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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONCEPT OF PERFECTIONISM AS TAUGHT
IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Washington, D. C.

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Department of Bible and Systematic Theology

by

F. W. Bieber

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For many years a difference of opinion has existed among Christians everywhere regarding the doctrine of Christian perfection. The Scriptures strongly exhort the Christian believers to aspire to perfection. One group of Christian believers maintains that this state, whatever this state might be, cannot be reached until the fires of purgatory have done their refining work in the individual. Another group maintains that this state cannot be reached until death parts the soul from the body. Still another group maintains that this state may be reached before death brings to a close the individual's pilgrimage in this world. Mrs. E. G. White presents much counsel and information regarding this important subject.

One wonders whether some of Mrs. E. G. White's Holiness and Puritanical contemporaries may have influenced her in her teaching. There is little doubt but that she wrote so much on this subject because of the strong exponents of this doctrine who lived just prior and during her lifetime.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to investigate the concept of Perfectionism as taught in the writings of Mrs. E. G. White.

What is Christian perfection and how can an individual attain to this state? What is the end result of the Gospel of Christ upon the life of the individual? How is it possible for an unregenerate man to arrive at a state of Christian perfection? Is Christian perfection to be understood as simply a state in which the sinner is covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness that covers sin and evil? Or is a process necessary whereby sin and evil are expelled and the sinner is cleansed and set free of his sins?

Does the individual have a part to play in the development of Christian perfection, or does God do it all for him? Is Christian perfection arrived at instantaneously or is it a process of growth and maturation?

The subject of Christian perfection is difficult to grasp because of the implications of the word perfection. It suggests absolute flawlessness and full and complete excellence. The believer reads the Biblical injunction of Christ where the believer is to be "perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Matthew 5:48. The possibility of reaching this state of Godly perfection leaves the believer standing aghast.

What relationship has Christian perfection to justification by faith, righteousness by faith, and imputed and imparted righteousness?

Importance of this study. Since this study deals with that phase of Christian doctrine which has to do with the "end result" of

the Gospel upon the lives of human beings, it is most important that the principles relating to the attainment of this end be properly understood. It is important to understand how the process of Christian maturation takes place which prepares the believer for that more abundant life in the here and now and the eternal life in the earth made new.

A clear understanding of this doctrine, as taught by Mrs. White, is especially important in view of the many Holiness and Pentecostal groups that have arisen and are making an impact upon the lives of many Christians.

Mrs. White counselled that the principles that have to do with Christian living and sanctification constitute a "science to be mastered."¹

II. SOURCES USED

The primary sources used in this study are the published writings of Mrs. E. G. White. Secondary sources are books written by well-known Seventh-day Adventist authors, as well as commentaries and books by non-Adventist authors which serve to cast light on the subject at hand.

Indexes used. Much of the study was done by using the Scriptural and Subject Index to the Writings of Mrs. Ellen G. White,

¹ 8 T 314

and the Periodical Index found in the office of the E. G. White Publications. The following words were used in locating references: perfection, character, obedience, holiness, righteousness, sanctification, Character of God, purity, and justification.

Key to abbreviations. The following abbreviations are used in referring to the books written by Mrs. E. G. White and periodicals from which quotations written by her were taken:

AA	<u>The Acts of the Apostles</u>
COL	<u>Christ's Object Lessons</u>
CT	<u>Counsels to Teachers, Parents, and Students</u>
DA	<u>The Desire of Ages</u>
ED	<u>Education</u>
GC	<u>The Great Controversy</u>
MB	<u>Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing</u>
MH	<u>Ministry of Healing</u>
PP	<u>The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets</u>
RH	<u>The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald</u>
SC	<u>Steps to Christ</u>
SL	<u>Sanctified Life</u>
ST	<u>Signs of the Times</u>
1-9 T	<u>Testimonies for the Church, I - IX</u>

CHAPTER II

DEFINITIONS

It is important that at the beginning of this study the meaning of certain key words be made clear. The words holiness, righteousness, grace, faith, and character will be defined rather briefly. In later chapters much space will be devoted to perfection, justification, and sanctification for these are the words with which this study especially had to do.

Holiness. Holiness suggests a state of spiritual wholeness. Mrs. White makes the following statements concerning holiness: "Holiness is wholeness for God; it is the entire surrender of heart and life to the indwelling of the principles of heaven."¹ "Holiness is constant agreement with God."² Holiness does not carry the meaning of absolute perfection and sinlessness.

A further statement will serve to define holiness for the purpose of this study:

. . . Holiness is not rapture; it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love.³

¹ DA 555.

² RH, May 16, 1907.

³ AA 51.

Righteousness. This word will be used often in this study in connection with the expressions, righteousness by faith, Christ's righteousness, and the robe of Christ's righteousness. Righteousness must be thought of in the highest possible sense of being right. Man may have a form of righteousness, but this compared to God's righteousness is described by the prophet Isaiah as "filthy rags." Isa. 64:6. Paul says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Rom. 3:10.

Mrs. E. G. White defines righteousness as follows: "Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God; . . . Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God."⁴ Thus righteousness is a quality or state which could only mean a holy life. The converse is equally true--a holy life would naturally mean a righteous life.

Righteousness connotes a strong "implication of freedom from guilt or blame; as applied to persons, it often implies justification, especially worthiness of salvation in the theological sense. . ."⁵ There are numerous scriptural references in which God's people are referred to as the "righteous." It is evident, then, that God's people are possessors of righteousness--as a gift.

Grace. In this one word lies a theological enigma which has puzzled Bible scholars throughout the centuries. Theologically, grace

⁴ MB 34.

⁵ "Moral," Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms (1st ed.), p. 557.

is understood to mean divine mercy given to undeserving man for the forgiveness of his sin and the spiritual assistance that God is anxious to give him for his regeneration or sanctification. The following quotation further clarifies the meaning of grace:

This is the grace of God in its peculiar New Testament sense. It is God's unlimited, all-inclusive, transforming love toward sinful men and women; and the good news of this grace, as revealed in Jesus Christ, is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). It is not merely God's mercy and willingness to forgive, but it is an active, energizing, transforming power to save.⁶

Thus grace is more than a passive love expressed only in words or thoughts of mercy toward fallen man, but rather it is a power freely given and supplied to man that will, if accepted, change and transform the life. The grace of God may be called the love of God, "love, not so much in a general sense as in a specific sense; not so much love merely as love, but love directionally. Grace is the love of God flowing--flowing not upward or outward, but downward."⁷ Man, because of his sin and willful alienation from God, deserves only God's wrath; but through grace he may become the recipient of love.

Mrs. E. G. White says, "Grace is an attribute of God exercised toward undeserving human beings."⁸ Grace embodies the entire plan of salvation. God gave His Son to die in man's stead. It is God's great desire that all should be saved. He extends His hand to the sinner

⁶ Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), p. 137.

⁷ Ibid., p. 138.

⁸ MH 161.

inviting him to be saved. He not only bids him to be saved, but He furnishes power to man in order that he may clasp His hand and be drawn from the pit of sin and despair. This act of God is indeed grace.

Faith. Faith is belief. Faith is trust and confidence. Faith is nothing tangible; it is simply believing God. Sight is nothing when there is no object to be seen; it only becomes valuable when there is an object to be seen. It is only as something is seen that one becomes aware of having sight. It is only as one believes something that one becomes aware of having faith. The virtue of sight lies not merely in seeing but rather in the object to be seen. So the virtue of faith lies not in merely believing but rather in the thing to be believed.

One writer says, "Your salvation comes, not because your faith saves you, but because it links you on to the Saviour who saves; and your believing is nothing but the link."⁹

Another writer puts it this way:

The exercise of faith is our part in the great transaction by which sinners are changed to saints. But we must remember there is no virtue in the faith we exercise "whereby salvation is merited." That is to say, there is no virtue in faith itself, nor in the act of exercising it. The virtue is all in Christ. He is the remedy provided for sin. Faith is the act by which the ruined,

⁹ H. W. S. The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life (Boston: Willard Tract Repository, 1875), p. 63.

helpless, doomed sinner lays hold of the remedy. . . .¹⁰

Mrs. E. G. White says, "Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power."¹¹

Thus, true faith is that simple belief in God's love, willingness, and ability to save, and permitting God to appropriate that power to the sinner that will bring a transformation of life.

Character. Webster says character is that "moral vigor or firmness, especially as acquired through self-discipline." Character is the intrinsic value of an individual. It is the very essence of life. Thus, a person of good character is thought of as one of good morals. A Christian character is one who has Christ dwelling within the heart.

Mrs. White says that "character is revealed not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts."¹²

It was not the intention to give a thorough exegesis of these words but rather a brief, concise definition which might aid in understanding that which will follow.

¹⁰ Arthur G. Daniells, Christ Our Righteousness (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), pp. 108-109.

¹¹ DA 347.

¹² SC 62.

CHAPTER III

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DEFINED

Christian perfection is a theological subject which in its various aspects and teachings suggests a freedom from sin and a reinstatement into that original relationship that Adam enjoyed with God.

