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The Dynamics of Salvation

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The Dynamics of Salvation

Throughout the 1970s, Seventh-day Adventists, particularly in North America, discussed and debated righteousness by faith. Conferences called by church leadership convened at Palmdale, April 23-30, 1976; Nosoca Pines Ranch, February 10-22, 1978; and Washington, D.C., August 6-11, 1978, but failed to eliminate the agitation on several points.

Neal C. Wilson, elected president of the General Conference at the 1978 Annual Council on the retirement of Robert H. Pierson, assumed office in January 1979. In the *Adventist Review* for May 24 of the same year, in "An Open Letter to the Church," he appealed for all to "seek to diminish the flood of cassettes, brochures, books, and miscellaneous documents" and to avoid "all controversy and contentious discussion of this matter" until "a representative group of laypersons, pastors, evangelists, theologians, church historians, biblical scholars, editors, and church administrators" surveyed and studied the issues and shared the results with the church.

This group, the Righteousness by Faith Consultation, consisting of 145 members, met in Washington, D.C., October 3-4, 1979.

The consultation appointed an editorial committee of 24 members to prepare for publication the materials growing out of the meeting. That committee met February 4-7, 1980, and prepared a paper, "The Dynamics of Salvation." This paper was distributed to the full membership of the consultation for critique and revised in harmony with the responses. The resulting statement, "The Dynamics of Salvation," was printed in the July 31, 1980, issue of the *Adventist Review*.

"The Dynamics of Salvation" is a study document and not a creedal statement. Nevertheless, it represents the culmination of the discussions and conferences during the 1970s and is an important statement of the church's understanding of this vital Christian doctrine.

Less than two weeks after the statement appeared, the Sanctuary Review Committee convened at Glacier View Ranch, Colorado. The heat of the discussions surrounding that committee's work tended to obscure "The Dynamics of Salvation," and the statement was largely forgotten. We reproduce the statement in full in this centennial year of the 1888 General Conference session, for the thoughtful, prayerful study of every Seventh-day Adventist.



Neal C. Wilson, who began his presidency of the General Conference in 1979, moved quickly to appoint and chair the 145-member committee to resolve contentious discussion about righteousness by faith. The committee's work culminated with the first publication of "The Dynamics of Salvation" in 1980.

The Dynamics of Salvation

The story of our salvation is inexhaustible. It exposes the mystery of evil and opens the mystery of the cross through which divine love conquers evil. It tells the desperate condition of the human family and God's plan and power to restore us into His image. It is the incredibly good news that God has done for us and does in us what we could never do for ourselves and which we do not deserve.

This story will be our study and song forever. Our minds will continue to be stretched by contemplation of "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints" (Col. 1:26),* and we will discern ever richer treasures of divine love and wisdom.

Yet the good news is for all. Although its depths tax the sharpest intellect, it is simple enough for even a child to understand. God has made it plain that every member of the human family might hear and wonder, and wondering be won by the story of divine love. He would have every one of us come to realize that in Jesus Christ we are accepted, redeemed, and adopted into God's family on earth and in heaven. This assurance turns despair into hope, and desolation to joy; for the transforming power of God's love makes us new men and women in Christ.

Seventh-day Adventists understand the gospel in a particular setting. We see it in the light of the final, end-time messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12. Our task is to complete the proclamation of the "everlasting gospel" to all the world just prior to the return of our Lord. It is the same story, the eternal story, the one story from Genesis to Revelation—the message of the third angel, we are told, centers in justification by faith (*Evangelism*, p. 190)—but it is proclaimed in the context of the final events of earth's history and of Christ's ministry in heaven (Dan. 7, 8; Rev. 3, 4; Heb. 8-10).

We also see a cosmic dimension in the story of our salvation. The divine plan reconciles all things in heaven and earth through the cross of Christ (Col. 1:20). The agelong conflict between good and evil originated in heaven in the rebellion of Lucifer against God. It spread to this earth, as our first parents yielded to the tempter; thus sin became part of us, and our world became the arena in which Christ battles with Satan for our allegiance.

