

But even a quick search among religious sources shows that a number of Christians[5] also hold this view[6]. And so in general, there is a lot of fear about perfection. There is a tendency to *perfection anxiety*. In the spiritual context, people often consciously or unconsciously come to one of the following conclusions: (a) it is not possible, or (b) it is possible, but they have to achieve it on their own by a strict observance of disciplined routines in their behavior and lifestyle. A common thought is that "*I*—must become *good enough*—to reach God's standard." No wonder there is fear. Unfortunately, there is much misinformation on the subject that is the cause of this fear.

Overcoming "perfection anxiety"

What does the Bible really mean when it tells us to be perfect? Is it even possible, or is it some sort of utopian dream? Or, is God's command to be perfect more like a moving target that was only intended for our encouragement and inspiration but never designed to be actually reached?

"When Paul wrote, 'The very God of peace sanctify you wholly' (1 Thessalonians 5:23), he did not exhort his brethren to aim at a standard which it was impossible for them to reach; he did not pray that they might have blessings which it was not the will of God to give."[7]

"Our Saviour does not require impossibilities of any soul. He expects nothing of His disciples that He is not willing to give them grace and strength to perform. He would not call upon them to be perfect if He had not at His command every perfection of grace to bestow on the ones upon whom He would confer so high and holy a privilege."[8] Could it be that we will finally overcome our fear of being perfect when we recognize that the high standard that God has called us to reach is a tremendous honor and privilege?

"All heaven is interested in the restoration of the moral image of God in man. All heaven is working to this end. God and the holy angels have an intense desire that human beings shall reach the standard of perfection which Christ died to make it possible for them to reach."[9] So the conclusion is, perfection is possible—it is attainable. Why do we get so discouraged then?

What vs. how

Typically, there is a lot of time spent discussing the *what*: what perfection means, what is involved, and so on, and not enough time is spent discussing *how* it actually all works. This lack of understanding can result in a tendency to doubt. While we will spend some time clearing up misconceptions about the definitions, we'll also spend time exploring how it actually works. And then—when we begin to understand how—impossible things may start to seem possible.

The What: Perfection defined

There are actually a lot of misunderstandings here, so let's start with the basics. When we talk about perfection, what do we mean? A lot of people have the idea that they need to reach God's perfect standard by exhibiting *good behavior,* and that by discipline and some help from God, they just might reach perfection one day, at the end of their lifetime. Is that what perfection is about—good behavior? In some circles, it is taught that perfection is about a reformation that we must make in our diet and standards of dress. When the Bible speaks of being perfect, is that what it's talking about? Friends, if that's our understanding of perfection, we have missed the picture entirely.

What is it about then? Some common definitions include righteousness, obedience, total victory over sin, sinlessness. Are these definitions correct? Yes of course, but it actually goes much deeper than that. Let's take a look at victory over sin, for example, by reading from the book of James. We should notice that James is typically known for his emphasis on *works* over grace or faith, but look at what he says on how to achieve victory: "…Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7). In order to have victory, he's saying we must resist, right? We just need to gather all our strength, and fight back. Or actually, have we missed a step? "*Submit yourselves therefore to God.* Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. *Draw nigh to God,* and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and *purify your hearts,* ye double minded." (James 4:7, 8, emphasis added). So often we quote this verse, and yet we miss the first step: submitting to God. James is saying that the secret to victory is not in the *resisting*: it's in the *submission*. To summarize, it's not a about the external things. It's about the heart work.

Where does perfection or even reformation actually begin? What is the first step that needs to be taken? *"The first work* of those who would reform is, *to purify the imagination.* If the mind is led out in a vicious direction, it must be restrained to dwell only upon pure and elevated subjects. When tempted to yield to a corrupt imagination, then flee to the throne of grace, and pray for strength from Heaven. In the strength of God the imagination can be disciplined to dwell upon things which are pure and heavenly."[10] [Emphasis added.]

"The first work of those who would reform is, to purify the imagination. If the mind is led out in a vicious direction, it must be restrained to dwell only upon pure and elevated subjects."

Yes, perfection has a visible manifestation on the outside, but it never starts there. Any attempt at being righteous by making a change to our lifestyle, or even our external behavior, without coming from a change within the heart is an attempt at human works, and is considered as filthy rags, or pharisaism in the sight of God.

Do you remember Jesus' account of the Pharisee and the publican? Why did He say that the publican was justified, and the Pharisee was not? What was the difference between the two, at a glance? The Pharisee focused almost entirely on the external things: what *he did.* The publican focused on the heart: "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

If the first step begins with the heart, then what about the last step? Is *that* about the external things? In *Christ's Object Lessons* we read: "The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within."[11] From the first to the last, perfection is measured from within.

Does perfection have an outward manifestation? Yes, of course. If our heart is surrendered, our life will be changed. Does God have standards that He expects us to follow, including in areas of lifestyle? Yes, absolutely, but the process should never begin there. The behavior, the lifestyle, and all other outward things will always come from the outflowing of a heart that is fully dedicated to God, and enabled by the extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit.

"Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and 'God is love.' . . . Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him."[12]

To summarize, what is perfection really about, in a word? *Character*. There will be people in heaven who didn't have the complete understanding of how a Christian should dress, or what a healthy diet means, but they will be there because they had the character of Jesus. On the other hand, there will be individuals who followed the strictest standards of modesty in dress, who observed the healthiest diets possible, and yet will be lost—because they were unable to overcome deeper character issues.

Why is perfection about character? Doesn't the external matter, too? Yes, but God wants more for us than that. We might look at the sixth commandment and feel good about ourselves knowing that we don't kill. But God wants us to be in a place where we don't have secret hatred or bitterness even towards our enemies. We might look at the seventh commandment and feel confident in our obedience to the seventh commandment, but God wants us not only to practice loyalty, but to purify our thoughts. We might look at the tenth commandment and feel satisfied after having overcome covetousness. But God wants us to be to be at a place where we reject materialism and would rather give to others in need than accumulate for ourselves. He doesn't want us just to *look* like Christians: He wants us to *be* Christians.

Levels of perfection

There are actually four different meanings for the word, and we will review them in **descending** order.

4. Absolute perfection

What does it mean to be *absolutely* perfect? Do human beings qualify? No. To be absolutely perfect means not only to never sin, not only to never make mistakes, but also to never change one's mind. In James 1:17 we read, "Every good gift . . . comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Have you noticed that nothing ever 'occurred' to God? There was never a moment when He said to Himself, "Hmmm, . . . I've never thought of that."

What about the angels—do they qualify? The pen of Inspiration tells us that nearly one half of all angels sympathized with Satan, at one point.[13] We know that only one third of the angels ultimately rebelled with him, and so we can conclude that some of the angels changed their minds, and this is acceptable. God allows for that, and it is not sin. But it is not *absolute* perfection. "Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden…"[14] God is the only one who qualifies for *absolute* perfection.[15] It never applies to us. We don't have to worry about it.

3. A perfect nature

The next level of perfection is *perfect nature*. In order to understand this, it helps to first understand the fallenness of the nature we now have. In Romans, the apostle Paul describes a conflict between his decisions of the will, and his ability to perform them. "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." Romans 7:19. In other words, we have *will (*freedom of choice and thought), but not *willpower* (the ability to carry out the will). This is why we need the divine nature.

When God created Adam however, not only was his character perfect, but his nature was as well. He had within his nature the strength to resist temptation, without additional help from God.[16] There were no fallen tendencies or inclinations. God does not create anything less than perfection.

If Adam had this, and the unfallen angels have it,[17] when will we receive it? Is it possible to attain to here on earth? In the book *Selected Messages* we read: "Not a soul of you has holy flesh now. No human being on the earth has holy flesh. It is an impossibility."[18] So when do we receive it? "In a moment…at the last trumpet…this corruptible must put on incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:52, 53). It happens at the second coming of Christ, and is yet another type of perfection that we don't have to worry about.

2. Perfect _____ ?

We will skip this level for now and come back to it shortly.

1. Perfect surrender

This is also known as *character surrender,* or being "perfect within your sphere", or at every stage of your spiritual growth. So how can we actually be perfect at each stage? "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20. If Christ lives in me, can He live anything other than a perfect life?

In Mark chapter 4, Jesus describes the growth of a cornstalk and compares it to the Christian experience. "And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knows not how. For the earth brings forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Mark 4:26–28. Even though the baby corn plant is not mature, it is still perfect at each stage of its growth. What this really means is to be perfectly surrendered to God on all points that you know.

When you first come to Christ—do you know everything there is to know about following Him? No, and we can be so thankful He doesn't tell us everything at once, as that would be overwhelming. But we are to be perfectly surrendered to Him in all that we know. So what if the *all* that you know is a very small *all*? What if all you know is "I'm a great sinner", and "Jesus is a great Savior?" Well, if that's all you know, and if you're fully surrendered, then that is enough. You see,

the real question Jesus asks us in the judgment is the same question He asked to Peter: "Do you love me with all your heart?"

There is yet another aspect to this definition of perfection, and that is *perfect growth.* If a Christian is a spiritual plant, he/she will grow. If a plant doesn't grow, it is dead. The growth that we're referring to here is always tied to knowledge. As the Christian learns more of God's purposes, he will apply that knowledge in life. But one thing remains the same: there is always perfectly surrender. The circle of knowledge enlarges, and the way the life is lived changes in correlation to the knowledge, but the commitment remains the same: 100% surrender to God.

"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day." Proverbs 4:18. In scripture, the word *light* often refers to spiritual knowledge, and the word *just* is rendered as "righteous" in other translations.