In thinking of moral perfection some think of a condition upon which no further improvement can be made. This would be called absolute. In material things one may speak of a machine as being in perfect condition with relationship to its age and its wear and tear. And making allowance for what one could expect of a machine of that type, age, wear, etc., it is spoken of as being in perfect condition though compared to another it may be very imperfect; and thus, its perfection is relative in nature. Could not Christian perfection also be relative in its character?

Because of the many Holiness, Puritanical, and Pentecostal movements that have swept across America much confusion has arisen regarding the matter of Christian perfection. Some have regarded Christian perfection as a practical way of life necessary for the regenerate Christian. Some have held that it is possible for a Christian to enjoy instantaneous perfection at the time of the New Birth experience. Some have gloried in the belief of having a perfect life and smugly disregard any regard for the law of God and obedience to it.

Perhaps too narrow a view has been taken on this matter of

Christian perfection. To separate this doctrine from the entire system of Christian faith can bring only confusion and distortion. Is it possible to build a complete and sound doctrine of Christian faith upon this rather narrow terminology? May there not be other terms more suggestive which would tend to broaden the scope entailed in this doctrine?

This chapter is devoted to an attempt at clarifying the terminology of Christian perfection.

Absolute perfection. God is perfection. There is no weakness of character, no flaw, no evil within Him. In Him is found absolute righteousness. Perfection in the ultimate sense finds its expression in God. Can the Christian reach this absolute state of God's perfection? Is it possible for a Christian to reach a state of perfection beyond which there can be no advance? Mrs. White says, "even the most perfect Christian may increase continually in the knowledge and love of God."¹ And again, she says, "With our limited powers we are to be as holy in our sphere as God is holy in His sphere."² This cannot be absolute perfection and holiness.

In referring to the statement made by Jesus, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect," Mrs. White says, "As God is perfect in His high sphere of action, so man may be

¹ 1 T 340.

² ST, Dec. 26, 1892.

perfect in his human sphere [*italics my own*]."³ Thus at its best and highest sense perfection for mankind can never equal the perfection of God.

Men will never become God nor equal God for even Adam and Eve, who were created perfect in that they had not sinned, were not placed beyond the possibility of doing wrong. The absolute perfection of God cannot do wrong. Mrs. E. G. White says, "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."⁴

The difference between that perfection that man is to attain to and that which belongs to Divinity is further shown by this statement: "'Having taken human nature and in this nature having overcome the temptations of the enemy, and having divine perfection, to Him has been committed the judgment of the world.'--Manuscript 42, 1901."⁵

It is clear then, that Christian perfection cannot equal God's perfection.

Sinlessness. Is Christian perfection as defined in this chapter sinlessness? Christian perfection may or may not be sinlessness. (The purpose and objective of the doctrine is salvation from

³ CT 365. ⁴ 2 T 549.

⁵ Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, p. 686.

sin). Much depends upon a proper understanding of what is meant by sin. If sin is understood as only those volitional acts where improper motives were in operation, then certainly that person who participated in sin could not be thought of as having Christian perfection. However, if wrong doing, done unconsciously, without premeditation, and without improper motive, is also classified as sin, then one could assume that such a person could still be considered perfect. The following quotation suggests that mistakes are not to be regarded as sins in the life of a Christian: "'When we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, we shall have no relish for sin; for Christ will be working with us. We may make mistakes, but we will hate the sin that caused the sufferings of the Son of God.'--
Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, March 18, 1890."⁶

One can regard Eve's wandering away from Adam, which was contrary to the instruction received, a mistake; but had she not eaten the forbidden fruit, it would not have been classified as sin.

In considering Noah and his being called perfect (Gen. 6:9), the following comment is made:

. . . i. e. perfect in the sense not of sinlessness, but of moral integrity (Gesenius, Calvin). It describes "completeness of parts rather than of degrees in the renewed character" (Bush). "The just is the right in the law, the perfect is the tested

⁶ I. H. Evans, This is The Way (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1939), p. 167.

in holiness" (Murphy).⁷

This does not exclude that readjustment that is necessary for every sinner to make in his relationship to God both legally and morally which comes as a result of the work of Christ in behalf of man.⁸

Of Noah it was said that he was a "just" man. This "does not imply spotless innocence, but uprightness, honesty, virtue."⁹ He was also called the "perfect in his generations." This suggests moral integrity rather than a state of sinlessness.¹⁰

Jesus gave instruction, "Be ye therefore perfect," (Matt. 5:48) and Paul spoke of "them that are perfect," (1 Cor. 2:6) and "as many as be perfect" (Phil. 3:15). These instructions must not be regarded as complete sinlessness for Paul recognizes that there are ever new heights to be gained.¹¹

The Christian is expected to live according to the light and privileges given him. God will take into consideration the environment in which the Christian finds himself. However, "great blessings or privileges should never lull to security or carelessness. They

⁷ H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell (ed.), The Pulpit Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1950), Vol. I, p. 108 (on Genesis).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953), Vol. 1, p. 252.

¹⁰ Ibid. ¹¹ Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 341.

should never give license to sin or cause the recipients to feel that God will not be exact with them."¹²

Were Christian perfection to demand absolute sinlessness it would have to make man infallible in order to be saved; this cannot be. However, "Christ imputes His perfection and righteousness to the believing sinner when he does not continue in sin."¹³

Relative perfection. It has already been shown that Christian perfection cannot be absolute. If it is not absolute, it must be relative. Says one commentator: "As God is perfect in His relations to us, so we must be perfect in our relations to Him."¹⁴

As God is perfect in His relations to man as Creator, so man is to be perfect in his relations to God by giving perfect response through the created mental and physical powers. As God is perfect in His relation to man as King, man is to be perfect in his relation to Him as His subject. And as God is perfect in His relation to man as his Saviour, so man is to respond to God by perfect repentance, gratitude, and a life of obedient appreciation.

Conclusive evidence that Christian perfection must be considered relative is shown by the following quotations: "As God is

¹² PP 360.

¹³ RH, May 23, 1899.

¹⁴ H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell (ed.), The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 15, p. 270 (on Matt.).

perfect in His sphere, so man may be perfect in his sphere."¹⁵ And again, "He tells us to be perfect as He is,--in the same manner [*italics not in the original*]. We are to be centers of light and blessing to our little circle even as He is to the universe."¹⁶

Growth. Perfection is growth. A process of growth must take place in everything living, or death will result. Perfection cannot exist in living things unless there is growth. This is a law of life. Either there is growth and life, or there is a lack of growth and death. The following statement clarifys this:

The plant grows by receiving that which God has provided to sustain its life. It sends down its roots into the earth. It drinks in the sunshine, the dew, and the rain. It receives the life-giving properties from the air. So the Christian is to grow by co-operating with the divine agencies. Feeling our helplessness, we are to improve all the opportunities granted us to gain a fuller experience. As the plant takes root in the soil, so we are to take deep root in Christ. As the plant receives the sunshine, the dew, and the rain, we are to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit. . . . By constantly relying upon Christ as our personal Saviour, we shall grow up into Him in all things who is our head.¹⁷

The Christian, like the plant, will grow day by day; he, like the plant, has only one objective--to bear fruit. This growth of the Christian will continue while life lasts here in this world and "will reach its consummation in that higher and holier life to endure throughout eternity."¹⁸

¹⁵ 8 T 64.

¹⁶ MB 117.

¹⁷ COL 66-7.

¹⁸ MB 124.

Sanctification. Would the term sanctification better express that which is involved in the doctrine of Christian perfection?

Sanctification is defined as "Holiness of life and character."¹⁹

Christian perfection is defined as "another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus, everyone that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect. . . ." ²⁰ Righteousness is also defined as holiness.

One may conclude that if Christian perfection is holiness and holiness is sanctification, then sanctification is Christian perfection; or Christian perfection is sanctification.

In this study it was found that the terms, Christian perfection, holiness, righteousness, and sanctification are generally used quite synonymously in the writings of Mrs. E. G. White. All of these terms suggest a state or condition.

Progressive work. Christian perfection is a progressive work. The road to holiness is to be used for traveling and not for parking. There must ever be growth and progress toward that goal of Christlikeness. "At every stage of development," says Mrs. White, "our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement."²¹ And again she says, "The Scriptures plainly

¹⁹ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1945), p. 748.

²⁰ Evans, op. cit., p. 179.

²¹ COL 65

show that the work of sanctification is progressive."²²

It is, therefore, proper to refer to the doctrine of Christian perfection as Progressive Sanctification.

Since absolute Christian perfection can be found only in God, it is impossible for any of God's created beings to ever arrive at this state of absolute perfection. Human beings may, however, be perfect; but this must be considered a relative perfection.

Christian perfection may not necessarily mean that there can be no more sin in the life; it must, however, mean that there should be growth which will mean less and less sin. What may not be considered sin in the newly converted Christian would most certainly be considered sin if it were not overcome.

Christian perfection is growth. Christian perfection is the process of growing toward and reaching spiritual maturity. Christian perfection is progressive, and thus it is progressive sanctification. In this study Christian perfection was thought of as such.

²² GC 470.

