

COMMON OBJECTIONS TO PERFECTION THEOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY ADVENTISM

And the Answers from Scripture and the Writings of the Spirit of Prophecy

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In their study of Bible doctrines, especially with other Christians, Seventh-day Adventists often meet objections presumably based on Scripture, as well as others based on circumstance, experience, or perceived logic. Discussions in contemporary Adventism on the subject of character perfection are no different. Arguments often used against the possibility of humans attaining sinless obedience in this life claim support from Scripture, the Spirit of Prophecy writings, and the presumed imperatives of personal experience and daily life.

In our study with persons not of our faith, Seventh-day Adventists have long recognized the necessity of being able to answer objections, in particular those claiming Biblical support, with evidence based on the consensus of Scripture. Such books as F.D. Nichol's *Answers to Objections* and Mark Finley's *Studying Together* have offered help and guidance in this regard (1). So in our discussion of the perfection issue with fellow Adventists, we must be ready to counter objections with the inspired consensus. Since both Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy writings address this doctrine, and since both are quoted on either side of the discussion, both inspired sources must be used in answering the objections raised.

Following are a number of key objections raised by various Adventists to the doctrine of sinless perfection in this life, and the answers from the inspired writings:

Objection No. 1: The only perfect righteousness believers can possess on earth is forensic.

This is perhaps the most common and popular objection, since it touches the sensitive issues of assurance and personal security. It is also the objection most fundamental to the entire discussion. If it can be demonstrated from Inspiration that the frequent calls to perfection found in those writings take for granted that forensic righteousness must always close the gap between the believer's sanctification and the law of God, then the argument for sinless perfection in this life collapses.

If, however, it can be demonstrated from the inspired writings that while forensic righteousness is needed to cover past sins and sins of ignorance, the practical righteousness of sanctification can and must be perfect this side of heaven, the basic premise of the anti-perfection argument is gone.

Perhaps the most common Ellen White statement used to support this concept is the following:

The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor, who is at God's right hand, presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ's propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned (2).

We must ever bear in mind the rule of self-interpretation that applies both to Scripture and the writings of Ellen White: "The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture" (3). We therefore must examine other Ellen White statements that use language similar to the above, in order to grasp what Ellen White is truly saying.

Here are some notable examples:

Before the believer is held out the wonderful possibility of being like Christ, obedient to all the principles of the law. But of himself man is utterly unable to reach this condition. The holiness that God's Word declares he must have before he can be saved is the result of the working of divine grace as he bows in submission to the discipline and retraining influences of the Spirit of truth. *Man's obedience can be made perfect only by the incense of Christ's righteousness, which fills with divine fragrance every act of obedience.* The part of the Christian is to persevere in overcoming every fault (4).

The merit of Jesus must be mingled with our prayers and efforts, or they are as worthless as was the offering of Cain. Could we see the activity of all human instrumentality, as it appears before God, we would see that only the work accomplished by much prayer, which is *sanctified* by the merit of Christ, will stand the test of the judgment (5).

There is none too much of any of the workers, be they possessed of large or small talents, to render themselves to God that they may be sanctified and fitted for His service. Give all you have and are, and it is all nothing without the merit of the blood that *sanctifies* the gift. Could those who hold responsible positions multiply their talents a thousandfold, their service would have no worth before God unless Christ was mingled with all their offerings (6).

Man is permitted to handle the Lord's goods. Thus he is tested and proved. His heart must be perfumed with the incense of Christ's righteousness, the Saviour must work in him to will and to do of His good pleasure, in order for the handling of the goods entrusted to him to bear the endorsement of the God of heaven (7).

The offering that is made to God without a spirit of reverence and gratitude, He does not accept. It is the humble, grateful, reverential heart that makes the offering as a sweet-smelling savor, acceptable to God (8).

Shall we not, then, give to Christ that which He has died to redeem? If you will do this, He will quicken your conscience, renew your heart, sanctify your affections, purify your thoughts, and set all your powers at work for Him. Every motive and every thought will be brought into captivity to Jesus Christ.

Those who are sons of God will represent Christ in character. Their works will be perfumed by the infinite tenderness, compassion, love, and purity of the Son of God. And the more completely mind and body are yielded to the Holy Spirit, the greater will be the fragrance of our offering to Him (9).

All these statements give evidence that the purification by Jesus' merit which our prayers, our worship, and our service must experience is an internal, sanctifying process, not a forensic one. None of the above passages bespeaks forgiveness or some kind of judicial declaration to cover "inevitable" sin. This is not a legal purification applied simply to the books of heaven, but an internal purification applied to the heart. Our words and efforts do ascend through the corrupt channels of our fallen natures to heaven, but if the above passages mean what they say, it is *while* they ascend through those channels—not when they get to heaven—that they receive purification.

The belief of some that God's forgiveness covers the believer's past, present, and future imperfections—what some call "overarching forgiveness" (10) or the "umbrella of eternal grace" (11)—is not supported by Inspiration. Others, noting the Ellen White statement that is the focus of this particular objection (12), claim it means that our sanctified deeds, even our prayers, "need forgiveness" (13). But the apostle John writes, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1). Notice again that forgiveness is available *if* we sin, not when.

One wonders how this notion of sanctified, Spirit-empowered works supposedly "needing forgiveness" comports with the apostle Paul's listing of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), following which he declares,

“Against such there is no law” (verse 23). The apostle goes on to say in the next verse, “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (verse 24). How can these verses be true if the law still condemns sanctified performance for falling short of its requirements? How can the flesh be described here as crucified if it still involuntarily pollutes the words and behavior of the most consecrated?

Ellen White makes clear that the forgiving aspect of Jesus' righteousness covers our past, not our present or future:

The law requires righteousness—a righteous life, a perfect character, and this man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God’s holy law. But Christ, coming to earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. *Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.* More than this, Christ imbues me with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ (14).

There is no way back to innocence and life except through repentance for having transgressed God's law, and faith in the merits of the divine sacrifice, *who has suffered for your transgressions of the past*; and you are accepted in the Beloved on condition of obedience to the commandments of your Creator (15).

Christ bears the penalty of man's *past* transgressions, and by *imparting* to man His righteousness, makes it possible for man to keep God's holy law (16).

Ellen White is clear in another statement that imputed righteousness is synonymous with justification, and imparted righteousness with sanctification (17). In the statement quoted above we can clearly see that in Ellen White's theology, imparted righteousness is capable of meeting the law's demands. Other statements affirm the same thing:

It was impossible for the sinner to keep the law of God, which was holy, just, and good; but this impossibility was removed by the *impartation* of the righteousness of Christ to the repenting, believing soul. The life and death of Christ in behalf of sinful man were for the purpose of restoring the sinner to God’s favor, through *imparting* to him the righteousness that would meet the claims of the law and find acceptance with the Father (18).

What is sanctification? It is to give one's self wholly and without reserve--soul, body, and spirit--to God; to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God; to know and to do the will of God without regard to self or self-interest; to be heavenly minded, pure, unselfish, holy, and *without spot or stain* (19).

True sanctification is nothing more or less than to love God with all the heart, to walk in His commandments and ordinances blameless. Sanctification is not an emotion, but a heaven-born principle that brings all the passions and desires under the control of the Spirit of God; and this work is done through our Lord and Savior (20).

True sanctification consists in the cheerful performance of daily duties in *perfect obedience to the will of God* (21).

Too much of contemporary Adventist thought assumes that trusting in "Christ's merits alone"—which we all agree with—means trusting in *justification* alone. But the following statements from Ellen White—the only inspired writer to use the term *merit* in the context of salvation—make it clear that the merits of Christ are just another term for the righteousness of Christ, and that these merits are imparted as well as imputed to believers:

Becoming partakers of His divine nature, we are to learn to discern the temptations of Satan, and, in the strength of His grace, overcome the corruptions that are in the world through lust. He who was once a sinful human being may be refined and purified through the *imparted* merits of Christ, and stand before his fellow men as a laborer together with God (22).

The more we contemplate these riches, the more we will come into possession of them, and the more we shall reveal the merits of Christ's sacrifice, the protection of His righteousness, His inexpressible love, the fullness of His wisdom, and His power to present us before the Father without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (23).

When the law of God is thus implanted in the soul of the believer, he is approaching eternal life through the merits of Jesus. . . .

Here in this life is the testing, trying time. The angels of God are watching the development of character, and weighing moral worth. The whole question is settled in this, Is he obedient or disobedient to the commandments of God? has the sinner been transformed in this world, through the merits of Christ, so that he is fitted to join the heavenly society? (24).

Through the merits of Christ man may be able to exercise the noblest powers of his being, and expel sin from the soul (25).

Through the merits of His blood, you may overcome every spiritual foe, and remedy every defect of character (26).