The apostle Paul describes this experience as a continual journey: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after…reaching forth unto those things which are before…I press toward the mark" (Philippians 3:12 –14). The Spirit of Prophecy describes it as the "work of a lifetime."[19] "The plant must either grow or die. . . . Its growth is silent and imperceptible. . . . At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement."[20]

2. Perfect character

Okay, going back now to look into this next level of perfection. It can be described as complete character maturity, or the top of "Peter's Ladder" (2 Peter 1:5–7). The plant has grown up; it is "the full corn in the ear" and there is no more growth to be done. Growth of knowledge will continue, but the character will be complete—a perfect reflection of Jesus. "For the perfecting of the saints. . . . Till we all come . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12, 13).

The big question is, do I have to achieve this level of perfection in order to be saved? If sanctification is the work of a lifetime, and it will take me an entire lifetime to reach this, do I have to live my life to the end before I can be saved? What happens if I die before my time in some illness or accident, and stop halfway through the process? Am I lost?

In order to answer this question, we will consider one example that will make it perfectly clear: the thief on the cross. He was saved at the last minute. In fact, he was mocking Jesus with his companion thief just a few hours (or maybe even minutes) earlier. But he was saved. There are people who believe that God made an exception for him, but is that really the case? It is not consistent with God's character to make arbitrary decisions or display favoritism.

If we look at Peter's Ladder, we notice that the thief didn't even make it past the first step. He had faith. There was no time to attain virtue, or knowledge. He didn't know about baptism, tithing, or even the Holy Spirit. He simply had faith. If the thief could be saved at the last minute, then this tells us all we need to know about perfection and salvation. Definition one is all that's required: *perfect surrender.* Sadly, so many Christians—Adventists included—think that they have to reach the top in order to be saved. No wonder there is fear.

If the first level of perfection is all that's required for salvation, then why do we talk about the second level at all? Is it reachable here, in this life? Has anyone ever reached the top? We have the example of Enoch, who undoubtedly did. He became so close to God, that God could not bear to be apart from him. But we must notice that Enoch had 365 years of life, and his nature was a lot stronger than ours is. So is it possible for the rest of us to reach a 100% perfect character in this life?

The Bible tells us it is possible, for a special group of people known as the one-hundred and forty-four thousand. Outside of Enoch, the people in this number will be the first ones in history to have the spotless character of Christ's righteousness, while living on earth. In Revelation 14:4 we read, "These are they which follow the Lamb wherever he goes . . . being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb." What does the term *first-fruit* mean? It means it is the fruit that came first. In other words, no other fruit before it was fully ripe. "And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Revelation 14:5). The word *guile* here means *deception* or *hypocrisy.* In other words, their lives are completely consistent with their professions.

"The godly character of this prophet [Enoch] represents the state of holiness which must be attained by those who shall be 'redeemed from the earth' (Revelation 14:3) at the time of Christ's second advent."[21] "I also saw that 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."[22]

In summary, perfection levels three and four do not apply to us in this life, and therefore we don't have to worry about them. The second level, the perfect character of Jesus, is a much deeper topic which can be explored another time. For now, what we need to understand about the first level is *how* it happens.

The How: Practical perfection

How can we be considered perfect in the eyes of God? How can we even make progress? Is it there a lot of flexing and straining required? "Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifice, is righteousness obtained; but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it."[23]

The Bible gives us an example that really helps show what our perception of our own perfection should be, and it is found in the story of Job. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. And

"When tempted to yield to a corrupt imagination, then flee to the throne of grace, and pray for strength from Heaven. In the strength of God the imagination can be disciplined to dwell upon things which are pure and heavenly."

the Lord said unto Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil?" (Job 1:1, 8). Notice how *God said* that Job was perfect. But what did *Job say* about himself? "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse." Job 9:20. The lesson here is that only God can declare us as holy. We cannot declare it. If we declare it, in that moment, we are unholy.

From Job's example we can see not only that we can make no claim to perfection, but we even have no knowledge of it at all. The acknowledgement, the record-keeping, and the declaration are God's prerogative. "No one who claims holiness is really holy. Those who are registered as holy in the books of Heaven are not aware of the fact, and are the last ones to boast of their own goodness. None of the prophets and apostles ever professed holiness, not even Daniel, Paul, or John. The righteous never make such a claim. The more nearly they resemble Christ, the more they lament their unlikeness to him."[24] What we are to be concerned with is to be continually "looking unto Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2), and as we continue to do so, we become changed (2 Corinthians 3:18).

God's part

So how does the process of becoming perfect actually work?

1. God *begins* the work. In Philippians 1:6 we read, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in you…" The work of getting started belongs to God.

2. Jesus *presents* us as faultless before His Father. "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory..." (Jude 24, *c.f.* Colossians 1:28.) This is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us.

3. God *declares* us as being righteous. "Whom God has 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 believes in Jesus." (Romans 3: 25, 26). In this step, the righteousness of God is *declared*, or spoken, into our lives. The Bible says that the very words that God speaks are themselves *creative* (Psalm 33:6, Isaiah 55:11). So what were to happen if God were to make a declaration that we were righteous, when in fact, we were not? In Numbers 23:19 it says that God cannot lie, but Hebrews 6:18 tells us something more interesting: it says it is *impossible* for God to lie. Why is that? Because if God were to say something that were untrue, it would become true, in the moment that He would say it. If God declares us righteous, and yet we are unrighteous, *we become* righteous in the moment that He declares us so, if we are repentant and exercise faith in His promise. This is the righteousness of Christ imparted to us.

4. God *measures* our growth. "And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein" (Revelation 11:1). Once again we see that the prerogative of observing and recording the exact status of our growth belongs to God. The problem with measuring ourselves is that our bias will always result in a grade that is higher by our own standard than in God's eyes. But a bigger problem occurs when we measure others, often by our own measuring rod. We tend to flatter ourselves that our neighbor is worse off than we are, but the reality is we are completely blind to our own hypocrisy. We can be so thankful that God owns this step, and His measuring instruments are always perfectly balanced. It is also important to notice that we never find any Scripture in which God informs us of our measurements.

5. God *records* our progress. "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

6. God *finishes* the work that He started. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

7. God *seals* us with His own seal. "And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." Ezekiel 9:4. Just as an artist signs his work, so the Master Artist puts His signature on His greatest work of art, the spotless character of Jesus in the life of a weak, incapable human being whose greatest desire is to bring honor to His name. But if God is to be the one to seal us with His seal, it must be His work that He is sealing. Imagine approaching Monet, Van Gogh, Rembrandt, or any one of the great painters of history, and asking them to put their signature on a piece that you had painted yourself. It would be unthinkable—even sacrilegious. And yet unfortunately, many of us have tried to do this with God. We've carefully crafted a coat of righteousness that looks like His,

and shamefully asked Him to accept it. If God is to seal us with His own seal, it must be His own work that he is signing. Are you not willing to trade in your rags for the robe of Christ's righteousness, signed with that most beautiful of signatures, and offered freely as a gift?

In review, it is plain to see that the work of becoming perfect—is one-hundred percent—the work of God. There is not one single ounce of human craftsmanship, or else God could not attest to the completeness and authenticity of the result.

My part

What about me? What is my work? Is there anything required from me for this to happen?

1. *Faith*. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17).

2. *Surrender. "*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Faith, surrender, together with prayer—this is our "work". But is it really *work*? Does our faith merit reward before God? Does our surrender through prayer hold any value, or are they merely conditions? The only thing which has merit before God is the perfect life of Christ, and so we should really call this *our role.*

Obedience

But what about obedience? How does that fit into this picture? Isn't that something that we still have to do? Let's take a closer look. "The work of gaining salvation is one of copartnership, a joint operation. There is to be cooperation between God and the repentant sinner."[25] If we were to apply this principle of cooperation to obedience, what would it look like?

Galatians 2:20, which we have already read, should make it plain: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but *Christ lives in me…*" (emphasis added). So is the obedience mine or Christ's? It is my surrender, and Christ's work; my choice, God's power. In fact, that is a good definition for obedience.

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). "Then he answered and spoke unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). The Bible makes it plain: obedience is something that fits across both spectrums. The choice comes from us, but the actual act comes from God and is done through the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit in the life, which we call the "divine nature."

Final thoughts

"Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God's presence. This covering, the robe of His own righteousness, Christ will put upon every repenting, believing soul. . . This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us. . . . Christ was obedient to every requirement of the law. . . . By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah."[26]

In a letter to a church member who once struggled with perfection anxiety, sister White said, "Brother Church, the Lord has said, 'a new heart will I give you.' [Ezekiel 36:26.] You may labor, you may work with all your powers for a new heart and you will be just as far from your object as you are at the present time. You cannot prepare the garment of righteousness for yourself. You must put on the garment of righteousness of Christ which has been woven in Christ's loom. All your struggles and wrestlings are unnecessary. All you have to do is to believe the naked promise of God. . . . Christ says, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. . . . All you have to do is to open the door for Jesus." [27]

Dear reader, the question for you today is, whose robe are you wearing? Maybe, you've found yourself in a category of believing that perfection was simply not achievable, because it was so difficult. On the other hand, maybe you've struggled for years to weave a robe of your own, and after trying it on, have found it heavy to carry. Won't you accept the beautiful robe that God has freely offered? You will find not only that it is light to wear, but also that it could not fit more perfectly.

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By Davi Paes Silva

Extracting the root OF BITTERNESS

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:15).

Sowing and harvesting follow a law of nature. What we sow we will surely harvest. Good thoughts, kind words, and Christian actions will produce a very positive harvest, and people around us will be blessed by our Christian behavior. On the other hand, impure thoughts, bad words, backbiting, criticism, false rumors, and accusations all produce a harvest that will bring terrible results.

All kind of actions, either good or evil, react first and more heavily upon the doers than upon the victims. We feel very happy when we can help other people. On the other hand, we are also the first to suffer the consequences of our own wrong procedures.

Always when we hear experiences of young people who have been involved in humanitarian missions, they are almost unanimous in saying that they were the most benefited by helping those in need. On the contrary, those people involved in war, taking part in destroying and killing people, suffer the tragic scars of their own aggressive actions for the rest of their life.