CHAPTER 1V

CHRISTIAN MATURATION--CHRISTLIKENESS

THE CHRISTIAN'S GOAL

The real import of the doctrine of Christian perfection is growth--growth toward full maturation. The implications of the doctrine of Christian perfection are that of a maturation process which the Christian must experience. In the Christian pathway there ever remain new goals to be reached, new heights to attain, new vistas to discover, and new victories to be won.

The apostle Paul expressed his wish to his ministering brethren, "that we may present every man perfect in Christ." Col. 1:28. This must be the aim for the minister, but it must also be the aim for every Christian. When the new life in Christ is begun, there is to be growth and progress which will ever remain the Christian's sole aim and desire. A greater love for the good, pure, and holy must be the Christian's constant objective. A mediocre experience can never satisfy the Christian; his goal must be perfection--growth. The following quotation clarifies this:

The ideal of Christian character is Christlikeness. There is opened before us a path of constant advancement. We have an object to gain, a standard to reach that includes everything good and pure and noble and elevated. There should be continual striving and constant progress onward and upward toward perfection of character.¹

¹ 8 T 64.

There are no limitations for the advancement of the Christian, for "higher than the human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness--godlikeness--is the goal to be reached."² It is the Christian's privilege to aim at overcoming all sin, for as the Christian develops more and more faith, he may through the grace supplied by God be kept from transgression.

Man must be aiming to be saved from sin for the objective of Christian maturation cannot mean that he is to be saved in sin. Temptation may be a great boon to the Christian because it is through temptation that the Christian's character is developed and perfected. The Christian, through Christ, may have the assurance that the temptations will not be greater than he can bear.

While the Christian may be considered perfect at each stage of Christian growth and development, he may yet ever aim to progress and increase. It would be quite impossible for a Christian to hold his original Christian experience without ever aiming for further increase in every virtue and to constantly become more like the Divine pattern. The following quotation is a challenge to the Christian: ". . . the refusal to grow is a greater sin than immaturity itself and is the outcome of self-satisfaction and low ideals [*italics my own*]."³

² ED 18.

³ The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, p. 1024.

The greatest promise of all Scripture is victory. The entire plan of salvation is an assurance of complete victory. God's intentions for the Christian are not to give him only partial victory and deliverance from the bondage of sin, but rather, complete victory. Jesus came to save fully and completely from the power of sin, and it must be the constant aim of the Christian to share in this experience. Mrs. White makes the following statement in this connection:

None need fail of attaining, in his sphere, to perfection of Christian character. By the sacrifice of Christ, provision has been made for the believer to receive all things that pertain to life and godliness. God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ's character. In His humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance of evil, the Saviour showed that through co-operation with Divinity, human beings may in this life attain to perfection of character. This is God's assurance to us that we too may obtain complete victory [*italics not in the original*].⁴

The Christian cannot "barely" gain entrance into the kingdom of God. He will either have an "abundant" entrance or none at all. After conversion, "the Christian life has just begun. Now he is to 'go on unto perfection;' to grow up 'unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'"⁵ This should be the Christian's constant aim for he has the promise that through Christ's righteousness, which has been imputed and is being imparted, he can stand perfect without spot or wrinkle; nothing short of this must be the Christian's goal.

⁴ AA 531.

⁵ GC 470.

CHAPTER V

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

In considering the doctrine of Christian perfection--progressive sanctification--it is important that the doctrine of justification by faith is understood in its relationship to sanctification. Justification by faith has to do with the very foundation of Christian perfection. It is the groundwork upon which sanctification builds. Justification has to do with the regenerating experience that must come to an individual as he is born again.

Regeneration. A sinner becomes convicted, by the Holy Spirit, of his sins and is led to repentance. He accepts Christ by faith and asks for forgiveness of his sins and expresses his longing for a new heart. This experience constitutes, in brief, regeneration--more commonly known as the new birth.

The experience of regeneration changes the sinner from a life of sin and evil to that of a new creation. A union is formed between the individual and Christ. A cleansing work wrought by a supernatural power takes place in the heart. The grace of Christ works from within and changes the individual from sin to a life of holiness.

The new birth brings a complete change in the individual. Before this new birth took place the individual was spiritually dead; now he is alive. Before the new birth took place he had no desire to

be clean; now there wells up within himself a great desire to be clean. The individual has caught a glimpse of his own state of unrighteousness, and there comes a great desire to him to be righteous. All of this is as a result of divine grace working upon the heart.

Justification by faith. Justification simply means "being accepted by or made acceptable to God, as righteous or worthy of salvation."¹ Faith is to accept the promises of God with utmost confidence and trust. To be justified suggests a power other than the individual's own power working within him and for him. Justification is the act of God whereby He forgives and accepts the sinner into a father and son relationship. The cloak of Christ's righteousness is placed over the individual so that the individual, guilty as he may have been, is now accounted righteous. His past sins are all forgiven; he is thoroughly cleansed, and he stands innocent of ever having sinned. This individual who was once so unrighteous is now declared righteous for in place of his former guilt and transgression there now has been placed the righteousness of Christ. This justification comes to the individual as he opens his heart and by faith believes it to be so. Mrs. White makes the following statement regarding this experience:

. . . The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes

¹ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 458.

to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account. Christ's righteousness is accepted in place of man's failure; and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son. . . .²

Imputed righteousness. Since this righteousness was not inherent in the individual and therefore he had no righteousness of his own to offer and no way of getting it by his own efforts, the righteousness which he now possesses had to come from another source. Thus, the righteousness with which the individual was justified was imputed to him. This, then, gave the converted individual a right, a title, to the kingdom of God. Notice the following quotation:

. . . The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.³

This experience may have taken place in a very short period of time. It came to the individual as a result of his accepting it by faith and his permitting the grace of God to do its work on the unregenerated heart.

At this point of the individual's Christian experience he is considered perfect in God's sight. All of his past sins are forgiven; he is covered with the spotless robe of Christ's righteousness. He has a perfect record in heaven. He has a perfect beginning on the

² RH, November 4, 1890.

³ RH, June 4, 1895.

Christian pathway for it is "through the merits of Christ, through His righteousness, which by faith is imputed to us, we are to attain the perfection of Christian character."⁴

Now the individual is in possession of the title that entitles him to a place in the kingdom of God. He now stands as a newborn babe in Christ. Were his life on earth to cease at this point, he would have a perfect right to eternal life.

The new birth has brought the heart into union, into harmony with God. The individual has passed from death unto life in Christ. No more is the individual an alien; he is now a son of God with all the privileges of sonship. He stands clean and pure in the robe of Christ's righteousness which was imputed to him because of the faith that linked him to omnipotence.

⁴ 5 T 744.

CHAPTER VI

PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

When the individual accepts Jesus, he is justified; Christ's righteousness is imputed to him. Man stands before God as innocent, pure, and perfect as though he had never sinned. He is a newborn spiritual babe. However, he is not to remain a babe. A baby in his infancy may be beautiful, good, and everything his mother wants him to be; but what a tragedy if he were to remain in this condition. Justification by faith was the newborn babe's first breath. If he is to continue to live, he must continue to breathe; and this continuation is sanctification.

As the sinner accepted Christ's righteousness by faith, so he is now to walk in newness of life by faith. Only those who "follow on and experience Him as an indwelling power, and who continually appropriate His grace for victory over their sinful natures, are sanctified or perfected."¹

Imparted righteousness. Justification is imputed righteousness; sanctification is imparted righteousness. That righteousness which was first reckoned to man in a moment of time is now to be imparted to him throughout his lifetime. That life which was born in faith is now to grow in faith. That obedience that was imputed to

¹ Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, p. 387.

man is now to continue. The newly born Christian is now to enjoy such close fellowship with the indwelling Christ that Christ will become a part of his nature. The righteousness by which man was justified was imputed, and the righteousness by which he is sanctified is imparted. The first is his title to heaven, and the latter is his fitness for heaven.²

There is now to take place in the life of the newly born Christian, through the power of Christ, a "fitness" process which not only entitles him to live in heaven but to be made a fit individual to do so.

Continuous justification. Sanctification is continuous justification. That which was done for the individual in the beginning must continue throughout his lifetime; for "as he obtained righteousness through faith, so now he retains that gift, and henceforth leads a holy life by faith. In some scriptures this is called sanctification."³

"Sanctification," says Mrs. E. G. White, "is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime."⁴ As long as life continues, the process of sanctification continues. There is no stopping place in the development of the Christian. There is no place to which he can come where he can rest and feel satisfied that he has attained.

² RH, June 4, 1895.

³ I. H. Evans, This Is The Way, p. 134.

⁴ AA 560.

Sanctification is that daily experience that carries the Christian ever onward and upward. It is not an instantaneous experience.⁵

Gradual maturation process. Sanctification is a gradual work and is best compared to the growth and development of a plant. It is described in the following quotation:

The germination of the seed represents the beginning of spiritual life, and the development of the plant is a beautiful figure of Christian growth. As in nature, so in grace; there can be no life without growth. The plant must either grow or die. As its growth is silent and imperceptible, but continuous, so is the development of the Christian life. At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is to be fulfilled, there will be continual advancement. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. As our opportunities multiply, our experience will enlarge, and our knowledge increase. We shall become strong to bear responsibility, and our maturity will be in proportion to our privileges.⁶

Thus, it is that the Christian must grow and develop and mature. There must be no standing still in his experience, and yet each day may find him perfect. The apple in June may be a perfect apple for June but far from maturity. In July it may be a perfect apple for a July apple but still not mature. When October comes, the apple is mature. It has now fulfilled the purpose of its growth and development. Suppose, however, that the June apple were content to remain a June apple even in October. That would not be perfection but imperfection.