Desmond Ford, in a sermon he preached during the 1970s, disparaged sanctified obedience by insisting that "it all deserves damnation because there is some of self in all of it" (27). By contrast, Ellen White makes the following observations about the truly sanctified Christian:

"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour." Ephesians 5:1,2. This is the height of the love we are required to reach. And the texture of this love is not tainted with selfishness (28).

In the life of the true Christian there is nothing of self. Self is dead. There was no selfishness in the life that Christ lived while on this earth. Bearing our nature, He lived a life wholly devoted to the service of others (29).

When the Saviour abides in the heart the work bears the impress of the divine touch. Self does not appear. Christ is revealed as the One altogether lovely (30).

The Word of God instructs us to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves," and it is the duty of every Christian to bring himself under discipline to the rules of the Bible, that he may be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed." The work coming from the hands of those who do this, will be as lasting as eternity. It will not be mingled with a thread of selfishness, and it will not be loose, careless work (31).

In word and deed Christ's followers are to be pure and true. In this world—a world of iniquity and corruption—Christians are to reveal the attributes of Christ. All they say and do is to be free from selfishness (32).

Of the man who is noted for his meekness, Christ says, He can be trusted. Through him I can reveal Myself to the world. He will not weave into the web any threads of selfishness (33)

The above statements should be sufficient to demonstrate that when Ellen White speaks of the need for the prayers, praise, and service of believers to be purified by the merits of Jesus' blood, that this purification is an internal, practical reality. As we have seen from the inspired writings, both justification and sanctification constitute the pure, spotless righteousness of Jesus. Neither is depicted in the inspired writings as superior or inferior to the other. The writings of Ellen White make it clear, as does the Bible (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; II Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5), that both phases of our Lord's righteousness constitute the means of our salvation.

Objection No. 2: Ellen White says, "Jesus makes up for our unavoidable deficiencies" (34), implying that a certain degree of sin remains inevitable even for the sanctified Christian.

Let us look at the context of this statement:

Jesus is perfect. Christ's righteousness is imputed unto them [His people], and He will say, 'Take away the filthy garments from him and clothe him with change of raiment.' Jesus makes up for our unavoidable deficiencies. When Christians are faithful to each other, and loyal to the Captain of the Lord's host, never betraying trusts into the enemy's hands, they will be transformed into Christ's character" (35).

The key to this passage is the reference to the story of Joshua and the Angel in Zechariah 3, and the command to replace our filthy garments with a change of raiment (verse 4). In her application of this story to the experience of God's end-time people, Ellen White is clear that the filthy garments being removed are past sins, not present ones:

"Are these," he [Satan] asks, "the people who are to take my place in heaven, and the place of the angels who united with me? . . . Look at the sins which *have marked* their lives. Behold their selfishness, their malice, their hatred toward one another." The people of God *have been* in many respects very faulty. Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins which he *has tempted* them to commit (36).

Elsewhere we read:

Now he [Satan] points to the *record of their lives*, to the defects of character, the unlikeness to Christ, which *has dishonored* their Redeemer, to all the sins which he *has tempted* them to commit (37).

Joshua's victory and that of his people are described as follows:

Israel was clothed in "change of raiment,"—the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. The mitre placed upon Joshua's head was such as was worn by the priests, and bore the inscription, "Holiness to the Lord," signifying that notwithstanding his *former* transgressions, he was now qualified to minister before God in His sanctuary (38).

Notice that each of these statements refers to the sins of believers in the past tense. Ellen White is clear that Satan's accusations, while correct with regard to the past, are correct no longer:

But while the followers of Christ *have sinned*, they have not given themselves to the control of evil. *They have put away their sins*, and have sought the Lord in humility and contrition, and the Divine Advocate pleads in their behalf (39).

An even stronger statement, also commenting on the story of Joshua and the Angel, makes it clear that those who haven't stopped sinning are not a part of the group from whom the filthy garments are removed:

"And He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, even the Lord that hast chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and stood before the angel" (Zech. 3:1-3). Joshua here represents the people of God; and Satan pointing to their filthy garments claims them as his property over which he has a right to exercise his cruel power. But these very ones have improved the hours of probation to confess their sins with contrition of soul and *put them away*, and Jesus has written pardon against their names.

Those who have not ceased to sin and who have not repented and sought pardon for their transgressions are not represented in this company (40).

In other words, Ellen White is unmistakably clear that those represented by Joshua in this narrative, whose filthy garments are removed and replaced with a change of raiment, are no longer committing sin.

In what way, then, are these deficiencies "unavoidable"? Because the past cannot be changed. It can only be covered by the Savior's forgiving righteousness. But in no way does this mean a certain level of sin remains inevitable for the duration of the Christian's earthly life. The inspired testimony is crystal clear:

There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God (41).

However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act (42).

Every impurity of thought, every lustful passion, separates the soul from God; for Christ can never put His robe of righteousness upon a sinner, to hide his deformity (43).

When man transgresses he is under the condemnation of the law, and it becomes to him a yoke of bondage. Whatever his profession may be *he is not justified*" (44).

Ellen White's theology envisions no objective, justifying righteousness as a cover for continuous, "unavoidable" transgression.

Objection No. 3: But doesn't a later version of the story of Joshua and the Angel in Ellen White's writings have Jesus saying His followers still have imperfections of character at this time, not simply a record of these in their past?

Here is what the statement in question says:

He who has been most abused by their ingratitude, who knows their sin and also their penitence, declares, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. I gave My life for these souls. They are graven upon the palms of My hands. They may have imperfections of character; they may have failed in their endeavors; but they have repented, and I have forgiven and accepted them" (45).

Notice once again, despite the claims of certain ones, that the sins of God's people described in this statement are still depicted as in the past. Notice how the statement says Jesus "has been" abused by their ingratitude, that "they may have failed" in their endeavors. We don't read of Jesus still being abused by the saints' ingratitude, nor do we read of continued failings on their part. As with what we've found in the Ellen White statements considered under the previous objection, the sins of God's people here described refer to the record of their lives, not their continuing experience.

In light of the language we have found in this statement, in addition to the numerous passages we have considered in which Ellen White declares the saints approaching probation's end to be fully free from sin through heaven's power (46), we are constrained to understand the above statement that the saints "may have imperfections of character" to refer to the record of their past. As we will see in the course of addressing the objections before us, the consistent testimony of Ellen White's teachings regarding the Last Generation saints is that sin will be fully expunged from their lives in advance of probation's close. Isolated statements which on the surface may appear to teach otherwise must be read in both their immediate context and in light of the inspired consensus.

Objection No. 4: Even if perfection is possible in this life, it is neither the cause nor the condition of salvation.

Most who believe they are saved by justification alone, and not at all by sanctification, also believe perfection is impossible this side of heaven. But there are those in contemporary Adventism who claim to believe in character perfection, who also believe in justification-alone salvation.

First we have to consider what in fact the Bible means when it speaks of salvation. The first reference to salvation in the New Testament reads, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Elsewhere in the New Testament, as we have seen already, it is clear that sanctification and the Spirit's inward work are a part of the means of this salvation:

God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (II Thess. 2:13).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5).

It is equally clear from the Bible that sanctification will be perfect in this life:

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

We have already seen the following Ellen White statements which affirm the Bible truth that our sanctification is to be perfect in this life:

What is sanctification? It is to give one's self wholly and without reserve--soul, body, and spirit--to God; to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God; to know and to do the will of God without regard to self or self-interest; to be heavenly minded, pure, unselfish, holy, and *without spot or stain* (47).

True sanctification is nothing more or less than to love God with all the heart, to walk in His commandments and ordinances blameless. Sanctification is not an emotion, but a heaven-born principle that brings all the passions and desires under the control of the Spirit of God; and this work is done through our Lord and Savior (48).

True sanctification consists in the cheerful performance of daily duties *in perfect obedience to the will of God* (49).

Ellen White is also clear that both imputed and transforming righteousness are the ground of our hope of salvation:

Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, *and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us* (50).

Elsewhere we read:

The world is seeking for those things that perish with the using; its diligence and activity are not exerted to obtain the salvation gained through the imparted righteousness of Christ (51).

We are saved by climbing round after round of the ladder, looking to Christ, clinging to Christ, mounting step by step to the height of Christ, so that He is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and charity are the rounds of this ladder (52).

Thank God, He attends us every step of the way through, if we are willing to be saved in Christ's appointed way, through obedience to His requirements (53).

The following statements clarify just how perfect this obedience must be as a condition of our salvation:

Before the believer is held out the wonderful possibility of being like Christ, obedient to all the principles of the law. But of himself man is utterly unable to reach this condition. The holiness that God's word declares he must have *before he can be saved* is the result of the working of divine grace as he bows in submission to the discipline and restraining influences of the Spirit of truth (54).