The inspired apostle Paul warns us against keeping any root of bitterness within our hearts. If we have offended someone or have been offended ourselves, our human nature makes us inclined to harbor those bad feelings in our heart. Doing this, we just multiply our own suffering. The Christian way to deal with this situation is to forgive those who have caused any damage to our reputation or our life.

But in order to be able to really forgive our offenders, we need to accept Christ's forgiveness.

I remember reading a story of a family whose husband and father abandoned his wife and children by leaving home to live with another woman.

The wife with her children had to work hard so that the children could be educated in the absence of the father.

After some years, one of the boys graduated in medicine. But to his terrible surprise, he was soon diagnosed with cancer in his throat. He was really devastated.

God then placed in his pathway a Christian psychologist who talked to him about the love of Christ and asked him if he had some bitterness in his heart. He answered that yes, he had a mortal hatred against his father who had abandoned their family when he was a child. The psychologist then told him that he needed to forgive from his heart the evil action of his father. At the beginning the man said that this was impossible. Later, as he experienced the love of Christ, he forgave his father. To his great surprise, his throat cancer receded.

Then the man decided to treat cancer patients with these remedies:

1. Accepting Christ and His forgiveness;

2. Forgiving any offender;

3. Detoxifying the system, purifying the blood.

He was very successful in these cancer treatments.

One very good professional in natural medicine in Brazil, used to tell me that cancer has many causes, but one of the strongest is the keeping of bitterness in the heart. And he was right. Keeping bitterness in the heart causes damage to many people, but mainly in the one in whose heart bitterness abides.

Eternal results

"As the seed sown produces a harvest, and this in turn is sown, the harvest is multiplied. In our relation to others, this law holds true. Every act, every word, is a seed that will bear fruit. Every deed of thoughtful kindness, of obedience, or of self-denial, will reproduce itself in others, and through them in still others. So, every act of envy, malice, or dissension is a seed that will spring up in a 'root of bitterness' (Hebrews 12:15), whereby many shall be defiled. And how much larger number will the 'many' poison. Thus, the sowing of good and evil goes on for time and for eternity."[1]

"While you so readily think and speak evil of one another, while you allow the root of bitterness to spring up and be cherished, your influence scatters from Christ and hardens hearts in resistance to the sweet spirit of unity and peace. Put it all away without a moment's delay. 'Love one another,' Christ says, 'as I have loved you' (John 15:12)."[2]

"It is a most serious matter to go from house to house, and under pretense of doing missionary work, cast in the seed of mistrust and suspicion. Each one speedily germinates, and there is created a distrust of God's servants, who have His message to bear to the people. When God speaks through His servants, the seed [of mistrust and suspicion] sown has developed into a root of bitterness. The word falls upon hearts that will not hear, on hearts that will not respond. No earthly or heavenly power can find access to the soul.

"Who is accountable for these souls? Who shall eradicate that poisonous root of bitterness that has prevented them from receiving the word of the Lord? A good sister or a brother planted the evil seed, but how can that one restore the soul thus imperiled? The tongue that should have been used to the glory of God in speaking words of hope and faith and confidence in God's workmen has turned away a soul from Jesus Christ. Those who themselves despised the words of Christ, and refused to hear His voice and to be converted, have leavened other minds with the leaven of evil surmisings and evil speaking.

"This is the day of the Lord's preparation. We have no time now to talk unbelief and to gossip, no time now to do the devil's work. Let everyone beware of unsettling the faith of others by sowing seeds of envy, jealousy, disunion; for God hears the words, and judges, not by assertions, which are yea and nay, but by the fruit one's course of action produces. 'By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). The seed sown will determine the character of the harvest.' "[3]

"I beseech all who engage in the work of murmuring and complaining because something has been said or done that does not suit them, and that does not, as they think, give them due consideration, to remember that they are carrying on the very work begun in heaven by Satan. They are following in his track, sowing unbelief, discord, and disloyalty; for no one can entertain feelings of disaffection, and keep them to himself. He must tell others that he is not treated as he should be. Thus, they are led to murmur and complain. This is the root of bitterness springing up, whereby many are defiled.

"Thus, Satan works today through his evil angels. He confederates with men who claim to be in the faith; and those who are trying to carry forward the work of God with fidelity, having no man's person in admiration, working without hypocrisy and partiality, will have just as severe trials brought against them as Satan can bring through those who claim to love God. Proportionate to the light and knowledge these opposers have is Satan's success. The root of bitterness strikes deep, and is communicated to others. Thus, many are defiled. Their statements are confused and untruthful, their principles are unscrupulous, and Satan finds in them the very helpers he needs."[4]

One vital question

Will we be able to enter heaven with bitterness in our heart? Absolutely not.

Only those who have heaven in their heart will enter heaven.

"To save the transgressor of God's law, Christ, the one equal with the Father, came to live heaven before men, that they might learn to know what it is to have heaven in the heart. He illustrated what man must be to be worthy of the precious boon of the life that measures with the life of God."[5]

"Love to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God. It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one with us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, 'Love one another, as I have loved you' (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts."[6]

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13, 14).

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by Vitor Teixeira

A Peculiar PEOPLE

The Duty of an Active and Living Church

Introduction

The love of God has been proclaimed all over the world, and the reason why this love has been so powerfully announced is because the world is in need of it. With each passing day, brotherly love, compassion, and charity cease to exist in some cold, insensible heart that is uprooted from God. The Lord has to transform those hearts. And instead of a hard, stubborn heart, Jesus must renew it, creating pure and living hearts, tender to the pain of others, empathetic and ready to receive the transformation that comes from the Holy Spirit.

John says in his epistle: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:1–3).

The apostle is practical in his approach to his readers. As much as we read, as much we understand his point of view, he has just said: "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (1 John 2:29). It means that Jesus is righteous, and in order for us to be truly born of Him we must show it by our fruits—"wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20).

John also has a special way in his wording. His purpose in writing these epistles is to strengthen the churches where he worked—to encourage his loving children in Christ to better live the Christian life. That is why we see many times John addressing each verse, as if he would be writing to one special, beloved child. Then, let us analyze

the first part of verse 1: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1).

John does not even try to measure the extent of God's love toward us. He says: what manner of love, meaning, with what can we compare this? What can we exchange it for? And he gives us a much stronger proof when saying: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). John does not say that the Father's love is equal to this or that, but uses this unique method of embracing Jesus' love in fervent intensity, passion and emotion for humanity.

And he questions: What manner of love is this? What kind of love has God bestowed upon us? Such a resilient love that would endure death, "even death of the cross" (Philippians 2:6–8) to give us the right to be called children of God, as he explains in his gospel: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12, 13).

In other words, all who receive Jesus as their personal and only Savior, all who accept Him to work a miracle in their hearts will receive power to become children of God. To Rahab, Jacob, and even the demon-possessed man in Gadara, Jesus gave power to change their lives. And now, for all those who wish to be transformed, He will clothe them today in clean, pure garments to walk in righteousness and newness of life.

And now John once again connects his gospel and his epistle saying: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." So, being born from God, and having received forgiveness, the new birth, as well as the mitre of holiness in the forehead, we are to bear fruit unto righteousness.

"The world knoweth us not"

Here on this point, John makes a clear statement about fame. With strong words, he leads us to re-think our work as Christians in society. He says: "therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." Two connected ideas stand out, which will be discussed separately. The first: sometimes we are very well known by the people of the world. They know our names, they know our houses, they come to our places, they also know we are Christians. What, then, is the problem with all of this? They know us too well; we became familiar; we became like them. Our lives are their lives; our music is their music; our food is their food; our words are their words; even our religion is their religion. We are no longer a peculiar people.

The second idea: If they really do not know us, what role as a Christian have we played? If they really do not know us, it is because they know not the Father, and the world has not been illuminated with the great glory and love of Jesus. In other words, what have we done that has kept the world from knowing Jesus? And then comes another question: If He is known, what is holding them back from making the decision to accept and follow Him? Or is it due to our role as Christians, our efficiency—or in this case, inefficiency?

But first, let us understand the previous idea. Let us take a couple of paragraphs to answer some questions: What is a peculiar people? Why are we called to be a peculiar people? How long does it take to become a peculiar people? Three long and complex questions need to be answered, but they cannot be skipped or forgotten—they are the right tools to measure the health of a living, faithful and active church.

1. The meaning of "peculiar"

What is a peculiar people? According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2002), the word "peculiar" means "Distinguished in nature, character; special; distinctive." However, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* reveals an interesting synonym for it, saying that "peculiar" can also be something odd, strange, atypical or even weird.

Using these terminologies, we extract different views on what being a peculiar people could be. Yet, this is not what God meant when He first called us to be a peculiar people, His peculiar treasure. His words are found in Exodus 19:5 and Deuteronomy 14:2:

"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5). "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deuteronomy 14:2).

God chooses us to be different. God is giving us, His people, a condition to continue being His people; actually, He says that if we obey His voice, and keep His commandments, then we will be a peculiar treasure above all nations. Note that He does not say we will be His only people, but His peculiar people—using the same meaning as in the Oxford Dictionary—a special people to take forward His love, mercy and goodness. Why? He finishes: "for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5).

The second question is now easier to be answered: Why are we called to be a peculiar people? Knowing these questions would come up, God inspired men to give the answer to His servants, and now we can find them in Titus 2:13, 14, and 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2:9: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a **peculiar** people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:13, 14, emphasis added).

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from

your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the **precious** blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19; emphasis added).

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9).

The answer is clear: Jesus has redeemed us, saved us, and also has made us a peculiar people unto Himself, so that, being justified by the faith in Christ, we can shine forth His light unto them that are still in darkness. That is, being saved by His blood, being rescued from the mud we were in, or being chosen as His peculiar people, we are to call all the people around us "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

2. Precious and peculiar

All the three previous references speak for themselves, that is obvious—actually, Titus and Peter are here in a deep conversation about the work of Jesus in cleansing us, purifying us and transforming us by His precious blood shed on the cross, and also His second coming to the earth. What is common between them is the wording chosen to give meaning, intonation, and a personal feeling—in short, their emotions.