A young fruit-bearing apple tree may grow but little fruit in

⁵ SL 9.

⁶ COL 65-6.

its first productive year, but even in the first year the fruit will be apples--not figs or dates. The tree has fulfilled its purpose for its first year of productivity. The next year it will produce more fruit--and the same kind; it does so because it is an apple tree. This is true of the Christian; it is not expected that he produce as much fruit in his spiritual infancy as a Christian who has been growing many years. But whether in his infancy or in later years, the fruit he produces must be the same--good fruit. It is impossible for a good tree to bring forth bad fruit. The Christian who has the righteousness of Christ dwelling within can't bring forth evil fruit.

Although there are distinct stages in the growth of a plant, yet this is so gradual that the stages are not discerned. But day by day one sees evidences of growth. Thus, it is with the Christian. As to when the Christian reaches full Christian maturity, God only can judge for growth and development will take place even in spiritual maturity.

That that which is perfect may yet grow and develop is well illustrated by the life of Jesus of whom it was said, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Luke 2:52. As Christ increased, so must all spiritual life regardless of its beginning perfection.

The true Christian can never be content with his progress; he will ever be restless in his search for more truth and ever striving to live up to it. He must press forward and upward.

Growth is natural for all life. Growth needs not to be forced; it needs only to be fostered. Growth is enjoyable. The Christian finds joy in growing. It may require pruning, self-denial, and trials; but it should still be counted as a part of an enjoyable experience of Christian maturation. Mrs. White says, "It is the privilege of every Christian to grow up until he shall reach the full stature of a man in Christ Jesus."⁷

Character is developed by taking one step at a time. When an infant takes his first few toddling steps, it would indeed become very discouraging to him if he looked into the future and tried to grasp the meaning of the thousands of steps he would be taking and the path over which these would lead. But the infant considers only one step at a time and is happy when he has negotiated one step successfully. The following quotation is of interest in this connection:

The Captain of our salvation leads his people on step by step, purifying and fitting them for translation, and leaving in the rear those who are disposed to draw off from the body, who are not willing to be led, and are satisfied with their own righteousness. . . .⁸

The apostle Peter, in his long and interesting walk on the pathway of Christian development, represents the process of Christian maturation (2 Peter 1:5-7) as a process of addition. Mrs. White calls this "the ladder of Christian perfection":

. . . The apostle presents before the believers the ladder of

⁷ 5 T 309. ⁸ 1 T 333.

Christian perfection, every step of which represents continual advancement in the knowledge of God, and in the climbing of which there is no standstill. Faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity are the rounds of the ladder. We are saved by climbing round after round, mounting step after step, to the height of Christ's ideal for us. Thus he is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.⁹

The rounds of this ladder of Christian maturation are negotiated step by step. However, all of these Christian graces are to be developed simultaneously and this ladder does not suggest the development of Christian perfection by degrees.¹⁰

To the Christian has been given the assurance that he may climb this ladder that reaches from earth to heaven until at last he reaches the top and has the privilege to step into the kingdom of God.¹¹

It is further suggested that Christian perfection is developed the same way as a brick layer lays bricks. Brick by brick is placed until a building or monument stands complete.¹² Every brick as it is laid leaves that much of the construction perfect as far as it has gone though the building may be far from complete. It should be emphasized, however, that normal development in the building must continue and the building must be seen through to its completion. If work ceases on the incomplete structure and work is not resumed, that

⁹ RH, September 19, 1912.

¹⁰ RH, July 29, 1890.

¹¹ RH, June 29, 1905.

¹² CT 537.

which was at its proper time and place perfect will only become a monument to imperfection. Reasonable delay in completing the building may be caused by weather condition, sickness, etc. Like the building being built the Christian is to develop and his maturity "will be in proportion to our privilege."¹³ Trials, fierce temptations, burdens, prosperity, etc., may slow up the process of Christian maturation; but God takes this into account.

Thus, as justification--new birth, is perfection, so is sanctification perfection. As the birth of a Christian is a perfect experience and renders a perfect beginning, so the growth of a Christian is a perfect experience and renders a perfect continuation. Christian perfection is determined by the sincerity of its beginning and the soundness of its progress. Christian perfection lies in going in the right direction. The following quotation emphasizes this:

No Christian can even hold his first experience without trying to increase in every virtue and to become more like our perfect Pattern. We are instructed: "Through faith in His blood, all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus. Thank God that we are not dealing with impossibilities. We may claim sanctification. We may enjoy the favor of God. . . ."--Ellen G. White, in General Conference Bulletin, April 23, 1901.¹⁴

Should this growth experience be briefly interrupted by a mistake, the interruption need not retard the growth process for as soon as the Christian recognizes his mistake he asks for forgiveness; and his faith in Christ will restore him immediately to a state of per-

¹³ COL 66.

¹⁴ Evans, op. cit., p. 174.

fection such as he enjoyed under the original regeneration. The Christian is a son of God, and God is anxious not to condemn but to help; and the same power which forgave him originally is still willing and anxious to forgive. Thus sanctification, Christian perfection, is not lost by a sin or mistake if it is immediately repented of.

It is the privilege of every follower of Christ to look forward to an unending life of growth and development. Not only will he grow while life lasts here, but "the efforts begun upon earth will continue through eternity."¹⁵ And in this maturation process the Christian has the privilege to know that at each stage--each moment--he is considered perfect by heaven for he is in continual possession of the perfect righteousness of Christ with which he was clothed when he was first justified by faith.

¹⁵ 4 T 520.

CHAPTER VII

OBEDIENCE, SIGN OF DISCIPLESHIP

It has already been determined that Christian perfection is progressive sanctification and that it involves Christian maturation in a gradual growth process. What, then, is to be the result of this growth? How is Christian maturity to reveal itself? How is Christian perfection to be discerned in the life?

Perfection involves striving to arrive at the highest possible standard of Christian manhood. To be perfect on earth suggests lacking nothing of what is needful to gain eternal life.

It has always been and always will be God's purpose that mankind be righteous. There must not be a make-believe, passive experience in the life of a Christian but a genuine, active experience which appropriates the righteousness of Christ into a fruitful experience of obedience and right doing. This must become evident in a Christian who is sanctified. Regeneration and justification give no license to resume a life of disobedience and a life of transgression. Grace would be of no avail if disobedience and a life of transgression were to be the result of justification by faith.

Exact obedience required. Christian perfection must be that which realizes the divine purpose for which man was created and for which all life exists--to the glory and honor of God in a happy and

joyous response to His requirements. "Bible sanctification," says Mrs. White, "will lead its possessors to know the requirements of God and to obey them."¹

Through the experience of Moses comes a warning to every Christian that God does not wink at disobedience for "God shut Moses out of Canaan to teach a lesson which should never be forgotten,-- that He requires exact obedience. . . ." ² Perfect obedience is necessary if the Christian is to take part in the reward promised to the righteous.

It is the Christian's constant desire to be loyal and obedient to the one who freely forgave and cleansed him. The Christian can have no other desire within him if the righteousness of Christ dwells within him. It is Christ living within that asks the Christian to be wholeheartedly for Him.

The same faith that justified in the beginning of the Christian's experience also brings forth fruits of obedience in sanctification. The whole purpose of justification, in the first place, is that a noble, fruitful, obedient, life be lived here on earth in preparation for a place in the new earth.

The Christian is admonished that "he only serves who acts up to the highest standard of obedience."³ This could well be paraphrased

¹ RH, February 8, 1898.

² PP 479.

³ COL 283.

to read, "he only grows who acts up to the highest standard of obedience [grows was inserted in place of serves in the original]." Growth in natural life cannot be possible without obedience to the laws of nature. Growth in the spiritual life cannot be possible without conformity to the laws of God.

Law of God to be kept. God's law is unchangeable. Had it been possible to alter the law of God, Christ's sacrifice would have been unnecessary. Adam and Eve were not excused from their transgression of the law of God; and God hasn't excused anyone since, nor will He now excuse anyone who transgresses.⁴ The following quotation is given regarding the necessity of keeping the law of God:

The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been,--just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents,--perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any condition short of this, then the happiness of the whole universe would be imperiled. The way would be open for sin, with all its train of woe and misery, to be immortalized.⁵

No Christian can smugly disregard the law of God in the belief that since he was justified by faith it is no longer necessary to comply with God's requirements. Since God is willing and able to give strength to the Christian to make possible a complete act of obedience, man would be all the more guilty for not keeping the law. God has

⁴ Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, p. 675.

⁵ SC 67.

promised to write His laws upon the hearts of His followers. Hebrews 10:16. And "if the law is written in the heart, will it not shape the life? Obedience--the service and allegiance of love--is the true sign of discipleship."⁶

The conditions for gaining eternal life today are just what they have been in the past,--"perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness."⁷ Eternal life could not be granted on any less requirement now than it was when the world was created in its original perfection.