So perfect is the character represented which men must have *in order to be Christ's disciples* that the infidel has said that it is not possible for any human being to attain unto it. But no less a standard must be presented by all who claim to be children of God. Infidels know not that celestial aid is provided for all who seek for it by faith (55).

He [God] sent His Son to this world to bear the death penalty of man's transgression, *and to show man how to live a sinless life. There is no other way in which he can be saved.* "Without Me," Christ says, "ye can do nothing." Through Him, and Him alone, can the natural heart be changed, the affections transformed, the affections set flowing heavenward (56).

In the day of judgment the course of the man who has retained the frailty and imperfection of humanity will not be vindicated. For him there will be no place in heaven. He could not enjoy the perfection of the saints in light. He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God (57).

Christ came to this earth and lived a life of perfect obedience, that men and women, through His grace, might also live lives of perfect obedience. *This is necessary to their salvation* (58).

Let us keep in mind, of course, that the perfection God requires is proportionate to the light given (Prov. 4:18; Matt. 13:8; Luke 12:48; Acts 17:30; James 4:17). More than likely, the great majority of the resurrected multitudes will have died sinning ignorantly. Some have drawn the contrast here between character surrender (the giving up and conquest of all known sin, which all in every age are able by God's grace to do) and character maturity (which will only be complete among those required at the end of time to stand without a mediator. As a mediator is essential in order to handle even ignorant sin (59), those who endure the great time of trouble and experience translation will have reached the fullest state of character maturity required for fallen beings—the complete absence of sinful conduct, with all ignorant sins revealed and overcome.

Objection No. 5: Ellen White says that while we can copy the pattern of Jesus' character, we can never equal it.

The Ellen White CD-ROM lists at least eight references which use this or similar language. The context of them all is similar if not identical. The one most often quoted is the following:

He is a perfect and holy example, given for us to imitate. We cannot equal the pattern; but we shall not be approved of God if we do not copy it, and, according to the ability which God has given, resemble it (60).

But the context of this statement shows what the pattern is which she says we can't equal:

He [Christ] laid aside His glory, His dominion, His riches, and sought after those who were perishing in sin. He humbled Himself to our necessities, that He might exalt us to heaven. Sacrifice, self-denial, and disinterested benevolence characterized His life. He is our pattern (61).

Earlier in this volume we find this:

Our Lord and Saviour laid aside His dominion, His riches and glory, and sought after us, that He might save us from misery, and make us like Himself. He humbled Himself and took our nature that we might be able to learn of Him, and, imitating His life of benevolence and self-denial, follow Him step by step to heaven. You cannot equal the copy, but you can resemble it, and according to your ability do likewise (62).

Later in the same volume we find similar words:

He laid aside His glory, His high command, His honor, and His riches, and humbled Himself to our necessities. We cannot equal the example, but we should copy it (63).

A comparable point is made in another such passage:

We shall never be called upon to suffer as Christ suffered; for the sins not of one, but the sins of the whole world were laid upon Christ. He endured humiliation, reproach, suffering, and death, that we by following His example might inherit all things.

Christ is our pattern, the perfect and holy example that has been given us to follow. We can never equal the pattern; but we may imitate it and resemble it according to our ability (64).

In each of these statements, and in similar ones, the pattern we are told we can't equal is that of Christ's infinite humiliation, suffering, and sacrifice for our sins, not the pattern of sinless obedience. We can't equal the pattern in question because we don't have the throne of God to give up. Nor have the sins of all mankind been laid upon us. The sinless angels can't equal this pattern either.

Another such statement speaks of Christ's infinite goodness as the pattern we cannot equal but must strive to follow:

What efforts are we putting forth as the believers of unpopular truth, in self-denial, in self-sacrifice? We can never equal the Pattern, because it is infinite goodness practiced in His human nature, yet we should make determined efforts with all the powers of our being to follow His example (65).

What is the pattern we can't equal? Christ's "infinite goodness." Again, even the sinless angels can't equal that. Only God is capable of infinite goodness, and Jesus demonstrated that goodness by coming to earth as the sacrifice for our sins. But in no way is this or any comparable passage saying our Lord's sinless obedience is a pattern fallen beings cannot equal, even through heaven's power.

Objection #6: The Bible declares, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10).

The first three chapters of Romans demonstrate how everyone—Jews and Gentiles alike—stand guilty before God and thus in need of Christ's righteousness. The verse just prior to Romans 3:10 makes this obvious:

What, then, are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin (verse 9).

The issue in this context is not what converted Christians, who are partaking of Christ's righteousness through both justification and sanctification, are capable of becoming. Paul is simply saying that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), and thus stand in need of what Christ can do for them. He is certainly not saying that even with the power of Christ in the Christian's life, a certain degree of sin remains inevitable.

Later in this same epistle Paul states "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4). Elsewhere he writes:

Awake to righteousness, and sin not (I Cor. 15:34).

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (II Cor. 7:1).

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:4-5).

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

In other words, those who claim God's power and promises through conversion and sanctification possess the means to keep from sinning, something those without Christ (described in Rom. 1-3) are incapable of doing.

Objection #7: When Paul writes, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), the phrase "come short" is in the present, continuous tense, which means sin remains inevitable for all.

Again we refer to the verse's context. Paul is not writing about Christians who partake of the power and righteousness of Jesus; but rather, of the fact that the entire world has sinned, fallen short of God's glory, and thus needs Jesus. In numerous other passages the same author is clear that through Jesus' power in the life, sin can be extinguished and the law fulfilled (Rom, 8:4; I Cor. 15:34; II Cor. 7:1; 10:4-5; Phil. 4:13; I Thess. 5:23).

It is possible, when studying the Bible, to force words and phrases to work overtime. Those who stretch the phrase "fall short" (Rom. 3:23) to imply continuous sin even in believers, have clearly fallen into this trap. This becomes obvious not only when one considers the context, but also the totality of Bible passages—including those by Paul himself—which make it clear that perfect obedience is possible for Christians through heaven's imparted strength.

Objection #8: Paul declared in Romans 7 that because of his sinful nature it was impossible to obey the law of God.

Let us review the verses in question:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.
For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.
If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law, that it is good.
Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.
For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.
For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.
Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.
I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.
For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:
But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.
O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?
I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.
There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 7:14-8:1).

Quite obviously, the man described in Romans 7 is in complete spiritual captivity, while the first verse of chapter 8 describes a complete change in this condition.

There is no victory in Romans 7, no advancement whatsoever. If these verses described someone experiencing a general upward trend in his spiritual life, a trend nevertheless marred by occasional defeats and backsliding, it could be argued that this was a converted Christian. But Romans 7:14-25 contains nothing but defeat, nothing but bondage. This is not the life of a genuine Christian.

Some will point to the verses where Paul admits the law is spiritual (verse 14), consents that the law is good (verse 16), and delights in the law of God (verse 22). Many insist that only a converted Christian could say these things (66). But Saul of Tarsus, as a Pharisee, certainly believed the law was holy, just, and good. Devout Jews and Muslims today would say the same thing. Millions more in today's world know God's law is good and that they should keep it, but because they don't have Jesus, they lack the power to do so. How many smokers know they shouldn't smoke, how many with drug, sexual, or other addictions know they should quit, but lack the strength to do so since they don't know God?

We need to remember the kind of person the apostle Paul was before his conversion. While according to pharisaical righteousness he considered himself blameless (Phil. 3:4-6), his conscience told him otherwise. This is why Jesus, on the Damascus road, declared to him, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5).

We need to speak carefully when we say the man of Romans 7 is unconverted. He is not an unconverted person who loves sin and feels no need. Rather, he is an unconverted person *under conviction* of his need, which is exactly what Paul, or Saul, was before his conversion.

We can praise God that, as noted above, Paul doesn't stop at the end of Romans 7. He moves on to chapter 8, and in so doing makes clear that his erstwhile slavery has been replaced by freedom and victory:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. . . .

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

“For to be carnally minded is death: but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

So they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. . . .

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live (Rom. 8:1-2,5-9,13).

Notice that the flesh and the carnal mind, which we find *in* control in Romans 7, are *under* control of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8. In chapter 7 Paul describes himself as “carnal, sold under sin” (verse 14). In chapter 8 he maintains that the carnal mind cannot be subject to the law of God (verse 7), while at the same time making it clear that for those who walk after the Spirit rather than the flesh, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled (verse 4). Since the law is clearly being obeyed in chapter 8, the carnality of chapter 7 has obviously been replaced by the spirituality of chapter 8. In Romans 7 Paul is carnal, unable to keep the law he loves. In Romans 8, by contrast, he has become spiritual, and is thus able by God's grace to fulfill the law's righteousness (verse 4).

