

# ***SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD***

## ***The humanity of Christ in the light of the everlasting gospel***

JACK SEQUEIRA

"The humanity of the Son of God," penned Ellen G. White, "is everything to us. . . . This is to be our study" (Selected Messages, 1:244). Unfortunately, Seventh-day Adventists are divided on that very subject.

What kind of human nature did Christ assume in order to be the *Saviour of the World*?

One group insists that Christ took our fallen sinful nature as we know it; the other teaches that the spiritual side of Christ's human nature was like that of Adam before the Fall. Into this ongoing discussion steps one of our church's foremost teachers on righteousness by faith, Pastor Jack Sequeira.

"I have written this book," Pastor Sequeira says, "not to add to the controversy that is now raging in regard to what kind of human nature Christ assumed at the Incarnation, nor to present arguments to win a debate. I have written to men and women who sincerely desire to know the truth as it is in Christ so that their Christian experience may be one of peace, joy, hope, and victory, thus glorifying their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

"Further, I have written this book for those who are seeking answers, facts, and explanations concerning this most important subject. What is the everlasting gospel God raised up the advent movement to proclaim to humanity in its global mission? Are we just another denomination? Or are we a prophetic people with a prophetic mission?"

*Saviour of the World* presents the human nature of Christ in the light of the full and complete gospel, the light that God gave the church in the 1888 message.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless indicated. Other versions of the Bible cited include: the Good News Bible (GNB), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), New International Version (NIV), and the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB).

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## Prologue

About the time that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was arising in mid-nineteenth century America, the doctrine of dispensationalism was also being formulated. Popularized by the Scofield Bible, this teaching went on to become widely accepted among certain segments of conservative Christianity in America and elsewhere.

Dispensationalism divides all of human history into a handful of distinct time periods, or "dispensations." One of these, the period from Moses to Christ, is called the dispensation of the Old Covenant. According to this teaching, the human race was placed under the authority of the law during the dispensation of the Old Covenant, but with the coming of Christ, the Old Covenant was abolished. The law, dispensationalists say, was nailed to the cross and replaced by the New Covenant of salvation by grace alone. Thus, they teach that the law is no longer binding on the Christian who lives under grace.

Our Adventist pioneers tried to counteract this false teaching, especially in view of the importance they placed on restoring the Sabbath truth of the fourth commandment. As a result, these early Adventists began to emphasize the law and the Christian's need for obedience to it. Eventually, this emphasis reached the point that the doctrine of justification by faith was largely forgotten and even excluded from the main thrust of Adventist teachings.

For example, from August 17 to December 19, 1874, Uriah Smith published a series of articles in the *Review and Herald* under the heading "Leading Doctrines of the Review." These "leading doctrines" included many points, but made no mention of justification by faith. Three years later, in 1877, James White and Uriah Smith conducted "The Bible Institute," a series of classes to prepare ministers for the work of evangelism. Again, justification by faith received no attention. The following year, 1878, Uriah Smith published, *Synopsis of Present Truth*. Its 336 pages had much to say about the law, but said nothing of justification by faith. No wonder Ellen White warned the church, "We have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain" (*Review and Herald*, March 3, 1890).

As a result of this overemphasis on the law, most Seventh-day Adventists became enmeshed in a subtle form of legalism—made up of salvation by grace *plus* works of the law, or by faith *plus* works—which robbed them of the peace and joy of salvation. In order to deliver us from this legalism, God, in His great mercy, brought to this church, in 1888, a most precious message of justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ. An integral part of this message was that Christ, in order to save humanity from sin's guilt and punishment, as well as from its power and slavery, assumed the self-same, sinful nature of the human race He came to redeem.

In 1976, the church acknowledged that the 1888 message had never been fully accepted, and that consequently the blessings of the latter rain and the loud cry, which were to accompany its reception, had never occurred (see the *Adventist Review*, May 27, 1976). This is also evident in the fact that many Adventists today still have not recovered from this subtle problem of legalism. Many are still depending, to a large degree, on their conduct to assure them a place in heaven.