The law of God, which is an expression of His character, plays a central role in this controversy. Lucifer denied the justice and goodness of the law, rejected its authority, and claimed that it could not be obeyed; he and his

subjects continue to oppose it. In saving men and women from rebellion and sin, therefore, God remains true to His own character and His law; His gracious activity which saves us at the same time vindicates His character and law; and reconciles the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 68, 69).

This study focuses on the dynamics of salvation. It does not attempt to embrace all aspects of the plan of salvation, even as it does not claim to plumb all the depths of its mysteries. Its concern is with men and women, here and now; it endeavors to tell plainly the good news that God has for us. This good news, the gospel, is so utterly different from human modes of thought that it is startling. It is easily distorted or lost or obscured—even by theological debate. Therefore it must be told and retold, probed ever more deeply, heard once and ever anew.

Section 1. Humanity's Desperate Need

Before we can accept the good news, we must recognize our desperate need. We must see that we can do nothing to restore ourselves to God, or to improve our evil nature: our condition is hopeless. To such poverty—mental, physical, spiritual—God's salvation comes.

1. We stand condemned before God (Rom. 3:19, 20). We are rebels at heart and rebels in deed, alienated from God and from one another. Even our "righteous deeds" are as "filthy rags" (KJV) in His sight (Isa. 64:6), because even our motives at best are mixed: we glory in our reputation; we are proud of our good works; we compare ourselves with others. When we see ourselves as God sees us, we know that we are a mixture of good and evil, always a bundle of conflicting desires, emotions, and aspirations. In our innermost being we are corrupt: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds" (Isa. 1:5, 6).

Nor can we change our standing before God. No sacrifice, no gift, no act of devotion—no work of any sort—can restore the broken relationship. Our first parents were created in God's image, but that image became defaced (Gen. 1:27; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 294); after their fall they fled from the presence of God. "Sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595), and we are still running from Him.

2. We are alienated from our true selves. We are torn by doubts and conflicts; we are



"I feel that this document provides an excellent understanding of what the leadership of this church believes relative to righteousness by faith," says J. R. Spangler, editor of *Ministry Magazine*. He was a member of several of the committees that led up to the 1979 consultation.

frightened by the depths of sin which we see in others, and we feel within ourselves the surge of the same evil. We are burdened by guilt, for we fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We proclaim our freedom, but are subject to the yoke of bondage (Gal. 5:1) and are slaves of corruption (2 Peter 2:19).

3. We are alienated also from one another. We seek to gather to ourselves riches, and to grow in reputation at the expense of others; so we are jealous and suspicious, envious and crafty, insensitive and cruel (Jer. 17:9). The network of human relations established by the Creator lies in tatters (Rom. 1:28-32); we seek to patch them here and there, but all our efforts are fragmentary and inadequate.

4. We are alienated from the created world. God appointed us to have "dominion" over the world (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:6), but we have turned stewardship into exploitation. We ravage the resources of the earth, consuming them greedily, and turning all we find to our own selfish ends (Rev. 11:18).

So humanity is in a desperate condition. All our plans, hopes, and efforts are corrupted by our sinfulness. Individually and collectively we stand condemned for what we have done and for what we are, for the spirit of rebellion against God that is part of us, for our all-encompassing alienation and sin (Rom. 5:18; *Steps to Christ*, pp. 19-25).

We are lost, full of anxiety and loneliness. And we are unable to help ourselves.

Section 2. The Divine Initiative

The good news of the Bible is that God has taken the initiative to save us. He comes to us in our lostness, offering salvation in all its abundance.

The gospel reverses all human understanding and endeavors. By nature we operate on the principles of achievement: the reward should match the performance. But the good news is that "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23, KJV). For "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20, KJV). God is generous in His love, extravagant beyond our comprehension.