Paul is captive to the law of sin and death in Romans 7 (verses 23-24). In Romans 8 he is “free from the law of sin and death” (verse 2). In Romans 7 he is clearly in subjection to the fleshly nature (verses 17-18,20,23). In Romans 8 he declares that “ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (verse 9). And in another epistle he makes it clear that now, as a Christian, he keeps under his body and brings it into subjection (I Cor. 9:27). In contrast with Romans 7, where Paul speaks of the fleshly nature “bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (verse 23), he writes elsewhere of the necessity of “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:5).

These two sets of verses cannot apply to the same spiritual condition, for Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24). Either we will be captive to the flesh, or captive to Christ.

When we compare Romans 7 and 8 with Galatians 5, we see this point demonstrated again. Paul declares in Galatians, in language similar to what we find in Romans 7:

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would (Gal. 5:17).

But just prior to this verse he writes: “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (verse 16). Then, after describing the fruits of the flesh as well as the Spirit (verses 19-23), he declares:

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (verse 24).

Once again Paul is clear that captivity to the flesh—not being able to do the things that we would—is broken by belonging to Christ and partaking of the Spirit's power.

Objection #9: Ellen White states: “We make mistakes again and again. . . . No one is perfect but Jesus” (67). “We shall fail often in our efforts to copy the divine pattern” (68).

She isn't saying we *can't help* making mistakes again and again, even when controlled by the Holy Spirit. She isn't saying no one *can* be perfect except Jesus, nor that our frequent failures to copy the divine pattern are inevitable, no matter how sanctified we become. Ellen White declares emphatically, without qualification: "There is no excuse for sinning" (69). The point of the above statements is simply the reality (not the inevitability) of our all-too-frequent choices to fail.

In the following statement, Ellen White is crystal clear that because of the example set by Jesus, sin is not a necessity at any point in life:

Men and women frame many excuses for their proneness to sin. Sin is represented as a necessity, an evil that cannot be overcome. But sin is not a necessity. Christ lived in this world from infancy to manhood, and during that time He met and resisted all the temptations by which man is beset. He is a perfect pattern of childhood, of youth, of manhood (70).

Objection No. 10: Philippians 1:6 states that "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Would this mean the removal of sin from human lives is not complete till Jesus comes?

Glorification—the destruction of our fallen, lower natures—will not be accomplished till Christ returns. Our study has demonstrated this already, particularly from the writings of Ellen White (71). But both Scripture and the writings of Ellen White are clear that all sin will be eradicated in the life of the Christian prior to Jesus' coming. The apostle Peter admonishes the saints to "be diligent that ye be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (II Peter 3:14). The apostle John declares 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" (I John 3:2-3).

If we are to be "found" without spot and blameless when Christ returns, it is clear we won't be made that way at that moment. And when John says that those who have the *hope* of His coming will purify themselves as Christ is pure, this again makes plain that the making of the Christian's character as pure as Christ's must take place in advance of the second coming, as the second coming will no longer be a mere hope when Christ actually appears. It is while we still hope for His coming, John is saying, that we are to become as pure in character as our Savior.

Ellen White is thus in full harmony with Scripture when she writes as follows:

When He comes, He is not to cleanse us of our sins, to remove from us the defects in our characters, or to cure us of the infirmities of our tempers and dispositions. If wrought for us at all, this work will be accomplished before that time. When the Lord comes, those who are holy will be holy still. . . . The Refiner does not then sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done in these hours of probation (72).

When Christ shall come, our vile bodies are to be changed, and made like His glorious body; but the vile character will not be made holy then. The transformation of character must take place before His coming (73).

So when we place all these inspired statements—and many more—alongside Philippians 1:6, it is clear the "good work" Jesus will perform in His saints until His coming is not the removal of their sins. The work left to be done when Jesus returns is solely the work of eradicating our fallen, fleshly natures, which according to the inspired pen are not synonymous with sin itself (James 1:14-15) (74).

Objection No. 11: Speaking of the faithful living during the time of Jacob's trouble, Mrs. White declares, "It is needful for them to be placed in the furnace of fire; their earthliness must be consumed, that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected" (75). This would seem to imply that the saints after probation's close are not yet sinless.

Once again, when Ellen White—like Scripture—is permitted to explain herself, the message of these statements becomes clear.

First, we should review other passages regarding just what level of character perfection God is seeking from the final generation of believers:

Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon the earth. . . . When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing (76).

Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully (77).

I saw that none could share the “refreshing” unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action (78).

Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us, as the early rain fell upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost (79).

Are we seeking for His fullness, ever pressing toward the mark set before us—the perfection of His character? When the Lord's people reach this mark, they will be sealed in their foreheads. Filled with the Spirit, they will be complete in Christ, and the recording angel will declare, “It is finished” (80).

The Refiner does not then (at the second coming) sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done *in these hours of probation* (81).

In the light of these statements, it is clear that whatever remains to be removed from believers' lives at this point does not include sin. Many will not perceive until the ultimate crisis the need for absolute, exclusive trust in God at the deepest level. Speaking of what the saints will experience during this crisis, Ellen White observes, “In the last great conflict of the controversy with Satan those who are loyal to God will see every earthly support cut off” (82). Many earthly support systems—family, friends, the fellowship of the church—were divinely established, and to repose a certain trust in them is not sinful. But during this time God must remove from us these anchors for our souls to give total proof of our utter helplessness apart from Him. In another statement Ellen White helps us further understand this principle:

We may have special, select friends that, all unperceived and unacknowledged by us, we place in the heart where God should be, and we can never perfect a round, full Christian experience until every earthly support is removed, and the soul centers its entire affections about God (83).

Now let us look again at the statement about earthliness needing to be consumed:

It is needful for them to be placed in the furnace of fire; their earthliness must be consumed, that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected (84).

Putting these statements together, along with others we have seen which mandate the total expulsion of sin by God's grace from the lives of Christians prior to probation's close, it becomes clear that the earthliness left in the saints during the great time of trouble is not sin, but rather, reliance on various earthly support systems which must be taken from the faithful in order to prove their fidelity in the deepest possible way.

Objection No. 12: Speaking of the saints during the great time of trouble, Ellen White declares, “The lessons of faith which they have neglected they will be forced to learn under a terrible pressure of discouragement” (85). In another statement she writes that a lack of faith is sin (86).

Are we therefore to conclude that *any* deficiency or shortcoming with regard to our trust in God is to be considered sin? No inspired passage teaches such a thing. Such a belief would make Christ Himself a sinner, since He prayed for the cup of suffering to be removed while in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). Concerning our Lord’s state of mind following Gabriel’s strengthening visit, Ellen White observes:

Christ’s agony did not cease, but His depression and discouragement left Him (87).

Regarding His final moments on the cross, Ellen White likewise states:

Even doubts assailed the dying Son of God. He could not see through the portals of the tomb (88).

If the Savior Himself struggled with depression, discouragement, and doubt while remaining sinless, His followers at the close of time—relying fully upon His grace and sustenance—will be enabled to do the same. The need for growth does not imply the presence of sin, for of Christ we read elsewhere that He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). Ellen White thus observes:

From the first dawning of intelligence He (Christ) was constantly growing in spiritual grace and knowledge of truth (89).

Jesus, considered as a man, was perfect, yet He grew in grace (90).

Like their Master, the saints after the close of probation will continue to grow in grace and in trust in God. But in no way does this imply they will still be sinning.

Objection No. 13: God requires perfect loyalty, not perfect obedience.

Can someone please explain the difference? Imagine a man or woman professing perfect loyalty to a spouse while reserving the right to occasionally see someone else! It seems Ellen White was directly responding to this fallacious reasoning in the following statement:

The law demands perfect obedience. ‘Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.’ James 2:10. Not one of those ten precepts can be broken without disloyalty to the God of heaven. The least deviation from its requirements, by neglect or willful transgression, is sin (91).

Objection No. 14: Ellen White says the general trend of the life is what God ultimately looks at in the Christian life, and that occasional sin doesn’t alter our relationship with God.

Here is the statement being referred to, in context:

A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or trace all the chain of circumstances in the process of conversion, but this does not prove him to be unconverted. . . . While the work of the Spirit is silent and imperceptible, its effects are manifest. If the heart has been renewed by the Spirit of God, the life will bear witness to the fact. While we cannot do anything to change our hearts or to bring ourselves into harmony with God; while we must not trust at all to ourselves or to our good works, our lives will reveal whether the grace of God is dwelling within us. A change will be seen in the character, the habits, the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are. The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts (92).

In other words, the subject here is the reality of one’s initial conversion, not what God ultimately requires of the converted believer. In other statements Ellen White is clear what the latter requirements are:

Christ has promised to make them [His people] harmonious on every point, not pleasant and agreeable and kind today, and tomorrow harsh and disagreeable and unkind, falsifying their profession of faith (93).