The Greek word *περιούσιος (periousios)* is often translated as "special," "chosen," or "peculiar" in the sense of being God's treasured possession. It is derived from the root *peri* ("around" or "surrounding") and *ousia* ("being" or "substance"). Thus, it implies something or someone set apart, precious, or of unique value, particularly in a covenantal relationship.

"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5). "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6).

There is another word: *περιποίησις* (*peripoiesis*) in Greek means "possession," "preservation," or "acquisition," and was used by Peter, where it conveys the idea of something or someone obtained for a specific purpose, cherished, or kept safe by God.

The church is described as a "people for God's own possession" (*λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν*). This echoes the covenantal language found with *περιούσιος*, where the redeemed people of God are viewed as His treasured possession.

So, when we read 1 Peter 1:18, 19, we see a point of connection for Titus, Peter and Moses in their writings, which gives us, altogether, the key for an active and living church, operating and being a lighthouse for the world in darkness. Thus, this can be understood in going back to the Old Testament and the election of Israel as a peculiar people. In Exodus 19:5, 6 is found the purpose of the nation of Israel:

"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a **kingdom of priests,** and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:5, 6, emphasis added).

What does it mean to be kingdom of priests in the midst of all the nations? We read:

"The Lord chose a people and made them the depositories of His truth. It was His purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel, men should be drawn to Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service, Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live."[1]

"All who, like Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As the numbers of Israel increased, they were to enlarge their borders until their kingdom should embrace the world."[2]

Therefore, being a peculiar people had to do with the spreading of the "good news of salvation," the gospel—thus sharing by their lives a living God; showing by their actions an awaited Messiah to deliver all from sin. Nevertheless, God first had to do a work of purification within Israel. God had to separate them, to set them apart, to sanctify them, so that they could be a "light of the Gentiles," God's "salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).

Now, it is possible to understand the connection in the first epistle of Peter and Titus chapter 2. God also had to work within us—it was no different. In order for us to be His people, awaiting His coming, He needed to "redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people" (Titus 2:14). But how did He do this? Was it with gold or silver, or even with the blood of lambs? No, "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19). Then, and only then, we can go forward and be considered "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9).

Then, it is time to answer the third question: How long does it take to become a peculiar people? And again the answer is simple.

"The grace of Christ is freely to justify the sinner without merit or claim on his part. Justification is a full, complete pardon of sin. The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is no more to doubt God's forgiving grace."[3]

The moment a sinner recognizes his condition, his unworthiness, and accepts Christ and His righteousness, the work of redemption is completed in him. The price was paid, the forgiveness was offered, and now accepted; and the work of sanctification begins—that is, God Himself, through the Holy Spirit is making of us a peculiar people in the likeness of Christ, a perfect people "not having



spot or wrinkle," but "holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27).

3. A living church

With all this said, we can go back to the second problem found in 1 John 3:1. Are God's people unknown by the world because of their inefficiency or loss in showing the truth once given to the saints? Well, when the lighthouse fails to shine or actually hides its light in the darkness of the night, boats, ships and thousands upon thousands of people are brought to total ruin and collapse.

Ever since sin first entered the world, people have been led into unbelief, despair and misery. There is no peace for the wicked at all (Isaiah 57:20, 21). However, God has placed truehearted people on earth to "make known . . . the riches of the glory" (Colossians 1:27). For what purpose? So that by a living church, operating according to His will and being filled with His Almighty power, the peace so greatly needed may come to every soul who cries for help.

"But he who spoke peace to the billows of Galilee has spoken the word of peace for every soul. However fierce the tempest, those who turn to Jesus with the cry, "Lord, save us," will find deliverance. His grace, that reconciles the soul to God, quiets the strife of human passion, and in his love the heart is at rest."[4]

But not only peace with God (Romans 5:1), but also to give to everyone a chance to experience a new birth, "not of blood . . . nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13); and then to be called "sons of God" (1 John 3:1)—no longer sinners, but men and women in Christ, "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Conclusion

In conclusion, 1 John 3 powerfully reminds us that our love for others must flow through our actions, not just our words: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

This beckons us to rise in love and service, urging us to express our faith in tangible ways—especially to those who are still lost in darkness, desperately seeking to know Jesus as their personal Savior. The church is called to be messengers of hope, illuminating the path to salvation through selfless acts of love and compassion.

As we embody Christ's love, we fulfill our divine mission to reach out to the broken and the hurting, offering them the grace and mercy that has transformed our own lives. Our actions must reflect the life-changing power of the Gospel, shining brightly to draw others into the arms of Christ.

As we move forward towards heaven, let us carry this mission in our hearts: to love deeply, to serve wholeheartedly, and to be a guiding light for those seeking salvation. As a church, united, let us shine forth His light into the darkness and bring hope to a world longing for peace.

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Adapted from highlights of a study presented by Peter D. Lausevic

The Making OF AN APOSTLE

"Peter said unto [Jesus], Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples" (Matthew 26:35).

Introducing Peter

"Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him" (Matthew 4:18–20).

"The Saviour knew the character of the men whom He had chosen; all their weaknesses and errors were open before Him; He knew the perils through which they must pass, the responsibility that would rest upon them; and His heart yearned over these chosen ones."[1]

"Peter, James, and John . . . were almost constantly with Him, witnessing His miracles, and hearing His words."[2]

Peter recognized that Jesus was the Son of God and openly expressed that conviction (Matthew 16:13–17). How confident was he of this? There was a time when "many of [Christ's] disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:66–68).

Does this mean that the disciples had accepted Christ? "**The disciples had found more peace and joy since they had accepted Christ** than in all their previous lives."[3]

This was the disciples' faith. "While the Saviour was forsaken by many who had witnessed His wonderful works, Peter expressed the faith of the disciples—'Thou art that Christ.' "[4]

"The faith of Peter never flagged; he followed his Master with unwavering devotion."[5]

In what special group was Peter included? "After

six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them" (Matthew 17:1, 2).

What did Peter give up in order to be so close to Christ? "Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, **we have forsaken all, and followed thee**" (Matthew 19:27).

Whom did Jesus take with Him when He wanted only those with strong faith to be with Him at the raising of the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue? "He suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James" (Mark 5:35–37).

When Jesus needed human sympathy, upon whom did He call? "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. **And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter,** What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:36–41).

Was Peter clean at the last Passover supper before Christ's crucifixion and resurrection? "Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, **He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit:** and ***ye are clean,*** but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean" (John 13:6–11).

The denial of Christ

What is the problem with our human nature? "Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord" (Jeremiah 17:5).

Why doesn't God shield us from experiencing disappointment in people? "We are prone to look to our fellow men for sympathy and uplifting, **instead of looking to Jesus. In His mercy and faithfulness God often permits those in whom we place confidence to fail us, in order that we may learn the folly of trusting in man and making flesh our arm.** Let us trust fully, humbly, unselfishly in God. He knows the sorrows that we feel to the depths of our being, but which we cannot express. When all things seem dark and unexplainable, remember the words of Christ, 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter' (John 13:7)."[6]

What warning did Jesus give to the disciples prior to His crucifixion?

"Then saith Jesus unto them, **All ye shall be offended because of me this night:** for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:31, 32).

How emphatic was Peter that he would never do such a thing? "Peter answered and said unto him, **Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended"** (Matthew 26:33). Was he the only disciple to be so confident? "Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. **Likewise also said all the disciples"** (Matthew 26:35).

Why was he so confident? "Wherefore let him that **thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"** (1 Corinthians 10:12).

What lesson can we learn regarding self-confidence? "For the **self-confident** there is a lesson in the history of the apostle Peter. In his early discipleship, **Peter thought himself strong.** When on the eve of betrayal, Christ forewarned His disciples, 'All ye shall be offended because of me this night,' Peter confidently declared, 'Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.' Peter **did not know his own danger. Self-confidence misled him.** He **thought himself able to withstand temptation;** but in a few short hours the test came, and with cursing and swearing he denied his Lord."[7]



Self-confidence misled Peter. He thought himself able to withstand temptation; but in a few short hours the test came, and with cursing and swearing he denied his Lord.

Is there anything more dangerous? "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

"The evil that led to Peter's fall is proving the ruin of thousands today. There is **nothing so offensive to God**, or so dangerous to the soul, **as pride and self-sufficiency.**"[8]



With blinding tears [Peter] makes his way to the solitudes of the Garden of Gethsemane and there prostrates himself where he saw his Saviour's prostrate form when the bloody sweat was forced from His pores by His great agony. Peter remembers with remorse that he was asleep when Jesus prayed during those fearful hours.

Was Peter sincere and honest in his belief?

"When Peter said he would follow his Lord to prison and to death, he meant it, every word of it."[9]

Is this a common problem for us, too?

Simply being honest is not enough. "What greater deception can come upon human minds than a confidence that they are right when they are all wrong! The message of the True Witness finds the people of God in a **sad deception, yet honest in that deception**."[10]

What warning did Jesus give Peter? "Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, **before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice**" (Matthew 26:34).

Why did Jesus give such a warning? "[Peter] assured his Lord that he would go with him both to prison and to death; but **Jesus knew Peter much better than the disciple knew himself**."[11]

How was this fulfilled? We read of Peter's shocking denial of Christ in Matthew 26:69–74, exactly as the Lord foresaw.

The path to victory

What encouraging words did Jesus have to say before the trial? "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31, 32).

Does this mean Peter was never converted? Remember, Jesus had said to Peter, "ye are clean" (John 13:10).

There is such a thing as reconversion. "Peter denied the Man of Sorrows in His acquaintance with grief in the hour of His humiliation. But he afterward **repented and was reconverted."**[12]

We cannot be secure and confident for even a moment.