Throughout the Bible, God takes the initiative to save. With the first sin He came seeking; and His call, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9), echoes down the ages. He calls Abraham and makes him the father of the faithful (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:6-21; Heb. 11:8-10). In Egypt He initiates the rescue of the Hebrew tribes from slavery (Ex. 3:6-10), and in Babylon He intervenes again to bring them home from exile (2 Chron. 36:22, 23).

This saving activity of God is expressed by the word *righteousness*. The Bible shows God's righteousness by what He does; it is not merely

a state; rather, it manifests itself uniquely in saving activity. And in that activity Israel finds hope. So the psalmist exclaims, "Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness" (Ps. 5:8) and "In thy righteousness deliver me" (Ps. 31:1; 71:2), while God announces, "I bring near My righteousness, it is not far off; and My salvation will not delay" (Isa. 46:13; cf. Isa. 51:5; 56:1; etc., NASB). So we can say that God's righteousness brings salvation; therefore God is called "the Lord our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6, KJV).

The saving righteousness of God is not in conflict with His eternal law. At Sinai the law was given in written form as part of God's saving act, to define the terms of the covenant relationship between God and His earthly children, but not as a means of salvation. The law warns that God "will not justify the wicked" (Ex. 23:7, KJV), yet before Him "no man living is righteous" (Ps. 143:2, NASB). And since God as "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25) cannot act unjustly, every person must expect a sentence of condemnation on the basis of his performance. Realizing this, the psalmist pleads, "Do not enter into judgment with Thy servant" (Ps. 143:2, NASB). For the law, given by God's initiative, tells men and women what to do, but not how to gain salvation; only God can create a clean heart (Ps. 51:10), and the prophet announces that God's Chosen One "will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. . . . He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:11, 12, NASB).

In Jesus Christ the divine initiative reaches a unique climax. God had continually intervened to bring salvation; now, in a supreme act of self-giving, God the Son becomes the incarnate Christ. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14, KJV). He became one with us, sharing our lot, showing us what true humanity—humanity made in the image of God—is like. He suffered and was tested, struggling with the tempter (Heb. 2:14, 17; 5:7-9). He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15, KJV). By word and life, by death and resurrection, the God-man, Jesus Christ, brings the good news of God's love for us and the salvation He provides (John 3:16).

Over and over, the life and teachings of Jesus reveal God's character (John 1:18). Instead of shrinking in terror or running in rebellion from Him, we are to call Him "our Father" (Matt. 6:9). All that we see of goodness, care, and loving provision in human fatherhood is at best a faint reflection of the heavenly Father. He is the divine Provider, who cares even for the birds and lilies (verses 25-34); He is the divine Lover, who counts everyone on earth as

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Christ we are
accepted,
redeemed,
and
adopted.

His child, even though His fatherhood is not acknowledged (Matt. 5:43-48); He is the divine Giver, who delights to pour His blessings upon His children (Matt. 7:7-12).

His generosity amazes us. He lavishes salvation; we do nothing to earn it. He is not an angry sovereign, nor a demanding judge. Rather, He pours out liberally, without regard to what we deserve. Our only condition is our need; we have no claim on Him at all (cf. Matt. 18:23-25; 20:1-16; Luke 18:9-14).

God's grace always surprises the self-righteous. It is the so-called "righteous" who challenge the teachings of Jesus; they cannot comprehend the idea that salvation is really totally free. They cling to some vestige of meritorious human activity, some remnant of their own achievement in which they may find secret satisfaction (Matt. 21:31; Luke 14:11).

The mission of Jesus corresponds with this revelation of God. He comes as the One sent of the Father (John 5:36, 37), the living embodiment of divine love to a lost world. He has come not to condemn us but to save us (John 3:16-21; Matt. 1:21).

And this mission exemplifies liberation (Luke 4:16-21). He sets us free from the captivity of the evil one. He sets us free from eternal death (Heb. 2:14, 15). He sets us free from guilt. He proclaims "the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:19), offering forgiveness to all who believe. We come to Him downcast, burdened, enslaved; we go away rejoicing, made new to live as sons and daughters of the God who forgives.