Are there those here who have been sinning and repenting, sinning and repenting, and will they continue to do so till Christ shall come? May God help us that we may be truly united to Christ, the living Vine, and bear fruit to the glory of God (94).

Objection No. 15: Scripture says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (I John 1:8). And Ellen White says, “We cannot say, ‘I am sinless,’ till this vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body” (95).

We made reference to the above text in Chapter 4, but let us consider the issues it raises—and its context—in greater depth. To say we cannot *say* we are sinless is not the same as saying we cannot *be* sinless. Consider the above passage from First John, in its immediate context:

If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (I John 1:7-2:1).

Elsewhere in the book of First John, we read such verses as the following:

And hereby do we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (I John 2:3-4).

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. . .

Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth not hath not seen Him, neither known Him.

Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.

He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God (I John 3:23,6-9).

Quite obviously, First John 1:8 is not saying it is impossible to live without sinning, for that would militate against a major theme of this epistle. What John is simply saying is the same truth found in Romans 3:23, that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” It is imperative for us to acknowledge this fact before sin can be either forgiven or removed from our lives.

The Ellen White statement noted above should also be read in its context:

But we shall not boast of our holiness. As we have clearer views of Christ's spotlessness and infinite purity, we shall feel as did Daniel, when he beheld the glory of the Lord, and said, “My comeliness was turned in me into corruption.”

We cannot say, “I am sinless,” till this vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body. But if we constantly seek to follow Jesus, the blessed hope is ours of standing before the throne of God without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; complete in Christ, robed in His righteousness and perfection (96).

Clearly, the focus of the above statement is boasting of our holiness, and how no Christian will do this. The statement is not saying it is impossible to in fact *be* sinless until our bodies are changed at glorification. What is forbidden by the above statement is *saying* we are sinless. Job acknowledged this truth when he declared, “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me; if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet I would not know my soul; I would despise my life” (Job 9:20-21). Yet earlier in the book of Job, as we have seen, God declares that Job was in fact living without sin, “a perfect and upright man, and one that feared God and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1,8). And within the space of two chapters we learn how Job—despite the horrific loss of goods, family, even physical health—did not sin (Job 1:22; 2:10).

God is the only One who knows when sinless obedience is achieved, since He alone knows the heart (I Kings 8:39). This is why, as our study has already demonstrated, only He can declare, “Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). Only He can proclaim—as the wicked cower and the saints rejoice before the covenant rainbow at Christ’s return: “They come! they come! holy, harmless, and undefiled. They have kept the word of My patience; they shall walk among the angels” (97). Until then, the striving, struggling saint leaves to God the assessment of his spiritual condition.

Another Ellen White statement comes to mind in this context, which has also been used to prove sinless conduct to be out of reach even for the sanctified: “Before angels, men, and demons, He had spoken, unchallenged, words that from any other lips would have been blasphemy: ‘I do always those things that please Him’” (98). Of course it would be blasphemy for any finite mortal to make this claim, since—as we have seen from Scripture—none of us knows our own heart (I Kings 8:39). We have seen also how Job clearly recognized, despite God’s declaration of his sanctified status (Job 1:1,8,22; 2:10), that such a claim on his part would bring condemnation (Job 9:20-21). But one is interested that Ellen White in another statement uses the same language Jesus uses (“I do always those things that please Him”), and goes on to say this can in fact be achieved through the Holy Spirit’s sanctification:

He says, “I have kept My Father’s commandments.” “I do always those things that please Him.” John 15:10; 8:29. The followers of Christ are to become like Him—by the grace of God to form characters in harmony with the principles of His holy law. This is Bible sanctification.

This work can be accomplished only through faith in Christ, by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God (99).

So the inspired consensus is quite clear on the question of sinless obedience here on earth. While we can’t claim it, by His power we can do it.

A number of Ellen White statements are often quoted in discussions concerning this topic, which speak of how, the closer we come to Jesus, the more faulty and imperfect we appear to ourselves. The following statements express this theme quite clearly:

The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan’s delusions have lost their power, that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you (100).

The more we contemplate the character of Christ, and the more we experience of His saving power, the more keenly shall we realize our own weakness and imperfection, and the more earnestly shall we look to Him as our strength and our Redeemer (101).

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. There will be a continual reaching out of the soul after God, a continual, earnest, heartbreaking confession of sin and humbling of the heart before Him. At every advance step in the Christian experience our repentance will deepen (102).

Those who experience the sanctification of the Bible will manifest a spirit of humility. Like Moses, they have had a view of the awful majesty of holiness, and they see their own unworthiness in contrast with the purity and exalted perfection of the Infinite One (103).

Those who are really seeking to perfect Christian character will never indulge the thought that they are sinless (104).

Unfortunately, many read the above statements as if they are saying that the closer we come to Jesus and understand His purity and perfection, the more we will recognize our own sin to be infinitely pervasive and thus ultimately unconquerable this side of the kingdom. But none of the above passages teach this. To have a progressively clearer view of one's faults doesn't mean the list of these faults is endless. What it does mean is that the maturing Christian, coming ever closer to the character of Christ, recognizes with increasing acuity the depth of rebellion and perversity sinful choices have produced, together with the level of vulnerability experienced when relying on one's own strength. As such a one draws nearer the divine standard, the awareness builds both of total helplessness and the potential evil holds apart from God's transformative power. The following statement underscores this reality:

None of the prophets or apostles ever made proud boasts of holiness. The nearer they came to perfection of character, the less worthy and righteous they viewed themselves (105).

In another statement we read:

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 (106).

The wording of the above statement is especially significant when considered closely. Quite obviously, when Ellen White speaks here of "those who are registered as holy in the books of heaven," she is not speaking of a legal declaration of righteousness, for indeed those declared righteous in that way would be aware of that fact. But those who have attained in their lives to the holiness Scripture upholds are not aware of this fact, since they don't know their own hearts (I Kings 8:39), recognize their unworthiness apart from divine pardon and power, and like Job of old, refuse to claim perfection for themselves (Job 9:20-21) even though God—unbeknownst to them—makes this claim concerning them (Job 1:1,8,22; 2:10).

One thinks of Daniel Hernandez, the youthful aide who rushed to the side of Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords during the Tucson shootings of January 2011, who soon thereafter was honored at a memorial service for the victims. While Hernandez humbly rejected the characterization of himself as a hero, none who observed or knew of his actions could describe him as anything less. Similarly, God's victorious people will not boast of their triumph, despite the accolade accorded them by heaven and the watching universe.

Let us consider a number of statements which leave no doubt whatsoever that Ellen White believes sinless living to be possible for the Christian through God's power here on earth:

In our world, we are to remember the way in which Christ worked. He made the world. He made man. Then He came in person to the world to show its inhabitants how to live sinless lives (107).

Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalthe itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." When you come into this position, the work of consecration will be better understood by you both. Your thoughts will be pure, chaste, elevated, your actions pure and sinless (108).

But it is God's purpose that man shall stand before Him upright and noble; and God will not be defeated by Satan. He sent His Son to this world to bear the death penalty of man's transgression, and to show man how to live a sinless life. There is no other way in which man can be saved. "Without Me," Christ says, "ye can do nothing." Through Him, and Him alone, can the natural heart be changed, the affections transformed, the affections set flowing heavenward. Christ alone can give life to the soul dead in trespasses and sins (109).

Thus He (Christ) places us on vantage ground, where we could live pure, sinless lives. Repentant sinners stand before God justified and accepted, because the Innocent One has borne their guilt. The undeserving are made deserving, because in their behalf the Deserving became the undeserving (110).

Christ bore the sins of the whole world. He was the second Adam. Taking upon Himself human nature, He passed over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell. Having taken humanity, He has an intense interest in human beings. He felt keenly the sinfulness, the shame, of sin. He is our Elder Brother. He came to prove that human beings can, through the power of God, live sinless lives (111).

The Saviour is wounded afresh and put to open shame when His people pay no heed to His word. He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness (112).

In the day of judgment the course of the man who has retained the frailty and imperfection of humanity will not be vindicated. For him there will be no place in heaven. He could not enjoy the perfection of the saints in light. He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God (113).

Objection No. 16: The Bible declares twice, “There is no man that sinneth not” (I Kings 8:46). “There is not a just man upon earth, who doeth good, and sinneth not” (Eccl. 7:20).

Does this mean it is impossible not to sin, even through heaven’s power? Too many other Bible verses forbid such a conclusion (Psalm 4:4; 119:1-3,11; Isa. 1:16-17; Zeph. 3:13; John 8:11; Rom. 6:14; 8:4; I Cor. 15:34; II Cor. 7:1; 10:4-5; Eph. 5:27; I Thess. 5:23; I Peter 2:21-22; 4:1; II Peter 3:10-14; I John 1:7,9; 2:1; 3:2-3,6-9; Jude 24; Rev. 3:21; 14:5). We have seen from Scripture how Job was “perfect and upright” (Job 1:1), living without sin despite devastating tragedy and physical pain (Job 1:22; 2:10). The above verses by Solomon, like First John 1:8, simply reaffirm the fact that all humans have chosen to sin (Rom. 3:23; 5:12), not that they have to keep doing so.