Sanctification is possible through faith in Christ and obedience to the law, and thus the Christian may "obtain a fitness for the society of holy angels and the white-robed redeemed ones in the kingdom of glory."⁸ Since the law of God is a transcript of the character of God and the Christian is admonished to pattern his life after God's character, it is important that the law become a part of the life of the Christian. The keeping of the law of God is proof of the Christian's faith in Christ. Faith does not release men from obedience. Mrs. White says, "The so-called faith in Christ which professes to release men from the obligation of obedience to God is not faith, but presumption."⁹

⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

⁸ RH, April 26, 1881.

⁹ SC 66.

Christian perfection is entire conformity to God's law and perfect obedience to all His precepts. The law is not opposed to grace as some maintain. It is only when man looks to the law as the means for salvation that it conflicts with grace, for the law is designed to reveal sin; grace is designed to save from sin.¹⁰ Thus, disobedience of the law is a denial to grace itself which has no other purpose than to save from sin and transgression.

It is, however, a grave error to suppose that the keeping of the law will provide merit for the Christian in order that he might be saved. There is no merit save the merit which Christ possesses and offers to God in man's behalf. The Christian cannot be saved because he keeps God's law, but he will not be saved if he does not keep it. The Christian does not keep God's law in order to be saved, but rather because Christ died for him and he loves Him so much that he couldn't think of displeasing Him by not keeping it.

In love the commandments find their fulfillment. If the heart is filled with the perfect love toward God and man, how could the Christian wilfully transgress against his fellow man or against God? Love is the means by which Christian maturation takes place. There must be a disciplined life, sustained by the power of God, which seeks to uphold the standards of God and which seeks to live up to the requirements of God that, as John Wesley believed, "are themselves con-

¹⁰ Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, p. 144.

stantly progressing."¹¹

Thus, the love of God dwelling in the heart of a Christian will bring about an ever increasing desire to please God and mankind. Righteousness will become more and more desirable as the Christian matures. As the maturation process continues, the Christian can't conceive how it would be desirable to continue to disobey and break the law of God.

As the rain and dew descend from above to supply the plant with the strength to survive the heat of the day, so the Holy Spirit descends from above to supply strength and a desire to the Christian to keep God's law. Those who dare call themselves Christian will not disregard the keeping of the law of God as the following quotation points out:

. . . This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom. The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law; and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. . . .¹²

And again Mrs. White says, "If you fail of gaining eternal life, it will be because you have failed to keep the commandments of God."¹³ Thus it is clear that the ten-commandment law will be the standard by which Christian perfection will be determined.

¹¹ John L. Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism (New York: Abingdon Press), p. 65.

¹² COL 315.

¹³ RH, July 13, 1905.

Obedience is not a drudgery to a Christian. The thought of a religion of legality is far from the Christian's mind. He serves and obeys gladly because of his great love for his Master and with the psalmist he exclaims, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart." Psalms 40:8.

There can be no genuine sanctification without willing obedience, and the sanctified heart will find it ever more enjoyable to walk in complete harmony with all of God's requirements.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION POSSIBLE ONLY

THROUGH DIVINE AID

It is a step of faith that brings the individual his first experience of justification which leaves him forgiven, clean, and pure--covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness. To maintain this experience there must be a gradual transformation of life as the individual now is not only covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness, but he actually becomes a partaker of this righteousness. By a step of faith the individual places himself into the hands of the divine Potter, and by a gradual process of shaping and molding he becomes a fit vessel.

Held out to every Christian is the possibility of being like Christ, but it is utterly impossible for the Christian to accomplish this by and for himself. If man is to gain entrance into the Kingdom of God, he is to be righteous; but he has no righteousness of his own to offer. Man does not have the power to take even the first step--repentance. Mrs. White says, "Man cannot even repent unless the Holy Spirit works upon his heart."¹

God has, however, made ample provision for man to become like Him; and He is anxious to do this for the individual if He is permitted to do so. The individual must realize that if he is ever to be fitted

¹ 8 T 64.

for eternal life, he must have a power other than his own to fit him, and to effect a genuine reform in his life.

All the agencies of heaven are set in operation to help the Christian. Notice this statement:

The heavenly intelligences will work with the human agent who seeks with determined faith that perfection of character which will reach out to perfection in action. To every one engaged in this work Christ says, I am at your right hand to help you.²

Divine help is pledged for the Christian's growth and progress. When the believer takes his baptismal vow, God, the Father, and Jesus, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are anxious and ready to work for him. Thus, heaven's perfection is provided to accomplish for the individual his perfection. Even though man has experienced justification, he is still very much human; his judgments are weak; his knowledge is limited; and thus his actions may be faulty. To help him grow and develop, the resources of heaven are at his command.

Life is to be different after justification, and the experience of sanctification is to draw the Christian into ever closer union and fellowship with Christ.

Union with Christ. With the apostle Paul man is led to declare, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself

² COL 332.

for me." Galations 2:20. The supreme gift from God to man is Christ. What a high honor is bestowed upon man in that he has the privilege to link his human weakness to the strength of omnipotence. Without being thus linked with Christ, the condition of the justified man becomes similar to that of the man from whom the unclean spirit had gone (Matthew 12:43-46). Because the empty heart was not filled with divine power, his last condition became worse than his original state. Concerning this parable, Mrs. White wrote the following:

When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world; and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. . . . Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. . . .³

Thus, the only remedy for sin is union with Christ, for through this union spiritual power is given to the Christian. Through this union the perfection of Christ is appropriated to the Christian. Men through faith may possess the same qualities and powers that Jesus possessed, for the promise is that "His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was."⁴

³ DA 323-4.

⁴ Ibid., 664.

Christ linked with the Christian in this union will transform the heart of the believer. The worldly minded will become heavenly minded. The criminal becomes upright and honest. Note the following quotation:

This sanctification we must all experience, else we can never gain eternal life. It is obtained by a union with Christ, a union which no power of Satan can break.

.....

His wisdom gives us spiritual life and enables us to manifest love to God and to one another. We reveal his grace in our characters; for we have his life. He presents us spotless before His Father; for we are sanctified through His blood. We are purged from dead works; for Jesus takes possession of the sanctified soul to renew, sustain, and guide all its impulses, and give vitality to its purposes. Thus we become temples for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁵

Man is to become a partaker of divine nature. This union with Christ leads the Christian to actually partake of divine nature. Just as truly as food taken into the physical body becomes a part of the physical being, just as truly divine nature may become a part of every soul who by faith desires it. To enjoy Christian perfection means partaking of divine perfection. The Christian has the assurance that "every sincere and earnest seeker will become a partaker of divine nature."⁶ Not only does Jesus pardon the repentant sinner, but He will restore him to the perfection that Adam had before he sinned. The indwelling Christ will assure victory over sin even in this life.

⁵ RH, July 25, 1899.

⁶ 5 T 105.

Jesus, Himself, took fallen nature and demonstrated to humanity what it might become if it laid hold upon the same power that He used to lead a perfect life. By becoming a partaker of divine nature, the Christian too may live a life of perfection.

By partaking of divine nature, the righteousness of Christ which was first imputed to the believer now becomes a part of him; it becomes a living experience, producing a complete change in the individual. The following statement shows the very essence of Christianity:

"The sum and substance of the whole matter of Christian grace and experience is contained in believing on Christ, in knowing God and His Son whom He hath sent." "Religion means the abiding of Christ in the heart; and where He is, the soul goes on in spiritual activity, ever growing in grace, ever going on to perfection."--Review and Herald, May 24, 1892.⁷

As men become partakers of divine nature, they are brought into harmony with divine principles of Christian conduct. The believer is unconsciously changed day by day "from our own ways and will into the ways and will of Christ, into the loveliness of His character. Thus we grow up into Christ and unconsciously reflect His image."⁸

The power of divine grace transforms. One of the divine qualities that comes to the individual by being a partaker of the divine

⁷ Arthur G. Daniells, Christ Our Righteousness, p. 74.

⁸ RH, January 2, 1913.

is grace. It was found that grace is not merely mercy and God's willingness to forgive; but "it is an active, energizing, transforming power to save."⁹ This power is imparted to the Christian. The Christian need not despair for "moral and spiritual perfection, through the grace and power of Christ, is promised to all. Jesus is the source of power, the fountain of life."¹⁰ The grace of Christ will do for the believer that which he can never hope to do for himself. The power of divine grace will transform and sanctify the believer.

In the following statement Mrs. White compares the working of the grace of God upon the heart to that of the working of leaven on the lump of dough:

As the leaven, when mingled with the meal, works from within outward, so it is by the renewing of the heart that the grace of God works to transform the life. No mere external change is sufficient to bring us into harmony with God. There are many who try to reform by correcting this or that bad habit, and they hope in this way to become Christians; but they are beginning in the wrong place. Our first work is with the heart.¹¹

To seek for purity of heart and life independently of the grace of Christ is to seek in vain. The heart is daily to be cleansed and renewed by divine grace. The grace of Christ has not only made ample provision for the perfecting of God's people, but it actually furnishes the necessary power. Not only is it the vehicle for salvation, but it is the power for locomotion.