Jesus' mission of liberation led inevitably to the cross. He foresaw it, shrank from it, but accepted it in conformity with the divine will. His whole life had pointed to it; as important as it was for Him to live among us and for us, it was only by His death that God could save us (Rom. 3:21-26; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 382).

He was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8, KJV). Before the world was created, God had covenanted to meet the crisis of sin and death (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1149). Sin is not a light thing, and God does not lightly pass over it; the divine initiative meets the demands of the broken law. God is just, and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus (Rom. 3:26)—through the cross. God would not only become flesh and struggle with temptation without succumbing to it (Heb. 4:15); in the climactic act of the incredible series of divine initiatives, He would die on a despised cross, vicariously for us all. "Being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8).

Jesus died for every person at every place and in every time. This was the event toward which the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed. It reconciled the world to God (2 Cor. 5:19); it delivered humanity from the power of Satan; it opened the door to a life in union with God. As Christians, we are therefore not ashamed of the cross; it is the guarantee of our forgiveness, the ground of our assurance, and the pledge of our eternal life in God. "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 161, 162).

While the cross and resurrection of Christ are the focal point of the ages (cf. Heb. 9:26), the divine initiative does not end with them. The risen Christ, ascended to the right hand of the Father, asks for the Holy Spirit to be sent to the world (John 14:16, 26). The Spirit had always prompted men and women to follow God; now He comes in a new way. Without Him our will is weak, so bent toward evil that we cannot of ourselves choose the good. But He energizes the will so that we can respond to the good news and accept the gift of salvation (John 3:5-8; 7:17; Phil. 2:13). In this way the ministry of Jesus is perpetuated; the Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).

The story of salvation is thus the story of grace and love. The God who delights to forgive has redeemed the world by Jesus Christ. At every point in the story, God takes the initiative.

Section 3. The Human Response to Grace

While Christ by His death has redeemed the world and paid the penalty of every sin, not every person actually will experience salvation. Why is this? Because God does not coerce, not even for our best good. He has provided salvation as a gift, but He does not force that gift upon us. He has made reconciliation, but we must agree to be reconciled.

The human response to grace centers in faith, and the essence of faith is trust, taking God at His word (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:1). In the Bible, a great example of faith is Abraham, of whom Paul quotes from the Old Testament that he "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3; cf. Gen. 15:6). Here, in the context of a covenant made by God, Abraham's faith is not simply an intellectual assent but a total response of trust in the promising word of God. It is a readiness to submit himself entirely to God and to accept His word. In this act of faith, Abraham is in a right relationship with God, and obedience is the result (Heb. 11:8). Thus he obeys God and is circumcised (Gen. 17:22-27). Faith in the biblical



Laurel Damsteegt, who had earned her M.Div. degree and was co-pastoring a church in Virginia with her husband, was one of four women appointed to the Righteousness by Faith Consultation. She also was part of the editorial group of 24 who helped prepare the final document. "Rereading it I'm still struck with the beauty of the message," she says. "I only wish we had dealt more directly with perfection; it might have taken some of the steam out of today's arguments."

sense is never merely a mental act but always a relationship of "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6, NASB; cf. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 6, p. 1111, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 398).

There is no merit in faith itself. We are not saved by faith but by grace: "For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8); "There is nothing in faith that makes it our saviour" (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 6, p. 1071). Instead, faith is the means, the instrument, by which we claim God's gift of salvation (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 363). The cross alone is our salvation; faith is our personal acceptance of the cross as God's decisive act in our behalf.

Without the drawing of God, no person will come to Him (John 6:44; *ibid.*, p. 390). Our faces are turned away from Him, and we lack even the desire to return. Our will is so weakened that we continually choose only evil (Jer. 13:23). But the Holy Spirit empowers our wills, awakening within us a longing for God. He leads us to repent; we are sorry for sin and turn from it as we reach out in faith to receive God's gift (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 6, p. 1073; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 175). Thus faith itself is a gift from God offered to us all (Eph. 2:8; *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 375) through the Scriptures.