Jesus even thought of Peter after his reconversion, with the angel's message: "Go your way, tell his disciples **and Peter** that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (Mark 16:7).

How encouraging were these words? "How eagerly did Peter receive this word of love and compassion! He knew that his Lord still thought of him, still loved him, and he took this message as a sign of forgiveness."[13]

When the rooster crowed, what did Peter do? "And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75).

What made him remember what Jesus had said? "And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Luke 22:60, 61).

How important was that look? "At this moment, Christ looked upon Peter; and beneath that grieved look, in which compassion and love were blended, Peter understood himself. He went out, and wept bitterly."[14]

What did that look lead Peter to do? "At his third denial of his Lord the cock crew, and Jesus turned his eyes upon Peter with a look of peculiar sadness, and the words that Christ had spoken to him came quickly to his mind. **All through his life the memory of that look was with Peter.** His sinful boasting, his Lord's warning, his denial of the Saviour, all came to him like a flash of lightning; and casting one pitiful look upon his suffering, insulted Lord, he hurried away from the sound of false accusation and reproach, rushed from the palace, plunged into the darkness, and weeping bitterly, hurried to Gethsemane. **He began to see himself as he really was.** Memory was alive, and his sins were pictured before him in all their heinous light. Peter **threw himself on the spot where a few hours before, Jesus had prayed and wept in ag-**

ony, and there ***the disciple prayed as he never before had prayed.*** With deep repentance and terrible remorse he pleaded for forgiveness, and **he rose a converted man;** but he felt that although Jesus would forgive him, he could never forgive himself."[15]

"Peter denied the Man of Sorrows in His acquaintance with grief in the hour of His humiliation. But he afterward repented and was reconverted. He had true contrition of soul and gave himself afresh to his Saviour. With blinding tears he makes his way to the solitudes of the Garden of Gethsemane and there prostrates himself where he saw his Saviour's prostrate form when the bloody sweat was forced from His pores by His great agony. Peter remembers **with remorse that he was asleep** when Jesus prayed during those fearful hours. His **proud heart breaks,** and penitential tears moisten the sods so recently stained with the bloody sweat drops of God's dear Son. He **left that garden a converted man.** He was ***ready then to pity the tempted.*** He was humbled and could **sympathize with the weak and erring.** He could caution and warn the presumptuous, and was fully fitted to strengthen his brethren."[16]

How does this happen? "The **nearer we come to Jesus, and the more clearly we discern the purity of his character, the more clearly shall we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the less shall we feel like exalting ourselves.** Those whom Heaven recognizes as holy ones are the last to parade their own goodness. Men who have lived near to God, men who would sacrifice life itself rather than knowingly commit a wrong act, men whom God has honored with divine light and power, have **confessed the sinfulness of their own nature.** They have put no confidence in the flesh, have claimed no righteousness of their own, but have **trusted wholly in the righteousness of Christ. So will it be with all who behold the Saviour**."[17]

Why was Peter permitted to go through such a difficult experience? "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

What was revealed to him? "When Peter said he would follow his Lord to prison and to death, he **meant it, every word of it;** but he did not know himself. Hidden in his heart were elements of evil that circumstances would fan into life. **Unless he was made conscious of his danger, these would prove his eternal ruin.** The Saviour saw in him a self-love and assurance that would overbear even his love for Christ. Much of infirmity, of unmortified sin, carelessness of spirit, unsanctified temper, heedlessness in entering into temptation, had been revealed in his experience. Christ's solemn warning was **a call to heart searching**. Peter needed to distrust himself, and to have a deeper faith in Christ. Had he in humility received the warning, he would have appealed to the Shepherd of the flock to keep His sheep."[18]

Restoration

How was Peter restored? When Christ met with the disciples by the seaside after His resurrection (John 21:15–19), He asked Peter three times about his love for Him. Peter's third response was—in all humility—"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (verse 17). Then the Lord bade him to follow Him.

Why did Jesus ask the question about love?

"Christ mentioned to Peter only **one condition of service—'Lovest thou Me?'** This is the essential qualification. Though Peter might possess every other, yet without the love of Christ he could not be a faithful shepherd over the flock of God. Knowledge, benevolence, eloquence, zeal—all are essential in the good work; but **without the love of Christ in the heart, the work of the Christian minister is a failure."**[19]

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References:

[1] *The Desire of Ages,* pp. 291, 292. [Emphasis added.]
[2] Ibid., p. 292.
[3] Ibid., p. 393. [Emphasis added.]
[4] Ibid., p. 393.
[5] *The Spirit of Prophecy,* vol. 2, p. 291. [Emphasis added.]
[6] *The Ministry of Healing,* pp. 486, 487.
[7] *The Youth's Instructor,* June 5, 1902. [Emphasis added.]
[8] Ibid.
[9] *The Desire of Ages,* p. 673.
[10] *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 3, pp. 252, 253. [Emphasis added.]
[11] *The Review and Herald,* April 7, 1891. [Emphasis added.]
[12] *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 3, p. 416. [Emphasis added.]
[13] *The Review and Herald,* April 7, 1891.
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[15] *The Review and Herald,* April 7, 1891. [Emphasis added.]
[16] *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 3, p. 416. [Emphasis added.]
[17] *The Youth's Instructor,* June 5, 1902. [Emphasis added.]
[18] *The Desire of Ages,* pp. 673, 674. [Emphasis added.]
[19] *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 515. [Emphasis added.]



by Dorival N. Dumitru

The Lord's Sanctuary AND THE TWO HOUSES OF ISRAEL

In the time of Moses, God had an endearing message of encouragement for His people—and it was based upon conditions: "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5). That timeless message has lost none of its relevance today.

"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). How can we be this kind of people? Christ makes it clear: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). To be God's distinct people, we need to be doing God's distinct will.

The distinctiveness of God's people

"**Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces**; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us. For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should **not** walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye **not**, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let **him** be your fear, and let **him** be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. Behold**, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders** in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion" (Isaiah 8:9–18, emphasis added).

We see here:

1. The remnant *vs.* the conspiring of the nations in opposition. God's people are told, "Do not fear what they fear. . . ."

2. The Lord shall be our sanctuary, and He will be a rock of offense and

a stone of stumbling to both houses of Israel.

3. The Lord directs: "Seal the law among my disciples." As we wait upon and seek Him in compliance with His Word, He shall save our children. Isaiah 49:25.

In Jeremiah 33:19–26, God speaks of the two houses to whom He made a covenant through His mercy and grace to the remnant. "Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, **a remnant shall be saved**: **For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness**: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" (Romans 9:27, 28, emphasis added). The apostle Paul writes, "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then **at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace**" (Romans 11:1–5).

Many called, few chosen

"Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10, 11).

Who is elected?

"Every soul is elected who will work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. He is elected who will put on the armor and fight the good fight of faith. He is elected who will watch unto prayer, who will search the Scriptures, and flee from temptation. He is elected who will have faith continually, and who will be obedient to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. The provisions of redemption are free to all; the results of redemption will be enjoyed by those who have complied with the conditions."[1]

What about the two houses—Israel and Judah? What caused that division?

Ahijah the prophet gave a special message to Jeroboam: "Take thee ten pieces: for **thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel**, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) **Because that they have forsaken me**, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, **and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments**, as did David his father" (1 Kings 11:31–33).

The conditions of retaining God's favor were not met; hence the sad history of how this prophecy was fulfilled as found in chapter 12:12–24. This is emphasized again later in chapter 14:7–16.

According to Exodus 19:3–6, God's people were indeed to be a holy people. "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). In 2 Chronicles 36 is found the tragic consequences of disobeying God because they had "mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:16). More of these bitter results are recorded in Isaiah chapters 3 and 4.

"Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:9).

Pitfalls for God's children

The enemy of our souls is always eager to lay snares for the people of God (2 Corinthians 2:11; 1 Peter 5:8.) This is manifested in unbelief, idolatry, and strife for recognition.

"The devices of Satan are no less now than in ancient times. Indeed, as we near the period of Christ's second coming, Satan redoubles his efforts to work with all deceivableness of unrighteousness. The youth especially are in constant and fearful danger of being overcome by his temptations.

"In the judgments that followed Israel's sin, we may see with what abhorrence God looks upon worldliness, idolatry, and licentiousness. The same dangers exist today that threatened the prosperity, and even the existence, of his ancient people. Temptations to licentiousness have been steadily increasing from that time to the present, and similar scenes are constantly enacted, with similar efforts at concealment. A bewitching power is brought to bear on every soul not fortified by firm principle. Warnings of fathers and mothers and of God's ambassadors are all unheeded. The affections which should be centered upon God are given to the idolatry of unworthy objects.

"Watchfulness and vigilance are needed now. The lustful eye must be turned off from beholding vanity. Boldness and immodesty must be met with a decided rebuke. Let none yield to a spirit of self-confidence, and feel that they are in no danger. As long as Satan lives, his efforts will be constant and untiring to make the world as wicked as before the flood, and as licentious as were the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. The prayer may well be offered daily by all who have the

The instruction that was given in the early days of the message is to be held as safe instruction to follow in these its closing days.



fear of God before them, that he will preserve their hearts from evil desires, and strengthen their souls to resist temptation. **Those who, in their self-confidence, feel no need of watchfulness and unceasing prayer, are near some humiliating fall**."[2]

Why are we still here?

"For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. **It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration and strife among the Lord's professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years.**"[3]

Therefore, the appeal resounds to each one of us: Sleep no more! (See Ephesians 5:5–20.) Like Esau, too many of us are willing to sacrifice our heirship to heaven for the perishable things of this earth.

The call of the hour

"The manifold wisdom of God has been displayed in the organization of His church in the earth for the representation of the truth in the world. In their zeal for the cause of righteousness, His servants are to reveal a faith that works by love and purifies the soul from every slothful habit, a zeal that reveals itself in watchfulness unto prayer, humble heart-searching, a readiness to examine self, that they may detect their own defects of character, and avoid the evils of self-exaltation. This faith and zeal are essential, or our labors for the perishing will weaken, and Christ will be disappointed in His church. . . .