Solomon certainly didn’t believe perfect obedience was impossible for the converted follower of God, as evidenced in his final words before the close of his life:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.
For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:13-14).

Objection No. 17: Ellen White says we can only be perfect “in our sphere.”

A number of Ellen White statements use this language, such as the following:

In His (Christ’s) life upon earth He plainly revealed the divine nature. We should strive to be perfect in our sphere, as He was perfect in His sphere (114).

With our limited powers we are to be as holy in our sphere as God is holy in His sphere (115).

But the statement below gives us a clearer picture as to what “sphere” Ellen White is talking about:

He tells us to be perfect as He is, in the same manner. We are to be centers of light and blessing to our little circle, even as He is to the universe. We have nothing of ourselves, but the light of His love shines upon us, and we are to reflect its brightness. “In His borrowed goodness good,” we may be perfect in our sphere, even as God is perfect in His (116).

A similar statement reads as follows:

When perfect faith and perfect love and obedience abound, working in the hearts of those who are Christ's followers, they will have a powerful influence. Light will emanate from them, dispelling the darkness around them, refining and elevating all who come within the sphere of their influence, and bringing to a knowledge of the truth all who are willing to be enlightened and to follow in the humble path of obedience (117).

In other words, the "sphere" Ellen White is talking about is the environment in which we live, defined by the limitations of time and space. We cannot serve equally all the billions living on this planet, nor can we avail ourselves of unknown opportunities. Our physical strength, the time at our command, the hours in the day, only go so far. This is the "sphere" she is describing, in which we are to be perfect just as God is perfect in His own much larger sphere. In no way does she say, in this context or elsewhere, that "perfect in our sphere" means we can only be perfect within the limitations imposed by a presumably unconquerable fleshly nature.

In fact, earlier in this context, we find the following words, which comment on Matthew 5:48: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect":

The conditions of eternal life, under grace, are just what they were in Eden--perfect obedience, harmony with God, perfect conformity to the principles of His law. The standard of character presented in the Old Testament is the same that is presented in the New Testament. This standard is not one to which we cannot attain. In every command or injunction God gives there is a promise, the most positive, underlying the command. God has made provision that we may become like unto Him, and He will accomplish this for all who do not interpose a perverse will and thus frustrate His grace (118).

Objection No. 18: When Ellen White speaks of people living without a Mediator in the last days, she is referring primarily to the wicked, not the righteous.

It is primarily the wicked who live without an intercessor because it is primarily wicked people who will be living upon the earth at that time. But while Ellen White is clear that when probation closes, "there was then no mediator between guilty man and an offended God" (119), she is equally clear that the righteous will also stand without a mediator during this time:

In that fearful time, after the close of Jesus' mediation, the saints were living in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor (120).

In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor (121).

And to be prepared for this time, God's end-time saints are instructed as follows, in a passage we can't quote often enough:

Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon the earth. . . . When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing (122).

Objection No. 19: Will the saints after the close of probation no longer need to pray that portion of the Lord's Prayer, which entreats, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12)? Didn't Ellen White rebuke those in early Adventism who thought themselves sufficiently sanctified that praying this part of the Lord's Prayer was no longer necessary?

First, as we have noted already, those who through God's power experience perfect victory over sin are not aware when this state has been achieved, as only God knows the true condition of every heart (I Kings 8:39). So even if one is no longer sinning, such a one is not aware that this is so, and will certainly affirm the need for the pardon of past sins by continuing to recite the Lord's Prayer and its petition for divine forgiveness.

The grasping of spiritual reality by the faithful is often heedless of time—whether past, present, or future. David declared in the present tense, speaking of God, "He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth" (Psalm 46:9). John the Baptist likewise declared of Jesus, in the present tense, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In neither case was this yet a literal reality, but was grasped at the moment by faith. In the same way, the saints following probation's close—who, while not claiming to be sinless due to God's sole awareness of their ultimate condition, will certainly be aware that the indulgences into which they so often fell in times past are no longer occurring—will nevertheless acknowledge their unworthiness and need for forgiveness on account of past failings, and thus in faith grasp the promise of pardon contained in the Lord's Prayer.

We must also keep in mind that the saints following probation's close are not at all certain that their sins have been forgiven; hence the agony of soul-searching that will characterize the Time of Jacob's Trouble. In Ellen White's words:

If they could have the assurance of pardon they would not shrink from torture or death, but should they prove unworthy, and lose their lives because of their own defects of character, then God's holy name would be reproached (123).

But the good news is that while the saints agonize and search their hearts for unconfessed and unforsaken sins, they can't find any. Thus the servant of the Lord writes of their self-examination at this time:

Had not Jacob previously repented of his sin in obtaining the birthright by fraud, God would not have heard his prayer and mercifully preserved his life. So, in the time of trouble, if the people of God had unconfessed sins to appear before them while tortured with fear and anguish, they would be overwhelmed; despair would cut off their faith, and they could not have confidence to plead with God for deliverance. But while they have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they have no concealed wrongs to reveal. Their sins have gone beforehand to judgment and have been blotted out, and they cannot bring them to remembrance (124).

The righteous will not cease their earnest agonizing cries for deliverance. They cannot bring to mind any particular sins, but in their whole life they can see but little good. Their sins had gone beforehand to judgment, and pardon had been written. Their sins had been borne away into the land of forgetfulness, and they could not bring them to remembrance (125).

It is in this context, speaking of the condition that will be needed for the saints to endure this ordeal, that she writes:

Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. . . . This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble (126).

Ellen White's statement—written together with her husband James—regarding those in her day who thought themselves so sanctified that the Lord's Prayer need not be uttered, reads as follows:

We are pained to learn the condition of Brother B, and to know that Satan is pushing him on to cause disaffection in the Indiana Conference under the pious guise of Christian holiness. Both you and ourselves fully believe that holiness of life is necessary to fit us for the inheritance of saints in light. We contend that this state must be reached in a Bible way. Christ prayed that His disciples might be sanctified through the truth, and the apostles preached of purifying our hearts by obeying the truth. The professed church of Christ is full of the spurious article, and one distinct feature of it is, the more one drinks into the spirit of popular sanctification, the less he prizes the present truth. Many of those who are the open opponents of God Sabbath, the third angel's message, and the health reform, are among the sanctified ones. Some of

them have reached the almost hopeless position that they cannot sin. These, of course, have no further use for the Lord's Prayer, which teaches us to pray that our sins may be forgiven, and but very little use for the Bible, as they profess to be led by the Spirit. . . . Our position has ever been that true sanctification, which will stand the test of the Judgment, is that which comes through obedience of the truth and of God (127).

Two points become clear about the false sanctification being described here, both of which place it completely apart from the doctrine of sanctification and perfection our study has found in the inspired writings:

First, the idea that anyone can be so sanctified that they "cannot sin" is totally separate from the Bible/Spirit of Prophecy teaching that through God's imparted strength it is possible to choose not to sin. Bible sanctification and character perfection do not remove from anyone the right of choice. Secondly, the false sanctification depicted in this passage was claimed by persons rejecting key Bible doctrines as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who believed guidance by the Holy Spirit was a substitute for obedience to Scripture.

This is not the doctrine of sinless obedience and sanctified purity taught by Scripture and Ellen White. True sanctification and sinless conduct will never lead one to claim they cannot sin, nor can it be experienced by persons who deny plain Biblical teachings and insist the Holy Spirit takes the place of strict adherence to Scripture. And as the truly sanctified, truly victorious Christian always recognizes that God alone knows their ultimate state (I Kings 8:39), they will always affirm through the Lord's Prayer the reality of God's forgiveness, even when that forgiveness is no longer continuously available due to the close of Christ's mediation in heaven.

Objection No. 20: Ellen White states, "We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute" (128). If this statement is true, why are the saints after probation's close in agony over whether or not their sins have been pardoned?

The assurance offered by this Ellen White statement applies to Christians in every age, including those after the close of probation. What the saints after probation's close will do during the Time of Jacob's Trouble is to scrutinize their hearts and lives, to make sure every sin in their experience has been forsaken and placed under the blood of the One whose life has been offered as a substitute for their past transgressions. As the substitutional life of Jesus is available only for those sins that have been confessed and forsaken (II Chron. 7:14; Prov. 28:13; Isa. 55:7; I John 1:9), the saints' post-probation agony as to whether or not their sins have in fact been both confessed and forsaken, is not at all in conflict with the assurance given by the Ellen White statement in question.