We cannot fully comprehend the manner in which the Holy Spirit energizes our wills to produce faith. We may say that we receive God's salvation because we have chosen to do so, but we must affirm also that whatever is human in faith is possible only because of the divine initiative in the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus there can be no "boasting" in our faith (Rom. 3:27).

The possibility of faith is also the possibility of its rejection. We may resist the urging of the Spirit and spurn the gift held out by God. By doing so, we condemn ourselves, for we have spurned grace and despised love (John 3:18, 19).

The results of the salvation appropriated by faith are all-embracing; we are radically re-oriented; we have both a new status and a new life. In the following sections of this paper we shall study in turn the new status and the new life in Christ. We must realize, however, that, while these aspects may be distinguished for the sake of clarity of discussion, they are never separated in experience. God's saving activity which declares us to be His sons and daughters is at the same time a transforming relationship (Rom. 5:1-5; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:16, 17; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114).

Section 4. The New Status in Christ

The new status in Christ is too rich to be

encompassed by any one term. Among the many expressions used in the Bible to describe this reality, the principal ones are justification, reconciliation, forgiveness, adoption, and sanctification. Each of these terms, while commonly employed by Christians, has a distinctive biblical usage and meaning.

1. Justification. This word comes from the setting of a law court. We are regarded as criminals, arraigned at the bar of God's justice. As the law is read out to us, we know that we are guilty. Even if we could plead innocent in terms of external compliance, the law probes our motives and desires, and shatters our defenses: "The law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). But now there is a stir in the court. Our Advocate rises to speak in our behalf. Instead of agreeing to our death, He presents His own death; while acknowledging our disobedience, He points to His own obedience. Instead of claiming our righteousness, He covers us with His own righteousness (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 311). Thus He stands for us as our Representative (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 357; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 925) and Substitute (*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 256, 258). Because of Him, the verdict is pronounced, "Acquitted!" We go forth free from the accusations of the law that previously had condemned us. This is the meaning of justification by grace through faith (Rom. 3:21-26).

2. Reconciliation. The picture here is drawn from human relations. Friends have fallen out; bitter feelings of estrangement have taken hold. One party, however, has already acted to restore the relationship; He has gone to the full extent, and beyond human expectation, thought, or activity, to make matters right. God has once again taken the initiative; He has "reconciled us to Himself through Christ" (2 Cor. 5:18, NASB). So far as He is concerned, all cause of ill will has been removed. But the second party remains alienated. He harbors feelings of guilt for the activities which led to the disruption of relationships; he feeds upon his hostilities. One day, however, the hopelessness of the situation and the magnanimity of the first party touch his heart. He turns around and is reconciled (2 Cor. 5:20; cf. Rom. 5:10; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 115, 116).

3. Forgiveness. This word is related to the world of financial transactions. According to Jesus' parable of the two debtors, we are confronted with a debt that we can never repay. It is so immense that we can never hope to cope with it (Matt. 18:25-35). This debt represents our sin. In the midst of this hopeless condition, however, God freely cancels the debt through



"Through the sacrifice made in our behalf, sins may be perfectly forgiven. Our dependence is not in what man can do; it is in what God can do for man through Christ."

—Ellen G. White,
Selected Messages,
book 2, p. 32.

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GC vice president Calvin Rock is now chairing the 1888 Commemoration Committee. "We encourage church leaders to plan events which will lead members to better understand righteousness by faith, an issue which surfaced dramatically at the Minneapolis General Conference session in 1888," he says. Special programs are set for the Nairobi Annual Council in October and for NAD meetings in Minneapolis this November.

Jesus Christ. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). All of our accounts are fully paid up; we enjoy the status of those who have no more debts of sin, and who therefore forgive their debtors (Matt. 18:32, 33).