"In these last days, there are arising strange fallacies and man-made theories which God declares shall be broken in pieces. The spirit of covetousness has led men to seek worldly advantage, and by extravagance and display they have tried to hide their wicked deeds which they have done in order to reach their object. Men occupying high positions of trust have revealed this unlawful desire for gain; they have practised extortion and robbery, and have gratified the evil passions of their hearts, until our cities are corrupted through their wickedness. God has declared that he will uncover these works of deceit and robbery by their own working. In some cases the judgments of God have already fallen heavily on these cities.

"[Isaiah 8:11–16 quoted.]

"In this representation of the prophet, we see that Satan is at work not only with worldlings, who have not the fear and love of God before them, but also with those who profess faith in Christ. **Here are plainly represented two distinct parties, formed from a company that was once united.** The members of one of these parties are in resistance to the will of God. They have taken themselves from the side of the loyal and true, and are now resisting the warnings of the Spirit of God."[4]

"A wealth of moral influence has been brought to us in the last half century. Through His Holy Spirit the voice of God has come to us continually in warning and instruction, to confirm the faith of the believers in the spirit of prophecy. Repeatedly the word has come, Write the things that I have given you to confirm the faith of my people in the position they have taken. Time and trial have not made void the instruction given, but through years of suffering and self-sacrifice have established the truth of the testimony given. The instruction that was given in the early days of the message is to be held as safe instruction to follow in these its closing days. Those who are indifferent to this light and instruction must not expect to escape the snares which we have been plainly told will cause the rejecters of light to stumble, and fall, and be snared, and be taken. If we study carefully the second chapter of Hebrews we shall learn how important it is that we hold steadfastly to every principle of truth that has been given."[5]

References [Emphasis added throughout]:

1 *Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 208.
2 *The Signs of the Times,* December 30, 1880.
3 *Letters and Manuscripts,* vol. 4, Ms 4, 1883.
4 *The Review and Herald,* July 18, 1907.
5 Ibid.



The Threefold CORD

by Barbara Montrose

In the book of Ecclesiastes, the wise man writing by inspiration of God observes: "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. . . . And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and **a threefold cord is not quickly broken**" (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12).

It is commonly known that a rope made with three strands has greater potential to be stronger and more durable than one of similar material made only with two.

How does this maxim apply in ecclesiology? The members of the church of the living God are to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24, 25). The believers fortify one another not as a social club, but rather are assembling as a holy convocation to the honor of God, being founded upon the principles of pure, unadulterated truth as revealed in His Word, the Holy Bible—and the church is there identified as the pillar and ground of truth (1 Timothy 3:15), not merely a gathering just to promote morsels of half-truths.

Faith developed

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? . . . So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14, 17).

God "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11–13).

To those who faithfully submit to this process, ultimately, "all who believe are to be gathered into one church."[1]

"Very close and sacred is the relation between Christ and His church--He the bridegroom, and the church the bride; He the head, and the church the body. Connection with Christ, then, involves connection with His church."[2]

Beyond the eyewitness testimony of the disciples penned for our understanding, "we have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take

heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:19–21).

Identifying the remnant

Let's face reality: There are many churches out there, each professing to be the true and genuine article, the actual bride of Christ dearest to His heart. There is no question that God has many faithful people scattered throughout all these organizations and even among those not affiliated with any organization whatsoever.

Yet just as a threefold cord binds together with greater tensile strength, while navigating at sea you likewise look for 3 points of reference (triangulation) to know where you need to go.

When looking for a church, it can be a fatal error simply to go where your friends and acquaintances are. When calling Abram to higher spiritual ground, the Lord plainly directed his servant to come apart from the comfort zone of his familiar associates: "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Genesis 12:1).

The reason to go to a church is not where I have friends; it's not where people like me and want me around. Quite the contrary: It is where I can grow in the Lord, where I will be challenged to higher ground. Do any of us have the luxury of time for any less than this? I daresay not.

So, in looking for a church, we need to recognize a strong foundation in Christ in His principles of truth, not error. We need to see three angles:

1. Doctrine

2. History

3. Prophecy

1. Typically, **doctrine** is studied first. Doctrine simply means teaching—what a church teaches/preaches as a community of believers. This is important since faith is essential, and the faith of individuals and churches is molded by what is taught. If present, pertinent truth is taught, the people will likely seek to adjust their lives to that truth because it will become embedded in their minds after hearing it week after week and observing their brethren putting that truth into daily life. Yet on the other hand, if lax behavior and unscriptural errors are promoted, confusion and a moral decline in behavior results—even in the minds of those who might have started off strong. It certainly does not make sense to be part of a church whose beliefs, teachings, or practices are not in harmony with what you believe. Either the ensuing collusion will cause you to adjust your beliefs to theirs (if they happen to be scriptural) or your own beliefs will be watered down. If the latter is the case—is this really the time in history to be taking such a risk? In the end, it will be shocking to realize how many will have "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:10–12). Such a course of action is a real danger that too many are choosing to ignore right now.

2. **History** comes next. Whose interpretation of history? Look for inspired sources that line up with the principles of God's Ten Commandments. Just as an example: Before getting married—or even before hiring a new employee—a conscientious person will inquire into the past life experience of the person with whom you are making a commitment, even if it is only a relatively minor commitment. Then how much more careful should we be when entering into a spiritual commitment (or even the simple weekly habit of churchgoing) where our eternal interests are clearly at stake? Another guiding principle is to allow them to speak for themselves; it's not fair to take anyone's say-so about another person or organization. We need not run down into rabbit holes to pursue anything and everything in this world, but when something has caught our attention as being legitimate and valuable, it deserves proper and fair investigation. If more in Christ's day had taken the initiative to go to hear Him and see Him in action instead of just listening to the false rumors concocted by envious religious leaders, they may have been saved for eternity.

3. **Prophecy** works together with history, as it is God's revelation of events to unfold. When we see how these events have occurred exactly as foreseen by the pen of Inspiration, that is already strong evidence that such a church which teaches prophetic truth—even when inconvenient or unwelcome to the people as in the lifework of Jeremiah the prophet—is a church led by God. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

With these 3 points of reference (triangulation), we are strengthened, "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:14–16).

May we heartily savor this type of experience in Christ today!

References [Emphasis added throughout]:

[1] *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 27.
[2] *Education*, p. 268.



God's Remnant in Prophecy

by Jeffrey Wiktorowski

In an era of rampant fear and doubt, how timely is the inspired statement of faith, "We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."[1]

That which we should not forget includes the providential leading of God as well as the doctrines He has taught us in Scripture.

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16). The paths considered "old" for us are the teachings of Scripture, especially as found in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ together with the moral law of God and highlighted also in the Spirit of Prophecy. By walking in these old paths, it is necessary to separate from many of the new ways that society and even churches of today have adopted.

So, the Lord bids us, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18). If we separate from something, we then become united with something else. "As trials thicken around us, both separation and unity will be seen in our ranks."[2]

Principles of unity

Why is unity important?

The psalmist declared: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

Shortly before His crucifixion, Christ, in His prayer to His Father, prayed, "Neither pray I for these

alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:20–22). We can have that glory when we are united.

Yet, while seeking to cooperate with Christ in fostering the circumstances required in fulfilling the answer to this prayer, we cannot surrender the truth.

"We cannot surrender the truth in order to accomplish this union; for the very means by which it is to be gained is sanctification through the truth. Human wisdom would change all this, thinking this basis of union too narrow. Men would effect a union through conformity to popular opinions, through a compromise with the world. But **truth is God's basis for the unity of His people**."[3]

"Our churches are becoming enfeebled by receiving for doctrines the commandments of men. Many are received into the church who are not converted. Men, women, and children are allowed to take part in the solemn rite of baptism without being fully instructed in regard to the meaning of His ordinance. . . . Christ calls for unity. But He does not call for us to unify on wrong practices. The God of heaven draws a sharp contrast between pure, elevating, ennobling truth and false, misleading doctrines. He calls sin and impenitence by the right name."[4]

How are we to deal with wrong practices?

1. Reason together

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isaiah 1:18–20).

2. But what if there is a decided refusal to change?

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:14–18).

"But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:11–13).

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

History repeats itself

As apostasy gradually crept into the early Christian church, "after a long and severe conflict, the faithful few decided to dissolve all union with the apostate church if she still refused to free herself from falsehood and idolatry. They saw that separation was an absolute necessity if they would obey the word of God. They dared not tolerate errors fatal to their own souls, and set an example which would imperil the faith of their children and children's children. To secure peace and unity they were ready to make any concession consistent with fidelity to God; but they felt that even peace would be too dearly purchased at the sacrifice of principle. . . .

"There is an alarming indifference in regard to the doctrines which are the pillars of the Christian faith. The opinion is gaining ground, that, after all, these are not of vital importance. This degeneracy is strengthening the hands of the agents of Satan, so that false theories and fatal delusions which the faithful in ages past imperiled their lives to resist and expose, are now regarded with favor by thousands who claim to be followers of Christ."[5]

Associations

Whatever or whomever we associate with makes an impact on us. The stronger and more frequent the association, the greater the influence it will have.

"**We cannot willingly associate with those who are trampling upon the law of God, and preserve our faith pure and untarnished. We shall catch the spirit, and unless we separate from them, we shall be bound up with them at last, to share their doom.**

"It was by associating with idolaters and joining in their festivities that the Hebrews were led to transgress God's law and bring His judgments upon the nation. So now it is by leading the followers of Christ to associate with the ungodly and unite in their amusements that Satan is most successful in alluring them into sin. 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean.' God requires of His people now as great a distinction from the world, in customs, habits, and principles, as He required of Israel anciently."[6]

"We cannot be too decided in shunning the company of those who exert an influence to draw us away from God. While we pray, 'Lead us not into temptation,' we are to shun temptation, so far as possible."[7]

"The different parties of professed Advent believers have each a little truth, but God has given all these truths to His children who are

being prepared for the day of God. He has also given them truths that none of these parties know, neither will they understand. Things which are sealed up to them, the Lord has opened to those who will see and are ready to understand. If God has any new light to communicate, He will let His chosen and beloved understand it, without their going to have their minds enlightened by hearing those who are in darkness and error.