⁹ Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, p. 137.

¹⁰ AA 478.

¹¹ COL 97.

The Holy Spirit is the Christian's sanctifier. Christ's personal representative on earth is the Holy Spirit. It is He that will "make you perfect in every good work to do His will. . ." Hebrews 13:21. To all who accept Jesus, the Holy Spirit will come as a "counselor, sanctifier, guide, and witness."¹² The Holy Spirit will guide the Christian in his spiritual growth and maturation. It is through the Holy Spirit that finite man can have access to the throne of the Infinite and partake of Infinite power. The Holy Spirit was given in all its fullness and power to Jesus, and man also may be a partaker of this power.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to implant the nature of Christ in the life of the Christian. It is His work to recreate the life of the individual and restore him to Edenic perfection. It is the Christian's privilege to be molded by the Holy Spirit into a character that will reflect the divine character of God.

The following statement shows how the Holy Spirit aids in the process of Christian maturation:

. . . As the dew and the rain are given first to cause the seed to germinate, and then to ripen the harvest, so the Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth. The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ.¹³

Thus, the maturation process of the Christian is the Holy

¹² AA 49.

¹³ RH, March 2, 1897.

Spirit's special interest. It is His work to foster the Christian's growth from one stage of perfection to another. To help the Christian develop perfection of character is His work. It is important that the Christian be willing to be used of the Spirit and not the Spirit to be used by the Christian. To think that a poor mortal man can have a member of Deity live within his heart should leave the Christian standing in awe at the great love of God that has made this possible.

Divine love sanctifies the Christian. Another of the great powers that has been made available is that inexplorable force of divine love which transforms the Christian. It is the Christian's great pleasure to be bathed in the very atmosphere of God's love. The Christian lives and moves in the sphere of the love of God. "True sanctification," says Mrs. White, "comes through the working out of the principle of love."¹⁴ She says further: "In every true disciple, this love, like sacred fire, burns on the altar of the heart [italics not in the original] ."¹⁵ It is as the Christian contemplates the love of God for undeserving mankind that there is awakened in him a love for God and his fellow man. As the Christian beholds the love of God, his "stubborn heart is melted and subdued, and the sinner is transformed and becomes a child of heaven."¹⁶

Mrs. White refers to love as the "golden oil of love,"¹⁷

¹⁴ AA 560.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 334.

¹⁶ MB 116-17.

¹⁷ COL 419.

which flows freely into the hearts of the believers. And again, "like rays of light from the sun, love and light and joy flow out from Him to all His creatures. It is His nature to give. His very life is the outflow of unselfish love."¹⁸

All of nature is an outflow of unselfish love as it exists to bless mankind. As man endeavors to comprehend these blessings from the hand of God, his heart responds in love toward God; and there is wrought within his heart a great transformation of character. None can withstand the love of God. Love will melt the hardest heart; it will transform the sinner; it will perfect the life--if permitted to do so.

Thus, all heaven is concerned with the perfecting of God's people. Nothing was left undone that heaven could do to perfect a people fit for eternal life. Satan was anxious that the value of the sacrifice of Christ be minimized so he influenced man to believe that he could work out his own salvation, and this man has endeavored to do since sin came into the world and Adam and Eve sewed leaves together for garments to cover themselves. However, it is God's part to do the work and man's part to trust. God is anxious to work for mankind and to bring about a transformation of character within him. Through Jesus God linked humanity with divinity. Man has the privilege to actually be a partaker of divine nature. As man thus partakes of the

¹⁸ MB 117.

divine nature with the aid of all the divine agencies, he gradually matures into full Christian maturity. To reach maturity without complete union with Christ is impossible. Union with Christ is a reality, and by faith this must be accepted by the believer.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHRISTIAN'S PART IN THE PROCESS OF MATURATION

It has been pointed out that it is impossible for the Christian to earn his salvation. Works as a means to salvation have no part in the maturation process. Works as a fruitage of salvation do have a part in the life of a Christian; however, works are a result of Christian growth and not a means of it. The Christian has no inherent righteousness; thus he has none to cultivate. Christ has provided the Christian with righteousness; this righteousness must produce fruit. A good fruit tree must bring forth good fruit or it ceases to be a good fruit tree. Thus it is with the Christian.

Does this, then, suggest a passive acceptance of Christ and His righteousness, a rocking chair complacency of unconcern, and an attitude of irresponsibility with regard to living a Christian life and maturing into a fullfledged Christian? The answer to this question is emphatically, "no." The Spirit of Prophecy does not so teach for Mrs. White says: "What we make of ourselves in probationary time, that we must remain to all eternity [*italics not in the original*]." ¹ The Christian does have a part to play in character development. He must make something of himself. Notice the following statement:

. . . The mental and moral powers which God has given us do

¹ 5 T 466.

not constitute character. They are talents, which we are able to improve, and which, if properly improved, will form a right character. A man may have precious seed in his hand, but that seed is not an orchard. The seed must be planted before it can become a tree. The mind is the garden; the character is the fruit. God has given us our faculties to cultivate and develop. Our own course determines our character. In training these powers so that they shall harmonize and form a valuable character, we have a work which no one but ourselves can do [italics not in the original]."²

No magical change will take place in the life of an individual. There must be determined effort on his part to overcome sin and to develop a perfect character. Change of location from earth to heaven does not change character. God, Himself, cannot force a change in the individual. If this could be, man would not be a free moral agent with a power of choice. Thus, there are some things God cannot do for man. However, a life of constant, living, faith in Jesus will determine to a large degree the progress in Christian growth and development of character. This exercise of faith is the Christian's responsibility.

A lack of faith will result in a lack of growth. Growth is in proportion to the faith exercised--much faith, much growth; little faith, little growth. This faith will lead the individual to look to Christ and His righteousness that is available to him.

The individual must behold Jesus. Beholding Jesus must be a daily experience for the individual who would be like Him for, by

² 4 T 606.

beholding the perfection of Jesus and by spending much time in contemplating His love for fallen man, a change is wrought in him; and he becomes like the one he beholds. Mrs. White says, "By looking unto Jesus we shall become assimilated to His image. By beholding we become changed. The character is softened, refined, and ennobled for the heavenly kingdom."³

It is as the Saviour's perfection of character is discerned that the individual develops a desire to be transformed to be like Him. The more the Christian knows of God the higher will be his ideal of Christian perfection, and the greater will be his desire to lay hold of Christ's perfection. In response to the Christian's beholding Jesus, divinity will combine with humanity and growth and progress takes place.

As the Christian beholds Jesus and His righteousness, he becomes more and more aware of his own unrighteousness. Self-righteousness will find no place in the life of a Christian who makes an earnest effort to keep Jesus before him constantly. The desire for sin disappears when the Christian beholds Jesus. The Christian beholds Jesus in the things of nature, but especially does he behold Him as he studies the Word of God.

Communion with God through study and prayer is necessary.

Mrs. White says, "By having a knowledge of Christ,--his words, his

³ MB 127.

habits, and his lessons of instruction,--we borrow the virtues of the character we have so closely studied and become imbued with the spirit we have so much admired."⁴

It takes effort on the part of the Christian to study God's word. It would be easier to neglect it; but to neglect it is to retard Christian growth, for by studying God's word strength and power is received. God's word is the bread of heaven that "must be eaten and assimilated, becoming part of the life. Thus we gain eternal life."⁵

Not only is the study of God's word necessary to maintain vigorous spiritual growth, but it is of equal importance that the soul commune with God. As the body must have bread to sustain life and foster growth, so the soul must commune with Christ to sustain spiritual life and foster spiritual growth. Christian tendencies and desires are not inherited, and it is only by noble effort that the channels of communion with Jesus can be kept open. Notice the following quotation:

. . . Character cannot be bought; it must be formed by stern efforts to resist temptation. The formation of a right character is the work of a lifetime, and is the outgrowth of prayerful meditation united with a grand purpose. The excellence of character that you possess must be the result of your own effort. Friends may encourage you, but they cannot do the work for you. Wishing, sighing, dreaming, will never make you great or good. . . .⁶

When earnest prayer ascends in behalf of a heart-yearning to

⁴ RH, March 15, 1887.

⁵ RH, January 28, 1904.

⁶ RH, August 26, 1884.

be Christlike, the answer will come; and nourishment will be granted to grow and develop. Indeed, communion with God in the study of His word and in earnest prayer will make it possible for the individual to keep his will surrendered fully to God.

The surrender of the will is necessary. James Mudge defines sin as "choosing our own will instead of the divine will; disobeying that law which is binding upon us as a rule of present action."⁷ Sin is always the wilful act of a free moral agent who has ample opportunity to know what is expected of him. Mr. Mudge continues by saying:

. . . It is not simply the missing of a mark which it would have been well for him to hit, but the missing of it because he did not take the pains which he might have done in rightly directing his aim, and, hence, a missing of what he ought to have hit. This definition draws a distinct line between faults and misfortunes, between what we can help and what we cannot help, between culpable sins and unavoidable infirmities.⁸

Indulgence in evil destroys the will. The individual cannot even will to do right unless that will is surrendered to God and controlled by Him. Without a will that has been captivated by Christ, no one can be fitted for God's kingdom. Spiritual growth is possible only if the will is kept under control. The reason that so many professed Christians find it hard to live the life of growth and progress is because they do not detach themselves from their own will; they do not surrender their will. Thus they cannot will to do right but con-

⁷ I. H. Evans, This is the Way, p. 26.