4. Adoption. This model is one of family relationships. We are in a wretched condition, orphans in a hostile world. We seek a home, a place of acceptance, a place to belong. We are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12, KJV). Then one day we are adopted. Our Father completes all formalities, paying the full adoption price and thus making us His own children. He welcomes us into His home and gives us all its rights and privileges. We receive the full status of His sons and daughters. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5, KJV; cf. Rom. 8:15; *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 250).

5. Sanctification. This word is usually employed by Christians to denote growth toward the divine ideal. In the Bible, however, it has a wider range of meaning, often signifying new status. Thus, it frequently means "dedication" or "consecration," as when Paul addresses his letters to the "sanctified ones" or "saints" (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1). He likewise writes to the Corinthians, "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified" (1 Cor. 6:11). The significance is drawn from the sanctuary setting. In Israel everything and everyone associated with the sanctuary had to be set apart from profane use and "consecrated" to God's service. So, in a world in revolt, God has those who belong to Him, who are set apart from the world and separated unto Him. Because they have accepted His grace through faith, they no longer belong to the prince of evil. They are stamped with God's own identifying stamp; they are His own property, which He holds dear amid the turmoil of this world (Phil. 2:15; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 49, 50).

These terms—justification, reconciliation, forgiveness, adoption, and sanctification—along with the concepts they entail, all point to our new status as Christians. They tell us how lofty are our privileges and how holy is the name with which we are named (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 6, p. 1070).

These terms also suggest responsibility. Because we are sons and daughters of the King of heaven, we are to live in a manner that befits our royal status. Having been acquitted in court because Jesus has taken our place, we will

show our gratitude by the way we live. Since we have become aware of the divine measures, even Christ's death on the cross, which led to our reconciliation, we can no longer take lightly a knowledge of God. With the crushing burden of our guilt rolled away, we will beware of coming under the bondage of debt again. Now that we are no longer alone and estranged, we will rejoice in our new family and seek to honor its name. Because God has called us apart from the world, we cannot maintain its lifestyle and pursue its goals and ambitions (2 Cor. 6:16-18).

We therefore have a new attitude toward sin and sinning. The lordship of sin has been broken in our lives; we are servants of Christ, yielding our members "as instruments of righteousness" (Rom. 6:12-19). We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13). God desires us to have victory over every sin: "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin" (1 John 2:1). But even if we slip and fall, our sins are not entirely like those of the unredeemed. The acts may seem identical from an external viewpoint, but the inner attitude toward them is radically different. The nonbeliever is at home in sin, unmindful of its consequences and of God, and often in deliberate rebellion against His law. When the believer sins, he hates his sin and sinning, because it was the cause of the death of his Saviour, and he does not want to crucify the Son of God again (1 John 3:4-10; Heb. 6:6; *The Great Controversy*, p. 508).

As long as we stand in the faith relationship with God, we retain our new status as His sons and daughters. Though at times we are overcome by temptation, we are not cast off, because we still have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous (1 John 2:1), who is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). We remain members of the divine family. It is not the occasional good deed or misdeed but the general trend of the life that indicates the direction in which we are moving—whether we have become rebels at heart again or are still standing in the relationship of faith (*Steps to Christ*, pp. 57, 58; *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 249).

The new status involves the new relationship. One cannot be divorced from the other. Having received God's gift of salvation, we now live by faith. We need to reach out to God day by day in loving trust, turning from pride in ourselves and relying entirely upon Him. The relationship will grow and strengthen; if not, it will wither and die. God would have the former, but He will not prevent the latter. He will not violate the element of human freedom in faith. If we allow the new relationship to die,

we can no longer claim the benefits of the new status of salvation (Heb. 6:4-8; John 15:4-8; *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 366).

Section 5. The New Life in Christ

The new status in Christ is inseparably related to new life. The gift of salvation, received by faith, makes us new persons. The divine, initiating love evokes within us a responding love, and we are changed progressively into the likeness of God. This change has several related dimensions.