"I was shown **the necessity of those who believe that we are having the last message of mercy, being separate from those who are daily imbibing new errors. I saw that neither young nor old should attend their meetings; for it is wrong to thus encourage them while they teach error that is a deadly poison to the soul and teach for doctrines the commandments of men. The influence of such gatherings is not good.** If God has delivered us from such darkness and error, we should stand fast in the liberty wherewith He has set us free and rejoice in the truth. **God is displeased with us when we go to listen to error, without being obliged to go; for unless He sends us to those meetings where error is forced home to the people by the power of the will, He will not keep us. The angels cease their watchful care over us, and we are left to the buffetings of the enemy, to be darkened and weakened by him and the power of his evil angels; and the light around us becomes contaminated with the darkness.**

"I saw that we have no time to throw away in listening to fables. Our minds should not be thus diverted, but should be occupied with the present truth, and seeking wisdom that we may obtain a more thorough knowledge of our position, that with meekness we may be able to give a reason of our hope from the Scriptures."[8]

Does this mean no association with the world at all?

"The question may be asked, **Are we to have no union whatever with the world? The word of the Lord is to be our guide. Any connection with infidels and unbelievers which would identify us with them is forbidden by the word**. We are to come out from them and be separate. In no case are we to link ourselves with them in their plans or work. But we are not to live reclusive lives. We are to do worldlings all the good we possibly can. Christ has given us an example of this. When invited to eat with publicans and sinners, He did not refuse; for in no other way than by mingling with them could He reach this class. But on every occasion He gave them talents of words and influence. He opened up themes of conversation which brought things of eternal interest to their minds."[9]

The purpose of God's church

"The word of God is a book of truth."[10]

Through the proclamation of the truth, we are drawn to the church. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14–17).

Organized for service

Because of this important aspect of faith, God is seeking to draw everyone to hear the truth, by His preachers and teachers in His church. Jesus reminds us that "other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16). "To you, My disciples, I commit this message of mercy. It is to be given to both Jews and Gentiles—to Israel, first, and then to all nations, tongues, and peoples. All who believe are to be gathered into one church."[11]

Two missions:

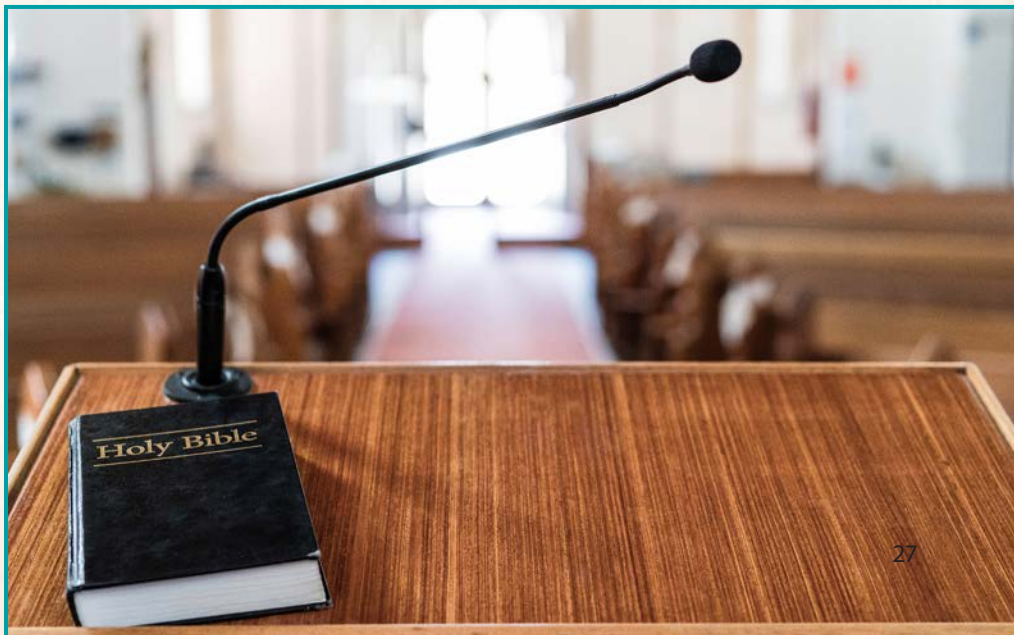
1. Maintain the truth
2. Teach the truth

What happens if a church does not maintain the truth? It will teach error.

What happens if a church does not teach the truth? It will lower the standards of God's Word.

Therefore, the apostle admonishes: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16).

"Strength comes by exercise. All who put to use the ability which God has given them will have increased ability to devote to His service. . . . **The Christian who will not exercise his God-given powers not**



only fails to grow up into Christ, but he loses the strength which he already has; he becomes a spiritual paralytic."[12]

Christ's example in His day

"The Lord had made the Jews the depositaries of sacred truth. He had appointed them stewards of His grace. He had given them every spiritual and temporal advantage, and He called upon them to impart these blessings. . . . Filled with pride, they regarded themselves as the chosen and favored people of God; yet they did not serve or worship God. They put their dependence in the fact that they were children of Abraham. 'We be Abraham's seed,' they said proudly. (John 8:33.) **When the crisis came, it was revealed that they had divorced themselves from God, and had placed their trust in Abraham, as if he were God**."[13]

After a while they perverted the truth.

"The teachers of the Jewish nation professed to educate the youth to understand the purity and excellence of the laws of that kingdom which is to stand forever and ever, but they perverted truth and purity. . . . The greater their perversion of figures and symbols, the more confused their minds became."[14]

Why was Christ constrained to establish a new church?

"The Sanhedrin had rejected Christ's message and was bent upon His death; therefore Jesus departed from Jerusalem, from the priests, the temple, the religious leaders, the people who had been instructed in the law, and turned to another class to proclaim His message, and to gather out those who should carry the gospel to all nations."[15]

Why this class? "To gather out those who should carry the gospel to all nations." They would do the job correctly by teaching the pure truth.

The word "church" *(ekklesia)* refers to a calling out. The very concept indicates a need for separation. The first step that Jesus took in making the necessary separation was to ordain the twelve disciples for their mission (Mark 3:13, 14).

Responsibility and authority

The Lord has given some guidelines about how the church is then to guard the truth within its borders. He explains the process: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:15–18).

"On the church has been conferred the power to act in Christ's stead. It is God's instrumentality for the preservation of order and discipline among His people. To it the Lord has delegated the power to settle all questions respecting its prosperity, purity, and order. Upon it rests the responsibility of excluding from its fellowship those who are unworthy, who by their unchristlike conduct would bring dishonor on the truth. Whatever the church does that is in accordance with the directions given in God's word, will be ratified in heaven."[16]

The Lord explains further: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

"Peter had expressed the truth which is the foundation of the church's faith, and Jesus now honored him as the representative of the whole body of believers. He said, 'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' '**The keys of the kingdom of heaven' are the words of Christ. All the words of Holy Scripture are His, and are here included. These words have power to open and to shut heaven. They declare the conditions upon which men are received or rejected.** Thus the work of those who preach God's word is a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. Theirs is a mission weighted with eternal results."[17]

"'The keys of the kingdom of heaven' are the words of Christ. All the words of Holy Scripture are His, and are here included. These words have power to open and to shut heaven."

How does this relate to the forgiveness of sins?

"And when [Jesus] had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:22, 23).

"On the church in its organized capacity He places a responsibility for the individual members. Toward those who fall into sin, the church has a duty, to warn, to instruct, and if possible to restore. 'Reprove, rebuke, exhort,' the Lord says, 'with all long-suffering and doctrine.' 2 Timothy 4:2. Deal faithfully with wrongdoing. Warn every soul that is in danger. Leave none to deceive themselves. Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, Sabbathbreaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil. 'They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.' Galatians 5:21. If they persist in sin, the judgment you have declared from God's

word is pronounced upon them in heaven. In choosing to sin, they disown Christ; the church must show that she does not sanction their deeds, or she herself dishonors her Lord. She must say about sin what God says about it. She must deal with it as God directs, and her action is ratified in heaven. He who despises the authority of the church despises the authority of Christ Himself."[18]

To teach the truth

In the famous Great Commission Christ gave in Matthew 28:18–20 and Mark 16:15–20, He bids us teach pure truth as He taught it, through the power provided through His Holy Spirit.

Notice the pattern:

"The work of God in the earth presents, from age to age, a striking similarity in every great reformation or religious movement. The principles of God's dealing with men are ever the same. The important movements of the present have their parallel in those of the past, and the experience of the church in former ages has lessons of great value for our own time."[19]

1. Genesis 12:1 shows the separation of Abraham from the idolatrous practices of his surroundings in order to establish the Hebrew nation. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8).