⁸ Ibid.

tinue to will to do as they formerly did.

The Christian must surrender his own spirit and receive in its place Christ's spirit. Mrs. White admonishes, "Reach up and grasp His hand that the touch may electrify you and charge you with the sweet properties of His own matchless character [*italics not in the original*]."9 The will of the individual is to be electrified and charged by being brought in contact with God's will. It must be merged into one will--God's will.

Nothing in Christian growth and development is as important as the right use of the will. The will is not a vapid desire of an individual but that puissance capable of decision. Will is not an emotion; it is the person itself for as the will is so is the Christian. Mrs. White states that "strength of character consists of two things,--power of will and power of self-control."10

God cannot force the individual to yield his will to Him; it must be surrendered voluntarily. If man does not will to overcome, he cannot overcome; and there is nothing God can do to force it. However, God will even help in making the individual willing if he is willing that this be done. Note the following pertinent statement:

. . . The will must be placed on the side of God's will. You are not able, of yourself, to bring your purposes and desires and inclinations into submission to the will of God; but if you are "willing to be made willing," God will accomplish the work for you, even "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into

9 4 T 63.

10 4 T 656.

captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." . . .¹¹

The Christian's life is a battle of the wills. The individual must continually persevere to keep the will surrendered to God. Thus the prayer, "not my will but thine be done," becomes a vital part in the Christian's growth and progress.

Talents must be consecrated to God. As the Christian yields his will to God, there can no longer be a selfish desire to use his talents to his own selfish wants. He will receive a desire to develop his talents and use them for God's glory. The performance of even the smallest duties are important for the Christian in the process of Christian maturation. Mrs. White states that "through the right use of our talents, we may link ourselves by a golden chain to a higher world. This is true sanctification. . . ."¹²

Of all the talents given to man, none is of greater value than the talent of time. In this talent all share alike. Every moment of time must mean growth and development, or there cannot be Christian perfection. That talent, which dedicated to the world may bring a moment of pleasure, must be fully dedicated to God for a higher development, even though it may seem to be a sacrifice.

The Christian must possess a spirit of self-sacrifice. Though it may seem a sacrifice for an individual to give his talents to God,

¹¹ MB 204-5.

¹² COL 360.

he must recognize that to walk humbly before God and man and to be a possessor of true meekness and to possess the spirit of sacrifice are essential to Christian growth and development.

The Gospel of Christ is a Gospel of sacrifice. It means a close fellowship with Jesus, and it calls for a life of sacrifice. The appeal of the apostle Paul was, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Romans 12:1. Notice the following statement:

It is not only at the beginning of the Christian life that this renunciation of self is to be made. At every advance step heavenward it is to be renewed. All our good works are dependent on a power outside of ourselves. Therefore there needs to be a continual reaching out of the heart after God, a continual, earnest, heart-breaking confession of sin and humbling of the soul before Him. Only by constant renunciation of self and dependence on Christ can we walk safely.¹³

It is impossible to possess Christian perfection without a spirit of self-sacrifice and a complete forsaking of selfish desires.

Sin must be put away. All who expect to grow and develop in the Christian pathway must daily gain the victory over temptations and put sin out of their lives. To be burdened down with sin cannot permit vigorous growth.

Not only should the Christian ask for forgiveness and expect forgiveness, but he should with the help of omnipotence conquer sin.

¹³ COL 159-60.

The same temptation that caused the newborn Christian to fall again and again during his spiritual infancy must not cause him to fall in his spiritual manhood; he cannot even arrive at spiritual manhood if he continues to fall as frequently as he did in his spiritual infancy. Growth toward full maturity must mean less and less yielding to temptations.

An infant stumbles and falls frequently at infancy, and no one thinks any the worse of it; but that stumbling and falling must become less and less frequent. While the individual is young and his bones are pliable, a fall does not usually prove critical. Nature makes allowance for the fall. But as the individual matures, the bones become harder; and falls can be much more critical. Nature takes it for granted that with maturity has come the ability to walk without stumbling. Likewise, this is true of Christian maturity. God allows for the mistakes of a spiritual infant who stumbles but quickly arises. The longer a Christian is on the Christian pathway, the more is expected of him and the more critical a fall will be considered. Were it impossible for the individual physically to learn to walk properly and would he continue to stumble and fall, he would never arrive at normal, mature manhood. Certainly this is true of the spiritual; if growth does not take place and sins are not less frequent and not eventually overcome, he cannot hope to arrive at Christian manhood. And since progress is not being made, the perfection he had at his spiritual infancy can now only be considered as lost.

At each stage, and this means constantly, or at all times, the Christian is to be perfect. This means he has made progress in proportion to the light and privileges granted to him. However, stumbling and falling, even in maturity, need not be fatal if a sincere repentance follows and forgiveness is immediately sought. This was demonstrated in the experiences of Saul and David. Saul could not blame himself but blamed someone else for his sin and thus demonstrated insincerity. However, David was truly repentant and confessed his guilt and asked for forgiveness. He was pardoned and forgiven.

Genuine repentance is evidenced by a working of a reformation in the life which means an absence of sin. The righteousness of Christ does not cover cherished sin. Mrs. White says, "The righteousness of Christ is not a cloak to cover unconfessed and forsaken sin; it is a principle of life that transforms the character and controls the conduct."¹⁴

Wilful, known sin, will separate the soul from God. The seal of God will not be placed upon the individual who is not cleansed of all spots or stains. "Everyone who by faith obeys God's commandments," says Mrs. White, "will reach the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression."¹⁵ This is both a command and a promise. When Jesus comes, He will find a people who have put away all sin; His coming will not cleanse anyone.

¹⁴ DA 555-6.

¹⁵ ST, July 23, 1902.

The Christian is admonished to "exert every energy of the soul in the work of overcoming."¹⁶ It will take earnest and continued effort to overcome temptations; Christ will not and cannot do it all for the Christian. Mrs. White says, "This is our washing and ironing time,--the time when we are to cleanse our robes of character in the blood of the Lamb [*italics my own*]."¹⁷ Thus, to put away sin requires conscientious effort on the part of the Christian. Perfection is not maintained without a struggle, without earnest effort, self-sacrifice and self-discipline.

Self-discipline is necessary. Mrs. White teaches plainly that it will cost the Christian something to gain eternal life, and the reward eventually received will be in proportion to the effort put forth. "It is only by long and persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict, that we shall be overcomers,"¹⁸ stated Mrs. White. The same discipline that continually marked the life of Christ must be a part of the life of the Christian who is making daily progress toward the goal of Christlikeness. Character development is not accidental; "it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline and of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature."¹⁹

¹⁶ 5 T 472.

¹⁷ General Conference Bulletin, March 30, 1903.

¹⁸ 3 T 324. ¹⁹ ED 57.

There will be constant struggling and agonizing to keep the carnal in subjection to the spiritual. This is a process of "slow and toilsome steps."²⁰ The following statement points out emphatically that man has a part in working out his salvation:

To man is allotted a part in this great struggle for everlasting life,--he must respond to the working of the Holy Spirit. It will require a struggle to break through the powers of darkness, and the Spirit works in him to accomplish this. But man is no passive being, to be saved in indolence. He is called upon to strain every muscle and exercise every faculty in the struggle for immortality; yet it is God that supplies efficiency. No human being can be saved in indolence. . . . [*italics not in the original*].²¹

Thus, more than a wish is necessary to retain that Christian perfection that comes to the individual when he is born again. Only the agonizing ones will have perfection of character that will gain for them an entrance into heaven.

Character development is a battle. To gain perfection of character requires "hard, stern battles with self. Conflict after conflict must be waged against hereditary tendencies."²²

The development of Christian character and the entire spiritual maturation process must be a co-operative undertaking between God and man. Neither can do it without the other. Each individual "has a personal battle to fight. Not even God can make our characters noble or our lives useful, unless we become co-workers with Him,"²³ stated Mrs. White.

²⁰ 5 T 500.

²¹ CT 366.

²² COL 331.

²³ MH 487.

"Life is a battle and a march,"²⁴ and in this battle there is no release; continuous and earnest effort is required. This is an individual struggle; no one can fight this battle for another. The Christian must not only fight against his own fleshly lusts and desires but against Satan and his hosts. God provides the armor and the strength, but the Christian must do the fighting.

Thus, the maintenance of Christian perfection requires an effort on the part of the individual. Nothing needs to be done by the individual who will be lost. That person will naturally drift into perdition. A person who will eventually reach heaven will not have drifted into heaven. To be saved requires a living, active faith. This faith must be kept active by continual exercise. It must be kept active by study and devotion. This might easier be neglected, but it is only as the Christian partakes of spiritual nourishment that he grows and develops.

The Christian cannot sit in passive indolence and expect God to do the growing for him. God supplies the nourishment and the strength, and the individual must do the growing and developing and fruitbearing.