1. New birth. No one can fully unravel the mystery of the new birth. The Holy Spirit works upon us, and we are "born again," or "regenerated" (John 3:4-8). There is a fundamental change in the direction of our life, our attitudes, our values. We retain our individuality, but now it is no longer self-centered; we have turned away from feeding our ego and toward serving God and man. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (verse 6).

2. Restoration. Under the power of the Spirit, the nearly obliterated image of God in us is in the process of continual restoration.

There is a restoration of the mental, physical, and spiritual person (1 Thess. 5:23). Instead of anxiety and inner conflict, we have "the peace of God, which passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). We have the abiding joy of the Lord, willing to do His will and good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), and living for His glory. We honor Him in our body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, presenting it as a "living sacrifice" in service (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; Rom. 12:1, 2).

There is a restoration of interpersonal relationships. We see all persons as God sees them, without pride of race, social class, sex, or religion: All are one in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28). We love others: we appreciate them for what they are; we seek to understand the circumstances that have molded their lives; we care for them with Christlike concern.

There is a restoration of relationships with the physical world. In sin the dominion over the earth given to our first parents (Gen. 1:26) is exploited; now responsible stewardship under Christ is restored. We regard the world's resources as God's gifts to us.

3. Growth. The new life is one of growth in Christ. The divine image in us is progressively restored as we, by beholding our Lord, are transformed by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). This process is commonly termed *sanctification*, although the Bible refers to it in various ways. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1, KJV). We thus may "grow up into him in all things" (Eph. 4:15, KJV; cf. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 233; *Testimo-*

nies, vol. 6, p. 350; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, pp. 1146, 1147).

Spiritual growth is reflected in our words and actions. These "works," however, are the result of our salvation and not the means of it. Through the indwelling Spirit we bear the fruit of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22, 23). This fruit is evidence that we have become sons and daughters of God (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 6, p. 1111).

The Christian life involves a new relationship to God's law. Instead of resenting divine instruction and seeking to evade it, we now delight to know God's will and to follow it (Ps. 40:8). We put our will on the side of God's will and shun every known sin; thus His law comes to fulfillment in our lives (Rom. 8:1-4; 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14).

The path of obedience leads us into ever-increasing understanding of God's will for us (Prov. 4:18). From its magnification in the life and teachings of Jesus, we see that it is far more than a set of rules that call for external compliance. We see that it searches even our thoughts and motives, and the desires and intents of the heart. Further, obedience is not merely the absence of transgression; it is a life of positive goodness. It centers in unstudied, loving activity in relation to every person whose life we touch. It is a life that, in its own sphere, mirrors the life of God in His, as "the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384; Matt. 5:20-48; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 76-78).

With this understanding, we cannot attempt to enumerate our obedience to God's law. Even if we were able to list deeds of evil that we have avoided and deeds of kindness that we have done, we could not count the secrets of our own hearts. Nor could we say that we have loved as we might have loved, as God loves.

The life of obedience is properly measured by the degree to which we have completely entrusted ourselves to Christ. We have laid aside trust in ourselves. The more Christlike we become, the less we will trust ourselves and the more we will realize how far short of the divine pattern we still are. But by faith we are clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ, which has met all the requirements of the law. "Our dependence is not in what man can do; it is in what God can do for man through Christ. When we surrender ourselves wholly to God and fully believe, the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. The conscience can be freed from condemnation. Through faith in His blood, all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus.



As director of the GC Biblical Research Institute, Dr. Richard Leshler helped coordinate the *Righteousness by Faith Consultation*, October 3-4, 1979. Drawing on the work of three earlier committees, Leshler wrote a summary paper "Perspectives on the Plan of Salvation." He was secretary of the 24-member editorial committee that drafted the final document in February, 1980.



Drs. Fritz Guy, Gerhard Hasel, and William G. Johnsson, three professors at the SDA Theological Seminary, worked together under extreme time pressures to produce the initial draft of "Dynamics of Salvation" on February 5 and 6, 1980. The editorial committee (referred to lightheartedly as "the 24 elders") and the rest of the Consultation members studied, modified, and approved it.