2. Centuries later, there was eventual need of separation in the early church from that nation which had been called, but had since apostatized. "The Jewish nation was a fruitless branch, and was therefore to be separated from the living vine, which was Christ Jesus. The Gentiles were to be engrafted upon the stalk, to become a living branch, partaker of the life that nourished the true vine."[20]

They did not even realize they had been rejected. "When God's presence was finally withdrawn from the Jewish nation, priests and people knew it not. Though under the control of Satan, and swayed by the most horrible and malignant passions, they still regarded themselves as the chosen of God. The ministration in the temple continued; sacrifices were offered upon its polluted altars, and daily the divine blessing was invoked upon a people guilty of the blood of God's dear Son and seeking to slay His ministers and apostles."[21]

3. Later within Christendom: "After a long and severe conflict, the faithful few decided to dissolve all union with the apostate church if she still refused to free herself from falsehood and idolatry. They saw that separation was an absolute necessity if they would obey the word of God. They dared not tolerate errors fatal to their own souls, and set an example which would imperil the faith of their children and children's children. To secure peace and unity they were ready to make any concession consistent with fidelity to God; but they felt that even peace would be too dearly purchased at the sacrifice of principle."[22]

"Romanists have persisted in bringing against Protestants the charge of heresy and willful separation from the true church. But these accusations apply rather to themselves. They are the ones who laid down the banner of Christ and departed from 'the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.' "[23]

4. Under the preaching of the three angels' messages: "As ministers and religious leaders decided against the advent doctrine and desired to suppress all agitation of the subject, they not only opposed it from the pulpit, but denied their members the privilege of attending preaching upon the second advent, or even of speaking of their hope in the social meetings of the church. Thus the believers found themselves in a position of great trial and perplexity. They loved their churches and were loath to separate from them; but as they saw the testimony of God's word suppressed and their right to investigate the prophecies denied they felt that loyalty to God forbade them to submit. Those who sought to shut out the testimony of God's word they could not regard as constituting the church of Christ, 'the pillar and ground of the truth.' Hence they felt themselves justified in separating from their former connection."[24]

What about today?

"As the light and life of men was rejected by the ecclesiastical authorities in the days of Christ, so it has been rejected in every succeeding generation. **Again and again the history of Christ's withdrawal from Judea has been repeated**. When the Reformers preached the word of God, they had no thought of separating themselves from the established church; but the religious leaders would not tolerate the light, and those that bore it were forced to seek another class, who were longing for the truth. **In our day few of the professed followers of the Reformers are actuated by their spirit. Few are listening for the voice of God, and ready to accept truth in whatever guise it may be presented. Often those who follow in the steps of the Reform-**



ers are forced to turn away from the churches they love, in order to declare the plain teaching of the word of God. And many times those who are seeking for light are by the same teaching obliged to leave the church of their fathers, that they may render obedience."[25]

"The Lord Jesus will always have a chosen people to serve Him. When the Jewish people rejected Christ, the Prince of life, He took from them the kingdom of God and gave it unto the Gentiles. God will continue to work on this principle with every branch of His work. When a church proves unfaithful to the word of the Lord, whatever their position may be, however high and sacred their calling, the Lord can no longer work with them. Others are then chosen to bear important responsibilities. But, if these in turn do not purify their lives from every wrong action, if they do not establish pure and holy principles in all their borders, then the Lord will grievously afflict and humble them and, unless they repent, will remove them from their place and make them a reproach."[26]

"When the irrevocable decision of the sanctuary has been pronounced and the destiny of the world has been forever fixed, the inhabitants of the earth will know it not. The forms of religion will be continued by a people from whom the Spirit of God has been finally withdrawn; and the satanic zeal with which the prince of evil will inspire them for the accomplishment of his malignant designs, will bear the semblance of zeal for God."[27]

Going beyond our comfort zone

In the meantime, the church that speaks the truth has some disagreeable responsibilities.

"God has selected a people in these last days whom He has made the depositaries of His law, and this people will ever have disagreeable tasks to perform. . . . **It will require much diligence and a continual struggle to keep evil out of our churches. There must be rigid, impartial discipline exercised; for some who have a semblance of religion will seek to undermine**



the faith of others and will privily work to exalt themselves."[28]

Jesus says, " 'I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.' **This labor of purifying the church is a painful work, but one that must not be neglected, if the church would have the commendation of God.** But repent, because thou hast left thy first love. Here is plainly presented before us our work as members of the church of Christ. If we are faithless, we shall lose the crown of life and another will take it; for in the dropping out of the faithless the places are supplied by the faithful. If we refuse to let our light shine for the Master, if we do not do the works of God, others will do that very work which we might have done and could have done, but refused to do. When we cease to fulfill our mission, when the candlestick refuses to reflect light, and the great truths committed to us individually in trust for the world, are not given to them, then the candlestick will be removed. 'I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place.' Another will be placed in his stead and will shine. Let prayer be ascending now without delay to Him who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks. Take not thy Holy Spirit from us. 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways: and sinners shall be converted unto thee.' "[29]

May the Lord strengthen us by faith to honor Him in this essential duty!

References [Emphasis added throughout]:

1 *Testimonies to Ministers,* p. 31.
2 *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 6, p. 400.
3 *Gospel Workers* [1892/1893 ed.], p. 391. [Emphasis added.]
4 *Manuscript Releases,* vol. 17, p. 306.
5 *The Great Controversy,* pp. 45, 46.
6 *The Adventist Home,* pp. 459, 460. [Emphasis added.]
7 *Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 458. [Emphasis added.]
8 *Early Writings,* pp. 124, 125. [Emphasis added.]
9 *Fundamentals of Christian Education,* p. 482. [Emphasis added.]
10 *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 4, p. 336.
11 *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 27.
12 *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 5, p. 393. [Emphasis added.]
13 *Christ's Object Lessons,* p. 267. [Emphasis added.]
14 *Fundamentals of Christian Education,* p. 397.
15 *The Desire of Ages,* p. 232.
16 *Gospel Workers,* p. 501.
17 *The Desire of Ages,* p. 413. [Emphasis added.]
18 Ibid., p. 805.
19 *The Great Controversy,* p. 343.
20 *The Spirit of Prophecy,* vol. 3, p. 90.
21 *The Great Controversy,* p. 615.
22 Ibid., p. 45.
23 Ibid., p. 51.
24 Ibid., p. 376.
25 *The Desire of Ages,* p. 232. [Emphasis added.]
26 *The Upward Look,* p. 131.
27 *The Great Controversy,* p. 615.
28 *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 5, p. 538. [Emphasis added.]
29 *The Review and Herald,* June 7, 1887. [Emphasis added.]



Compiled from the writings of Ellen G. White

An Exciting Time TO BE ALIVE

God has never left His church without a witness. In all the scenes of trial and proving, of opposition and persecution amidst moral darkness, through which the church has passed, God has had men of opportunity who have been prepared to take up His work at different stages and carry it forward and upward. . . . The voice of God was heard by the prophets whom He had appointed to a special work and to bear a special message. He sent them to repeat the same words over and over again. He had a message prepared for them that was not after the ways and will of men, and this He put in their mouths and had them proclaim. He assured them the Holy Spirit would give them language and utterance. He who knew the heart would give them words with which to reach the people.

The message might not please those to whom it was sent. They might not wish for anything new, but desire to go right on as they had been doing; but the Lord stirred them up with reproofs; He rebuked their course of action. He infused new life in those who were sleeping at their post of duty, who were not faithful sentinels. He showed them their responsibility, and that they would be held accountable for the safety of the people. They were watchmen who were not to sleep day nor night. They were to discern the enemy, and give the alarm to the people, that everyone might be at his post, that the watching foe might not obtain the least advantage.[1]

Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning. There will be those among us who will always want to control the work of God, to dictate even what movements shall be made when the work goes forward under the direction of the angel who joins the third angel in the message to be given to the world. God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands. The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness. Those who are accounted good workers will need to draw nigh to God, they will need the divine touch. They will need to drink more deeply and continuously at the fountain of living water, in order that they may discern God's work at every point. Workers may make mistakes, but you should give them a chance to correct their errors, give them an opportunity to learn caution, by leaving the work in their hands.[2]

All over the world men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. Prayers and tears and inquiries go up from souls longing for light, for grace, for the Holy Spirit. Many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in.[3]

God's work is to be carried forward with power. We need the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We need to understand that God will add to the ranks of His people men of ability and influence who are to act their part in warning the world. All in the world are not lawless and sinful. God has many thousands who have not bowed the knee to Baal. There are God-fearing men and women in the fallen churches. If this were not so, we would not be given the message to bear: 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. . . . Come out of her, My people.' Revelation 18:2-4. Many of the honest in heart are gasping for a breath of life from heaven. They will recognize the gospel when it is brought to them in the beauty and simplicity with which it is presented in God's word.[4]

References [Emphasis added throughout]:

1 *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 404, 405.
2 Ibid., p. 299.
3 *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.
4 *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 110.

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WORSE THAN BAD

Have you ever heard of an "abomination"? This word is used to describe something very, very bad. It's more than just bad—it's simply disgusting. So, the word "abomination" is saved for things that are worse than bad.

What kinds of things are an "abomination" to God? The Bible gives a list of seven things:

"These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16–19).

That's a big Bible passage, isn't it? Let's try to understand it:

1. A proud look. Have you ever seen a person who always seems to think they are better than everyone else? Maybe you have met such a person. They are not fun to be around. God gives a warning: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). The one who shows off usually ends up falling down.

2. A lying tongue. Nobody likes to be lied to and nobody likes a liar. Lying is a very bad habit we should not have.

3. Hands that shed innocent blood. This is talking about people that kill others who have not done anything wrong. The people they kill are innocent, so they are hurting God a lot.

4. A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations. Have you ever met anyone who comes up with naughty ideas that should not be done? It's not good to stay around someone like that because we will surely end up learning bad things from them.

5. Feet that be swift in running to mischief. Some children always seem to be getting in trouble. It's as if their feet are quick to find something bad to do. This is not a good way to be.

6. A false witness that speaketh lies. This kind of person is like a tattletale who makes up stories of things they say that they saw or heard, but it is not really true.

7. He that soweth discord among brethren. A lot of times when people don't like each other or are arguing it is because a third person said something bad about one of them to the other person. This is called gossip. If people don't like each other because of something mean we said to one of them about the other, then we need to change our ways.



God hates all these things. But He more than hates them; they are an abomination to Him. People everywhere are doing these kinds of things, but remember, with the help of Jesus, in His strength, we can decide not to do them!—*BHM*.