This growing process requires a full surrender of all to God, which can be accomplished through strength received from Christ and through earnest self-discipline and self-sacrifice. A sinless matu-

²⁴ MB 203.

...
rity can only be arrived at by conscientious effort on the part of the Christian and with the strength and power provided by Christ. As the Christian strains every muscle and wages a continual warfare against evil, he grows and develops and gains new heights day by day, ever bearing more and more fruit. And with each passing day the Christian becomes more and more Christlike. All the while that he is engaged in this struggle he may maintain the Christian perfection he received when first justified by faith.

CHAPTER X

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION EXCLUDES BOASTING

The individual who has experienced new birth may have the assurance ever after that he is a child of God. This assurance is his because he has faith in the promises of God. He must ever be conscious that he is in a state of sanctification. Though he is conscious of failures and shortcomings, yet he has the assurance that he is accepted of God and that he is a son of God. For him to doubt his acceptance of God after his genuine new birth experience would be folly and sin.

However, with all of this faith and all of this assurance the Christian will never boast of perfection and righteousness. To boast of such would immediately suggest a perfection wrought by his own works, and a righteousness attained by his own merits.

The true Christian will feel more and more dependent upon God. A boastful claim to perfection and holiness is proof enough that the individual is not perfect or holy. Notice the following statement:

. . . Those who are really seeking to perfect Christian character will never indulge the thought that they are sinless. Their lives may be irreproachable; they may be living representatives of the truth which they have accepted; but the more they discipline their minds to dwell upon the character of Christ, and the nearer they approach to His divine image, the more clearly will they discern its spotless perfection, and the more deeply will they feel their own defects.¹

¹ SL 7.

The more one beholds the character of Jesus, the more imperfect he will appear in his own sight. Christian humility and meekness does not permit the Christian to boast of perfection.

The prophet Daniel was an example of true sanctification, and yet in his great prayer he identified himself with the sinful people and never claimed purity and holiness for himself.

The apostles and prophets continually confessed the sinfulness of their own nature; they made no claim of righteousness of their own, but in humility and meekness depended wholly in the righteousness of Jesus.²

The Christian never feels that he has attained or arrived. Far beyond, there are ever new ideals and new goals to be reached. Mrs. White gave the following counsel:

Let the recording angels write the history of the holy struggles and conflicts of the people of God; let them record their prayers and tears; but let not God be dishonored by the declaration from human lips, "I am sinless; I am holy." Sanctified lips will never give utterance to such presumptuous words.³

The apostle Paul in speaking of this, said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Ephesians 3:12. Here the apostle does not claim to have reached that stage of perfection that he might have attained. He is still endeavoring to work out his salvation in co-operation with di-

² COL 160.

³ 561-2.

vinity.

The Christian will co-operate with the divine agencies to work out his salvation as did Paul; but while he is so doing he will feel humble to think that his own sin caused Jesus to suffer, and he can boast only that Jesus is his Saviour and for this he is humbly grateful.

CHAPTER XI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I. SUMMARY

Christ challenged His followers to be perfect even as God is perfect. The thought of being perfect as God is perfect presents some problems which to many has brought discouragement and defeat. However, a correct understanding of this doctrine gives the Christian courage, for with the command is also a promise that perfection is possible.

Christian perfection is relative, not absolute. Christian perfection, as taught by Mrs. White, is not that absolute perfection which God possesses. It is impossible for any of God's created beings to ever become perfect as He is perfect and to possess the divine attributes of God. Were this possible for man, God would cease to be God. God is absolute perfection. Deity alone possesses attributes which can know no improvement. God is the basis of everything that is. He is the source of life itself, and unlike created beings, is not fettered by time or space. God knows no bounds.

Created beings may, however, ascend in the process of relative perfection. Angels, though spoken of as being holy, can only have relative holiness for God alone possesses absolute holiness. Man is to be perfect in his sphere of activity as God is perfect in His

sphere. Regardless of the heights of Christian perfection attained by man, it will still be only relative perfection.

Christian perfection is growth. Christian perfection is growth which has as its goal Christlikeness. It includes the whole process of spiritual maturation. This growth has its beginning when man is born again. Divine grace in the process of regeneration changes man from the sinful to the holy. He stands justified before God; and guilty, as he may have been, he now stands cleansed. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to him, and he stands perfect in the sight of God. He is as a newborn babe, perfect. But he can only remain perfect if he grows and develops. For, that righteousness which was imputed to him in a moment, must now through union with Christ, actually become a part of him through growth and development.

The experience of the new birth was the Christian's justification; if he is to continue in Christian perfection, he must grow, develop, and mature. That which was born by faith must now grow by faith. This is progressive sanctification. This will cause him to retain the original perfection so that at every moment of time in his growth and development he is considered perfect by heaven.

Progressive sanctification is continuous justification, and this is the work of a lifetime. It is a process of gradual maturation. At every stage the Christian can be perfect, but there must ever be an increase. Should there be a relapse, the original state of perfection

would be lost, unless, of course, the relapse were only momentary and not permanent. Progressive sanctification suggests an upward climb on the ladder of Christian maturation, the top of which is reached by negotiating round after round.

Growth will be in proportion to the light and privileges given the Christian. Growth suggests an overcoming of sin and the lusts of the flesh, and an increase of the fruits of the Spirit. Though the newborn Christian may make mistakes, he is assured of forgiveness; and he need not be considered as having fallen from grace.

Growth, progressive sanctification, does not exclude that re-adjustment that is necessary for every sinner to make in his relationship to God both legally and morally. As the infant is born for the purpose of growth and development into full manhood, so the individual who is born again spiritually is born only for the purpose of growth and development into full spiritual manhood. And, as the mother does not condemn when the child stumbles and falls in infancy, so God does not condemn and forsake the Christian should he stumble and fall in his infancy. The mother does, however, have a right to expect less stumbling and less falling as the child has opportunity to develop and grow; so it is also expected of the Christian.

That faith which justified in the beginning will also bring forth fruits of obedience in sanctification. Though the keeping of the law of God does not provide the Christian with merit for salva-

tion, it is the fruit of salvation. The only reason for growth is that fruit may be produced. Obedience to the law of God is a fruit of Christian growth made possible through union with Christ. There can be no sanctification without willing obedience, and no perfection without works as evidence, for "all will be justified by faith, and judged by their works."¹

The Christian has no inherent strength or righteousness with which to bring about a transformation of character. This strength all heaven is anxious to provide. Christ has made provision for man to become a partaker of His nature through union with Him. To reach spiritual maturity outside of this union is impossible.

Union with Christ suggests that Christ has a specific work to do in the growth process of the Christian, but it also suggests that the Christian has a responsibility. As long as man is clothed with mortal humanity, there will be conflicts between the carnal nature and the spiritual nature, there will be trials, physical pains, and suffering. Sincere effort will be needed to endure in these conflicts. Faith must be accompanied by effort to forsake sin and to overcome. This will mean self-sacrifice and self-discipline. To put away sin requires conscientious effort. Life is a "battle and a march." God provides the armor and the strength, but the Christian must do the fighting.

¹ 4 T 386.

Though the Christian should be conscious of growth and development, and though he should realize that he has been justified, yet he will never boast of perfection and righteousness for the only perfection he possesses is the perfection of Jesus; and this thought must leave the Christian humble and grateful, but never boastful.

II. CONCLUSION

The doctrine of Christian perfection as taught by Mrs. White is not understood to be a separate entity, but rather is an integral part of the entire Christian experience. It is that entire spiritual maturation process which has its beginning with the new birth experience. It stands in sharp contrast with some of the Holy Flesh, Holiness, Puritanical, and Pentecostal movements so prevalent today.

Christian perfection is possible in this present life through faith in Christ. It comes to the individual instantaneously at the time of his new birth experience when he is robed with the righteousness and perfection of Christ.

This original perfection may be maintained, by faith, in the process of sanctification. As the Christian grows and matures, it is possible to be perfect at each level of growth both by reason of being clothed with the robe of Christ's perfection received at the time of justification, and also by reason of actually partaking of the divine perfection and it becoming a part of his nature during the gradual process of sanctification.

In order for the Christian to retain and maintain Christian perfection, he must grow and bear fruit. It is not expected that he bear much fruit during his spiritual infancy, but the fruit will be good fruit. As he grows and develops, he will bear more fruit and finally much fruit. All of this is as a result of union with Christ and it being possible to actually partake of Christ's righteousness.

Thus spiritual growth and maturation constitute Christian perfection. This, the Christian may possess through Christ at the time of justification and at each point thereafter in sanctification. During all this time the individual is robed with the righteousness of Christ, and he is considered by God as being without "spot or wrinkle."

Mrs. White teaches nothing more nor less about Christian perfectionism than that it is progressive sanctification, or Christian growth and development which starts with the new birth experience and continues throughout life. As the Christian bears more and more abundantly the fruits of the spirit, he becomes more and more Christlike. This process of growth continues as long as life continues. There is no stopping place. Should death come during the early stages of the maturation process, the Christian would have a title to heaven for this was given him at the time of justification; and he would have been fitted for heaven through sanctification. Although he may not have reached full Christian maturity, salvation is assured him through the righteousness of Christ.

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