Underscoring this problem recently, the Valuegenesis survey of Adventist young people revealed that the large majority do not feel secure about their own salvation. Steve Dailey reports "83 percent of Adventist young people agree with the statement that reads, 'To be saved I have to live by God's rules.' " Even more disturbing is the finding that 62 percent of Adventist youth believe that "the way to be accepted by God is to try sincerely to live a good life." And 58 percent believe that they can "earn salvation" directly through "personal

effort" (*Adventism for a New Generation*, 14,15). No wonder our young people are leaving the church in droves!

Clearly, our gracious Lord is once again endeavoring to restore the glorious truth of Christ our righteousness, a subject which will one day, said Ellen White, "swallow up every other truth" (*Review and Herald Extra*, December 23, 1890). Will this message be fully accepted this time? If so, it will accomplish what God had intended it to do some one hundred years ago; it will lighten the whole earth with Christ's glory (see Revelation 18:1), thus making it inexcusable for any to be lost.

In His prophecies of the last days, Jesus declared, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). Revelation 14:6-12 describes the fulfillment of this prophecy in the proclamation of the three angels' messages. I believe God has raised up the advent movement to give these messages to the world just before Jesus returns.

If the message God sent to this church one hundred years ago is to be received by His people today, if we are ever to proclaim the gospel in the three angels' messages to the world with power, then we will have to resolve the issue of Christ's human nature. Not simply in order to clear up some complicated theological point, but because it is through Christ's humanity that God totally redeemed our fallen human race from the sin problem and obtained for all humanity full and complete salvation. Ellen White expressed it this way: "The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study" (*Selected Messages*, 1:244).

To this end, this book is dedicated.

## Chapter One

# Salvation Defined

Sad to say, the Seventh-day Adventist Church today is polarized over the issue of the human nature of Christ. One camp affirms that Jesus came in a "sinless" nature—the spiritual nature Adam possessed before the Fall. Another group, what the present editor of *the Adventist Review* correctly referred to as a "more insistent group" *July 22, 1993*), maintains that Jesus came in the "fallen" nature humanity assumed after sin entered Eden.

One thing is clear: whatever consensus the church may reach on this vital issue will affect the gospel it proclaims to the world. William Johnsson, editor of *the Adventist Review*, has written, "The stakes in this debate are high. This isn't some abstract theological discussion—it's about our salvation; it's about the very gospel God calls us to proclaim" (*ibid.*).

Because the issue of Christ's human nature is so closely intertwined with implications for our salvation, it is imperative that we study one in the light of the other. That is the only way we will ever come to a correct *biblical* consensus on the human nature of Christ. When we deal with this subject as a separate topic, we miss the whole point of why He became a man, and we come to all kinds of false conclusions. That is why this book will attempt to analyze carefully what constitutes the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and how that gospel is linked with the nature of our Saviour's humanity.

I believe that Satan is fully aware that "the humanity of the Son of God is everything to us" (Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, 1:244). He knows that a correct understanding of Jesus' humanity will play a vital part in the proclamation of the everlasting gospel in these last days. That is why he has produced a counterfeit teaching within Adventism on this topic of Christ's humanity. He has done this in order to blind the eyes of God's people and turn them against the matchless charms of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, thus preventing the world from being lightened with God's glory.

What is Satan's counterfeit teaching on this subject? It is *not* the "sinless nature" view of Jesus' humanity—the view that teaches He took on the spiritual human nature of Adam before the Fall. Although I believe this view presents major problems when considered in the light of the full and complete gospel, I do not believe it is Satan's counterfeit. Rather, I believe, the "sinless nature" view of Jesus' humanity is a *reaction* to Satan's counterfeit. I believe Satan's counterfeit on this topic is the view of that "more insistent" group mentioned above—the view that Jesus assumed the "fallen" human nature of Adam after sin entered our world.

As taught by some of the major independent ministries in Adventism today, the post-Fall view of Jesus' human nature is placed in the setting of Christian living, rather than in the context of the good news of the gospel. It is this emphasis, I believe, that makes a satanic counterfeit out of the teaching that Jesus assumed fallen human nature. You see, when the emphasis of Christ's humanity is focused primarily on Jesus as our *Example*, rather than as our *Saviour*, legalism becomes the inevitable result. The reasoning runs this way: "Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, lived a sinless life in our sinful humanity. Therefore, God expects us, especially the last generation of Christians, to do the same in order to make it to heaven." Such a teaching of perfectionism has led many into despair and robbed them of the joy and peace Christ brought to the human race through His gospel.