Objection No. 21: If sinless obedience is necessary for those translated without seeing death, how will the millions of last-minute believers, who come out of Babylon in response to the Loud Cry message (Rev. 18:4), have the chance to perfect that kind of character?

Let us remember, first of all, that many of those who answer the summons of the Loud Cry in the last days will, until that time, have been living in accordance with all the light and truth they have thus far received. For such persons, the acceptance and practice of new truth will not be a slow and arduous process. Even for those who have much to learn, who have to "start from scratch," the power of the Holy Spirit through the latter rain will be such that spiritual growth will take far less time than many might now believe possible. In the words of Ellen White:

Some of us have had time to get the truth and to advance step by step, and every step we have taken has given us strength to take the next. But now time is almost finished, and what we have been years learning, they will have to learn in a few months (129).

Let us also bear in mind that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). God is not going to arbitrarily close probation on people who haven't had the time to develop the maturity essential for them to stand without a Mediator, as part of the final demonstration of perfect holiness. God is the absolute Master of time, history, and the process of spiritual growth in every life. Because of this, all can be assured that probation will not cease till all who seek to be ready are in fact fully ready.

Objection No. 22: Speaking of those who will meet their Lord in peace at His coming, Ellen White declares that in that hour they will say: “I believe in Him who was condemned at Pilate’s bar, and given up to the priests and rulers to be crucified. Look not upon me, a sinner, but look upon my Advocate. There is nothing in me worthy of the love He manifested for me, but He gave His life for me. Behold me in Jesus. He became sin for me, that I might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (130). Doesn’t this imply that the saints after probation’s close are still sinners in need of their Advocate’s mediation?

A “dry” alcoholic, who hasn’t taken a drink for twenty years, still considers himself or herself a recovering alcoholic. Even the victorious saints who stand without a mediator after the close of probation, have past lives of sin that their Advocate atoned for while His intercession lingered. As a result, the saints still view themselves as sinners, and plead with God to look upon their Savior’s life as the substitute for the sins that once stained their past. Like the dry alcoholic, they consider themselves recovering sinners.

If taken by itself, this passage might offer evidence that the saints following probation’s close are still experiencing occasional sin. But not only does the wording of the passage not require such a conclusion; the collective weight of inspired commentary on this issue—demonstrated throughout our study of these objections—disallows it. The fact that God’s people still trust in their Savior’s pardon for sins committed prior to the close of probation, in no way implies the continuance of sin on their part once probation has ceased.

Objection No. 23: In one statement Ellen White writes, “Repentance is a daily, continuous exercise, and must be so until mortality is swallowed up of immortality. Repentance, and humiliation, and sorrow of soul must be our daily meat and drink, until we cease to carry with us so many imperfections and failures” (131). This sounds like imperfections and failures will remain with the believer till Jesus returns.

We have already noted how, in our study of Biblical perfection theology and how inspired counsel constructs its various facets, that neither a single inspired word nor a single inspired passages can make or break an inspired teaching. In her discussion of Jesus’ human nature, Ellen White says in one statement, “Never did He do a wrong action, for He was the Son of God” (132). Taken by itself, this statement could be read as saying the reason Jesus didn’t sin was because He was God—until, of course, we consider other statements which make it plain that it wasn’t His inherent Godhood that kept Jesus from falling, but rather, the same imparted divine strength available to us all (133). Placed alongside other passages, the above statement is thus read as saying that while Jesus’ didn’t compromise His divine dignity by transgressing His Father’s will, the same power that kept Him from transgressing lies at the disposal of the striving faithful in every age.

Francis D. Nichol states that if Philippians 1:23—which expresses the apostle Paul’s desire to “depart and be with Christ”—were the only statement in the Bible about what happens to God’s people when they die, we might be justified in accepting the doctrine of natural immortality (134). But once we consider the collective testimony of Scripture, we learn that “departing” (death) and “being with Christ” happen at two different points in time.

By the same token, if the above statement about repentance, imperfections, and failures were the only statement we had from Ellen White regarding the condition of God’s people when Christ returns, we might be justified in concluding that she believed the saints will fall and fail till that point. Of course, that would place her out of harmony with a number of Bible passages we have considered, which offer clear evidence that spotless perfection and total victory will be the saints’ experience *before* Jesus comes (I Thess. 5:23; II Peter 3:14; I John 3:2-3). But as we have seen, a multitude of Ellen White statements declare, as does the Bible, that those alive when Jesus returns will be totally free from sin—prior to that time—through God’s imparted strength (135).

The statement cited by the present objection reads, once again: “Repentance is a daily, continuous exercise, and must be so until mortality is swallowed up of immortality. Repentance, and humiliation, and sorrow of soul must be our daily meat and drink, until we cease to carry with us so many imperfections and failures” (136). Just as we must read Philippians 1:23—regarding Paul’s desire to “depart and be with Christ”—in the light of the rest of Scripture regarding what happens at death, thus concluding that the apostle is referring to two different points in time, so we must read the above Ellen White statement in light of the consensus of her own writings, as well as the Bible, which make clear the Christian’s imperfections and failures will be conquered prior to probation’s close. The

daily, continuous exercise of repentance must continue, according to the Ellen White statement in question, *both* till we overcome our imperfections and failures *and* till mortality is swallowed up by immortality. We know these are two different times because of the inspired consensus our study has reviewed.

Objection No. 24: Ellen White said she didn't expect others to be perfect, and that perfection only exists in the imagination of deluded church members.

Here are the statements which some have quoted to allege this point:

You may create an unreal world in your own mind and picture an ideal church where the temptations of Satan no longer prompt to evil, but perfection exists only in your imagination. The world is a fallen world, and the church is a place represented by a field in which grow tares and wheat. They are to grow together until the harvest (137).

I do not expect others to be perfect, and if I could not associate with my brothers and sisters who are not perfect, I do not know what I should do (138).

But neither of these statements, in context or on the surface, deny the Bible truth that individuals can perfectly obey God's law through God's power. Ellen White is simply saying that until the church is purified, tares and wheat will be seen growing together, and we cannot therefore expect the church to be perfect until this ultimate purification. Elsewhere she is clear when "the harvest" here described will take place—"the harvest is the end of probationary time" (139). When that time arrives, the shaking will have purified the church so that it is perfectly united (140), and fully prepared for the latter rain. And we have already seen, according to the same author, what the nature of this preparation must be:

Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble, must reflect the image of Jesus fully. . . . I saw that none could share the 'refreshing' unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action (141)

Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us, as the early rain fell on the disciples upon the day of Pentecost (142).

Are we seeking for His fullness, ever pressing toward the mark set before us—the perfection of His character? When the Lord's people reach this mark, they will be sealed in their foreheads. Filled with His Spirit, they will be complete in Christ, and the recording angel will declare, "It is finished" (143).

Objection No. 25: The doctrine of sinless perfection in this life leads to fanaticism.

This is comparable to those who blame the Bible for racism, on account of certain misguided professed Christians who have distorted Scripture and the Christian faith into supporting such ideologies (144). Or to those who blame the Adventist focus on end-time events for the teachings of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians. (Perhaps the best rejoinder I have heard to those who remind us that David Koresh came out of Adventism is, "Yes, and the devil came out of heaven.") But no straightforward reading of the Bible or Ellen White offers justification for racism or the monstrous absurdities held by Koresh and his followers, and no straightforward consideration of the Bible/Spirit of Prophecy doctrine of sinless perfection on earth will lead any sincere soul into extremes of faith or conduct.

If Scripture and Ellen White are the means whereby we establish the possibility of sinless obedience in this life, it follows that these sources will define for us what sinless obedience actually is. And if these writings warn us from the perils of fanaticism and extreme behaviors, as Ellen White so strongly does, one must conclude that Ellen White's definition of sinless perfection does not include the fanaticism into which some who hold this doctrine have unfortunately strayed. Contrary to popular myth, the problem with such persons is not "too much Ellen White," but not enough! If they would study and internalize the totality of her writings, fanaticism would be avoided. As I often

say when I preach on this subject, to talk of "Ellen White fanatics" is like talking about dry water. This is because if Ellen White's writings are consistently followed, fanaticism is impossible. And if fanaticism is being indulged, this can only happen through a disregard of Ellen White's clear teachings.

Ellen White is clear, as we have seen, that inspired vocabulary is to be defined by Inspiration itself (145), not by cultural taboos or peculiar personality traits. If Scripture and Ellen White declare sinless perfection to be achievable in this life through heaven's power, we must permit those writings to define what this behavior truly is. The various extreme behaviors which at times have soiled the reputation of this theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, have been birthed through a disregard of the inherent balance found in the writings of Inspiration. Such tendencies can only be viewed as the illegitimate children of this doctrine, since only through a disregard of the writings which bequeath this doctrine can such tendencies be nurtured and tolerated.