Thank God that we are not dealing with impossibilities. We may claim sanctification" (*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 32).

4. Grace and faith. We do not live the Christian life in a manner other than the way in which we first accepted salvation. Having accepted salvation through faith, we do not now trust in human accomplishment (Gal. 3:1-5). At every point in the new life, from its beginning to its ultimate glorification, we depend entirely on grace received through faith. "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him" (Col. 2:6; *Steps to Christ*, p. 69). By the Holy Spirit, God works in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13, KJV). It is the divine initiative which sustains our life in Christ, even as it brought it into being (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 6, p. 1071).

We are to nurture faith. Growth is not automatic; obedience is not mechanical. God wills to re-create us in His image, but we must be willing to foster our relation with Him (John 15:1-8). We are to feed on His Word, commune with Him in prayer, and tell what He has done for us (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 1 Thess. 5:17; Mark 5:19). Day by day we are to understand His will more fully, and experience new dimensions of commitment.

5. Assurance. The new life involves assurance (Heb. 10:19-22). Our salvation was secured by the most decisive divine act in history: Christ's death and resurrection. We know that He who has begun a good work in us will not leave us to struggle alone. We know that, so long as we put our trust in Him, He will hold us by a hand that will never let us go (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 182). He is able to complete His purposes in us, presenting us blameless before His presence with exceeding joy (Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 5:23). Already we have passed from death to life; already the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are sons and daughters of God (1 John 3:14; 5:18-20; Rom. 8:16). He gives us His peace in the midst of strife, and His strength sufficient for our every need (John 14:27; 2 Cor. 12:9). Not only has God in Christ made the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins, but we now have a great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, where He ever lives to make intercession for us and to send forth timely help from the throne of grace (Heb. 7:25; 4:16; *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 32, 33).

6. Praise. So we rejoice in the Lord (Ps. 20:5; Phil. 4:4). In every experience of life, in the darkness as well as the light, He is with us (Heb. 13:5). His yoke is easy; He gives us rest (Matt. 11:28-30). "Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith," we abound in thanksgiving (Col. 2:7). In everything He is working

for our good; "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:28, 37). The Sabbath is the celebration of His creation, His salvation, and His liberating presence. Indeed, every duty of life is consecrated to the Lord of love who has set us free. Through the faithful performance of even the humblest task and by lovingly sharing the good news of salvation, we seek to bring glory to our heavenly Father (Matt. 5:13-16; *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 77).

Section 6. The Consummation

"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2, 3). This is the goal of a sanctified life in Christ.

Now our devotion is flawed, our desires are confused. Now we know in part. Now we are beset by doubts in the midst of peace, disappointments in the midst of joy. Now our obedience is hampered by our frailty. One day, however, we shall be like Him. "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:20, 21, NASB).

Time reaches toward this climactic end. We live in the end-time. The prophetic time clock signaled that in 1844 the final phase of the great controversy between good and evil commenced with God's pre-Advent judgment. The people of God in all ages have looked forward to God's judgment (Rev. 5). They have waited expectantly for it as the time when God's people will be vindicated and the universe restored to a perfect, sinless state. So in this judgment hour (Rev. 14:6-12) we thank God for Christ our Advocate, through whom alone we may stand in the judgment, whose love motivates us to holy living, and who soon will deliver all things to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

The consummation is at hand. It is God's final initiative in His saving activity.

Thus the dynamics of salvation forever center in the righteousness of God and His Son. God's righteousness encompasses the sweep of our needs. It leads us from guilt to justification, from sinfulness to sanctification, from alienation to restoration and on to glorification. It brings about the decisive change from slavery to sin to new life in Christ, from bondage in fear to joy in the Spirit. Salvation is from the Lord; the Lord is our righteousness (Jonah 2:9)! □

*Unless otherwise noted, the Revised Standard Version is used throughout this document.