Further, the legalism resulting from this wrong emphasis on the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity has produced wrong motivations for Christian living—fear of punishment or desire for reward. "Such religion," says Ellen White, "is worth nothing" (*Steps to Christ*, 44).

At the same time, this wrong emphasis has also turned many against the post-Fall view of the human nature of Christ. They see the fruits this view can produce when the emphasis is on Jesus as our *Example*—how it has robbed many sincere Adventists of the joy and peace of salvation—and consequently, they want nothing to do with it.

The legalism produced by this emphasis has also resulted in Pharisaism— a critical spirit that is unwilling to tolerate or respect anyone who does not see things in the same way I do. The result is fragmentation of the church, the very thing Satan delights in.

Yet, it is true, I believe, that Jesus took on our fallen human nature when He came to be one with us. According to the clear teaching of the New Testament, the primary reason Christ assumed our human nature was so that He could be the Saviour of the world (see Hebrews 2:14-17). Only *after* we have received Him as our Saviour, only *after* we have experienced the "peace with God" (Romans 5:1), that comes through justification by faith alone, does Christ present Himself to us as our *Example* (see 1 Peter 2:21; Philippians 2:5). His role as our Saviour must *always* precede His role as our *Example*. That is why this book will present the post-Fall view of the humanity of our Saviour in the light of the gospel, the truth as it is *in Christ*.

The experience of salvation is based on a foundation that has already been laid—the holy history of *Christ our righteousness* (see 1 Corinthians 3:11-13). Therefore, all truth pertaining to our salvation must be studied within the context of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is an extremely important point to keep in mind if we are to come to a correct understanding of the humanity of our Saviour—or, indeed, of any biblical truth.

Unless this approach to studying any doctrine of the church is kept in the forefront, the doctrine loses its significance.

When Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (see Mark 16:15), what message did He expect them to carry? What was the gospel they were to preach? The answer can be summed up in one sentence: *Christ and Him crucified*. This is what constitutes the good news of the gospel and the central message of the New Testament (see 1 Corinthians 1:17, 18; 2:1, 2). Unfortunately, there is a great deal of confusion within Adventism today as to what constitutes the gospel. So we must first deal with this problem—what the gospel actually is—before we can discuss why it was necessary for Christ to assume our sinful nature at the incarnation.

As a church, we have given the word *gospel* a very broad meaning. As a result, many Adventists are confused regarding the relationship between justification, which is the *imputed* righteousness of Christ, and sanctification, which is the *imparted* righteousness of Christ. The Bible describes three phases of salvation that are related yet distinct. These three phases of salvation are:

- the gospel
- the fruits of the gospel
- and the hope of the gospel.

I believe it is the failure to see the relationship and distinction between these three aspects of salvation that has produced the confusion in our midst regarding what the gospel actually is. As a result, for many Adventists, the gospel is not "good news," but good advice. The following is a brief description of these three phases of salvation, showing the relationships between them, as well as the distinctions.

### **The gospel**

This is the unconditional good news of the salvation Christ obtained for all humanity by virtue of His holy history—His birth, life, death, and resurrection (see Romans 5:6-10). It is referred to as the objective fact of salvation and is a finished or completed work to which we have made, and can make, no contribution whatsoever (see Romans 3:28, 5:18; Ephesians 2:8, 9). It is therefore, entirely the work of God. That is why the apostle Paul describes it as "the righteousness of God" (Romans 1:17; 3:21). It is this holy history of Christ—His birth, life, death, and resurrection—that constitutes the good news of the gospel and saves sinful human beings from sin now and in the judgment. When received by faith, the gospel becomes *justification by faith* or *righteousness by faith*. Each of the above four facts constituting the gospel message—the *birth*, *life*, *death*, and *resurrection* of Christ—is vital to our salvation. By Christ's *birth*, God united the sinless, divine nature of His Son to our corporate, sinful human nature that needed redeeming. This not only qualified Christ to be mankind's legal substitute and representative, but it also made our sinful human nature, which was spiritually dead, alive spiritually, in Christ (see Ephesians 2:5).