Objection No. 26: The doctrine of sinless perfection discourages people—in particular the young, who are usually more honest with themselves about their spiritual condition than others.

If this doctrine is presented the way inspired counsel presents it—as a liberating, inspiring hope made possible by continuous divine aid, devoid of the imbalance and extreme proclivities which Inspiration forbids—there is no reason it should discourage the truehearted among us. If it is presented in some other way, without consistent and positive reference to the divine power which makes such victory possible, discouragement is a very real possibility.

Ever should we remember, and preach to others, that we serve a God who is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). God wants us in heaven more earnestly than any of us wish to be there. So long as we truly wish to be rid of the sin in our lives, without exception, the grace and strength of God stands ready to make triumphant every encounter with temptation.

Sadly, discouragement is often the companion of a simple lack of faith in God's power to deliver. The ten unfaithful spies in Israel found themselves discouraged by the positive report of Caleb and Joshua that through God's power they were able to conquer the Canaanites. Ellen White offers the following sobering observation as to Israel's attitude at that time:

If only the two men had brought the evil report, and all the ten had encouraged them to possess the land in the name of the Lord, they would still have taken the advice of the two in preference to the ten, because of their wicked unbelief (146).

The Biblical account of this tragic event speaks of how Caleb assured Israel that through God's power they were “well able” to overcome their foes (Num. 13:30). “Their defense is departed from them,” this stalwart saint declared, “and the Lord is with us; fear them not” (Num. 14:9). And what was the response of God's professed people? “All the congregation bade stone them with stones” (verse 10). Are we wishing to do the same today, to those upholding God's power for complete victory over sin?

Supporters of the imperfectability doctrine should be asked, “When we hear the testimony of an ex-smoker, a recovering alcoholic, or a former pornography addict, who rejoice by the grace of God at having shunned these vices for years, does this discourage us? If not, why then should we be discouraged at the prospect of complete victory over more ‘mainstream’ sins, such as pride, gossip, impatience, overeating?” For the fully consecrated Christian whose heart is broken on the Rock Christ Jesus, there is no such rejoinder as, “I can't help but sin.” Such a one exclaims instead with the apostle Paul, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).

Objection No. 27: Perfection will be achieved as a corporate experience by the church as a body, not in the lives of individual believers.

This is truly one of the strangest of the anti-perfection theories to surface in modern Adventism. As if the unbeliever who encounters a church member who abuses his children, or deals dishonestly in business, can console himself that while the Christian he happened to meet wasn't perfect, the church as a corporate body somehow is! As one gospel song written some years ago says, "You're the only Jesus some will ever see; you're the only words of life some will ever read."

Both Scripture and Ellen White are clear that the perfection God seeks from His church, and the salvation thus resulting, are very much an individual matter:

And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure. . . .
Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous (I John 3:3,7).

All are personally exposed to the temptations that Christ overcame, but strength is provided for them in the all-powerful name of the great Conqueror. And all must, for themselves, individually overcome (147).

Salt must be mingled with the substance to which it is added; it must penetrate, infuse it, that it may be preserved. So it is through personal contact and association that men are reached by the saving power of the gospel. They are not saved as masses, but as individuals (148).

The work of preparation is an individual work. We are not saved in groups. The purity and devotion of one will not offset the want of these qualities in another. Though all nations are to pass in judgment before God, yet He will examine the case of each individual with as close and searching scrutiny as if there were not another being upon the earth. Everyone must be tested and found without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (149).

Objection No. 28: I've never met a sinless person.

When all else fails, this objection usually forms the linchpin of the anti-perfection argument. One rightly wonders, however, whether those making this claim would actually recognize a sinless person if they ever did meet one! Our sinless Lord, after all, was repeatedly accused of being devil-possessed (John 7:20; 8:48,52; 10:20). And of His followers He declared, "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household?" (Matt. 10:25).

A sobering fact of sacred history is that the holier people get, the less popular they get. Conviction may indeed be pressed home to sinful hearts by the godliness of the faithful, but no inspired assurance is offered that such conviction will be verbally acknowledged by a majority of mankind prior to Jesus' second coming (150). Revilement, not admiration, has been the consistent portion of the godly in every age. It is doubtful even the accusers of Daniel, who were constrained to acknowledge his faultlessness among themselves (Dan. 6:4), would have voiced such a candid admission to others.

Speaking of the holiness of Christ and its effect on His adversaries, Ellen White observes:

Though His every word and act breathed of divine compassion, His unlikeness to the world provoked the bitterest hostility. Because He would give no license for the exercise of the evil passions of our nature, He aroused the fiercest opposition and enmity (151).

The purity and holiness of the character of Christ stirred up the very worst passions of the human heart. . . . His perfect obedience to the commandments of God was a continual rebuke to a sensual and perverse generation. (152).

Moreover, the inspired pen is clear that some in every age have obtained, through God's imparted strength, the sinless obedience promised in God's Word:

Some few in every generation from Adam have resisted his (Satan's) every artifice and stood forth as noble representatives of what it was in the power of man to do and to be—Christ working with human efforts, helping man in overcoming the power of Satan. Enoch and Elijah are the correct representatives of what the race might be through faith in Jesus Christ if they chose to be. Satan was greatly disturbed because these noble holy men stood untainted amid the moral pollution surrounding them, perfected righteous characters, and were accounted worthy of translation to Heaven (153).

As was Enoch's, so must be their holiness of character who shall be redeemed from among men at the Lord's second coming (154).

The godly character of this prophet (Enoch) represents the state of holiness which shall be attained by those who shall be "redeemed from the earth" at the time of Christ's second advent. . . . But like Enoch, God's people will seek for purity of heart, and conformity to His will, until they shall reflect the likeness of Christ (155).

Joseph walked with God. He would not be persuaded to deviate from the path of righteousness and transgress God's law, by any inducement or threats (156).

Joseph had been tried by parental fondness and partiality; by the enmity, envy, and hatred of his brothers; by the esteem and confidence of his master; and by his high position of honor. He was tried by the seduction of woman's charms, by the flattery of her lips and her lawless love. But the steadfast virtue of Joseph would not permit him to listen to the voice of the tempter. The law of the Lord was his delight, and he would not depart from its precepts (157).

Joseph represented Christ. He stood for many years as the honored ruler of Egypt. In his life and character was manifested that which was lovely, and pure, and noble. In bearing his sorrows under trying circumstances and in enduring temptation, Joseph was one in character with Christ (158).

They (Daniel and his companions) realized that in order to stand as representatives of true religion amid the false religions of heathenism they must have clearness of intellect and must perfect a Christian character. And God Himself was their teacher. Constantly praying, conscientiously studying, keeping in touch with the Unseen, they walked with God as did Enoch (159).

Except the one perfect Pattern, there is not described in the Sacred Pages a single character more worthy of emulation than that of the prophet Daniel (160).

His (Paul's) words, his practices, his passions—all were brought under the control of the Spirit of God (161).

The sufficiency of the apostle (Paul) was not in himself, but in the gracious influence of the Spirit of Christ, which filled his soul, and brought every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ (162).

Paul attained to the full moral stature of a man in Christ Jesus (163).

And what does the modern prophet say about the duplication of Enoch's attainment in our time?

And there are Enochs in this our day (164).

When I hear the statement, "I've never met a sinless person," I am constrained not only to mourn the loss of faith on the part of so many in the power of Christ to "do all things" (Phil. 4:13); I am forced also to lament the eclipse in so many lives of that noble idealism that sees beyond obstacles to the long-sought triumph, that seeks the beauty of the possible beyond what is presumed to be inevitable. The words of Robert F. Kennedy still offer their challenge to the heart that dares to dream the impossible dream and fight the unbeatable foe: "Some men see things as they are and ask, Why? I dream of things that never were and ask, Why not?"

Let us review, one last time, representative evidence from both Scripture and Ellen White which promises this global demonstration in Christian lives of the righteousness of Christ and of Enoch:

The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid (Zeph. 3:13).

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

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? . . . Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless (II Peter 3:10-12,14).

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. . . . Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous (I John 3:2-3,7).

And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God (Rev. 14:5).

The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness (165).

The church, being endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depository, in which the wealth of His mercy, His love, His grace, is to appear in full and final display. . . . The gift of His Holy Spirit, rich, full, and abundant, is to be to His church as an encompassing wall of fire, which the powers of hell shall not prevail against. In their untainted purity and spotless perfection, Christ looks upon His people as the reward of all His suffering, His humiliation, and His love, and the supplement of His glory (166).

He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness. He desires them by practicing the principles of truth to show to the world that God's grace has power to sanctify the heart (167).

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own (168).

Those who claim they have “never met a sinless person” will in that day be constrained to acknowledge the presence of an entire generation in whose lives this glorious reality is unveiled before the universe.

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