By His *life*, which He lived for thirty-three years in our corporate humanity, Christ fully and perfectly met the positive demands of the law on behalf of the human race He came to redeem. But because the human nature He assumed in the Incarnation was our corporate, sinful humanity that stood condemned and needed redeeming, His perfect obedience was not enough to save fallen humanity. Consequently, having satisfied the positive demands of the law by His obedience, Jesus took our corporate humanity to the cross and surrendered it to the wages of sin. In doing this, His *death* met the justice of the law on behalf of all mankind.



On the cross, the collective, or corporate, life of the fallen human race died forever in Christ. This death was the second death, the death that comes as a result of the just demands of the law. But the incredible good news of the gospel is that God so loved the world that He gave the eternal life of His only begotten Son to the human race. As a result, the human race was *resurrected* in Christ as a redeemed humanity (see John 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 John 5:11,12). That is why Paul declared to the Corinthian Christians, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This, in a nutshell, is what constitutes the fantastic good news of the gospel.

Every subjective experience in the believer's life is based on this finished work of Christ. So it is important, at this point, to note what Christ actually accomplished in this gospel. The Bible clearly teaches that the reason God sent His Son into this world was to save mankind from sin (see Matthew 1:21; John 1:29; 3:17). But sin, as we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, is a multiphased problem. All Adventists are aware that sin is "the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV), and that transgression of the law results in guilt and punishment. But the Scriptures also define sin as a state of being—a force or law or principle that resides in the flesh, our sinful human nature (see Romans 7:17, 20, 23). Furthermore, the corruption and physical infirmities of our humanity are also part and parcel of our sin problem from which we need to be redeemed as well (see Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:53-57).

By His birth, life, death, and resurrection, Christ redeemed fallen humanity from every aspect of our sin problem. Thus justification, sanctification, as well as glorification have already been accomplished *in Christ* for all mankind (see 1 Corinthians 6:11). The good news of the gospel is that Christ has obtained salvation full and complete for every human being! Through the incarnation, we who were spiritually dead were made spiritually alive *in Christ* (see Ephesians 2:5). Based on this fact, believers can experience the new birth (see Titus 3:5).

By His perfect life and sacrificial death, Christ rewrote mankind's history and changed our status from one of condemnation to one of justification to life (see Romans 5:18). Then, having reconciled the sinful human race to God on the cross (see Romans 5:10), Christ took this redeemed and glorified humanity to heaven, in His own self, to intercede for us at God's right hand as our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (see Romans 8:34; Ephesians 2:6; 1 John 2:1,2).

But since this holy history of Christ is God's supreme gift to mankind, and in view of the fact that God created man with a free will, the objective gospel Christ obtained for each person demands a human response (see John 3:16-18). Those who respond and accept the gospel message by faith, stand perfect *in Christ*—perfect in performance, in justice, as well as in nature. This is what justification by faith is all about—God's looking at the believer as he or she is in Christ. This is what entitles all believers to eternal life and heaven, both now and in the judgment. So while the gospel itself is unconditional good news to all human beings, *experiencing* that salvation is conditional and will be enjoyed only by those who believe (see Mark 16:15, 16).

When we understand what the objective gospel actually is and what it has accomplished, it becomes clear that unless Christ totally assumed our sinful human nature that needed redeeming, none of this could be realized. As the church fathers in the first five centuries of the Christian era often stated: "That which was not assumed by Christ could not be redeemed or healed."

Those who teach that Christ's human nature was like the spiritual nature of Adam before the Fall, must present a Saviour who redeemed humanity only from *the guilt and punishment* of sin, since, in this view, that is what He bore vicariously on the cross. Such a Saviour may satisfy our egocentric desires to be saved and give us assurance, but He gives

no hope to Christians who sincerely desire to live the victorious life and who are struggling with the law of sin in their bodies.

If Christ in His earthly mission did not save humanity from every aspect of sin, He ceases to be our complete Saviour. The gospel is robbed of its full power of salvation. Here is where the 1888 message of righteousness by faith, that most precious message God gave this church over a hundred years ago, parts company with the evangelical gospel, the so-called new theology.

Of course, some Adventists who take the pre-Fall view of the human nature of Christ do believe and teach that the flesh and its cravings for sin can be totally overcome through the power of the indwelling Spirit. But if the Holy Spirit does this in the believer, apart from the finished work of Christ—the gospel—then we are making the Spirit a coredeemer with Christ. Scripture nowhere presents such an idea; the Holy Spirit's part in the plan of salvation is to *communicate* to us the good news of the gospel, that is, to make real in our experience what Christ has already obtained for us through His birth, life, death, and resurrection (see John 16:8-11; 2 Corinthians 13:14). We must also keep in mind that Christ had to fully identify Himself with the human race He came to redeem in order for Him to lawfully be our substitute and representative in His work of redemption, as well as to be our faithful and merciful High Priest. By uniting, in Mary's womb, His own divine life with our corporate sinful human life that needed redeeming—through the operation of the Holy Spirit—Christ became the second Adam (in Hebrew, *adam* means "mankind"), and earned the right to be the Saviour of the world. Then by His life, death, and resurrection, He totally and completely redeemed mankind from every aspect of sin. This is the full and glorious gospel that I believe God raised up the Advent movement to proclaim to the whole world before the end can come.

### **The Fruits of the Gospel**

The second phase of salvation is known as "the fruits of the gospel." This is a subjective experience produced by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer who has accepted the gospel by faith, experienced the new birth, and who is walking in the Spirit (see Galatians 5:16, 22, 23). In saving us from sin, Christ not only saved us from death to life, from condemnation to justification, but He also saved us from sinful living to a life of good works (see Titus 2:11-14; 3:8; John 14:12). The gospel is not only the means of our justification and acceptance into heaven; it is also the basis of holy living and good works here and now (see Ephesians 2:8-10).

Scripture refers to this holy living, or fruit bearing, as *sanctification*. Sanctification, like justification, also comes to us by faith. These fruits do not contribute one iota towards our justification, or entitlement to heaven. Instead, they witness to the salvation we already possess in Christ by faith and, therefore, indicate that we are fit for heaven. Although sanctification is certainly good news, we must never equate it with the gospel. Sanctification is *the fruit of the gospel*. Failure to distinguish justification from sanctification has produced the spiritual insecurity common among so many Adventists. We need to keep in mind that the believer's justification is based on a *finished* work, the gospel, but sanctification, as a subjective experience, is an ongoing process that will continue as long as life will last.

Through the gospel, the believer stands perfect *in Christ*; this is the basis of his or her assurance. Good works—sanctification—are not the basis of assurance, but they prove that the believer's faith is genuine and not a sham (see James 2:14-26). A genuine justification by faith must express itself in behavior. Therefore, it will *always* produce good works (see Matthew 13:23) even though these works may not be apparent to the believer himself (see Matthew 25:37-39).



That is why the New Testament teaches that we are justified by faith *alone* (see Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8, 9), but that we will be judged and rewarded by our works (see Matthew 7:21; 25:34-40; John 5:28-30; Romans 2:5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The works are not the means, but the evidence, of justification by faith (see James 2:20-22). Justification is entirely God's doing. It is a finished work which we receive by faith alone. Sanctification, on the other hand, involves our human cooperation putting faith into practice; it is an on-going process of "walking in the Spirit," that continues throughout the lifetime.

According to the New Testament, faith is more than a mental assent to truth. It involves a heartfelt obedience to the gospel, that is, the good news of what God did for our corporate humanity in Christ (see Romans 6:17; 1:5; Galatians 5:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-8; 1 Peter 4:17). Such obedience of faith means a total surrender of the will to the truth as it is in Christ. Thus, in justification by faith, we acknowledge and identify with Christ's holy life as well as with His death to sin. This is the true meaning of baptism (see Romans 6:3-11). Without this faith obedience, justification by faith becomes merely a sham (see James 2:14-26). Christianity, unlike any other religion, involves more than just following a set of do's and don't's; it involves actually participating in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:16-18).

All Christians must confess, with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). This is what it means to put faith into practice.

### **The Hope of the Gospel**

This third phase of salvation refers to the ultimate reality of the gospel in our lives—the reality which will be experienced by all believers at the second coming of Christ when "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53). The Bible calls this experience *glorification*. The experience of conversion and the process of sanctification do bring about a change to the Christian's *character*, but not one iota of change to the flesh, the believer's *nature*. The nature remains sinful throughout the Christian's earthly existence or until the second advent whichever occurs first. That is why Paul can speak about Christians groaning and waiting patiently for the redemption of their bodies (see Romans 8:22-24; Philippians 3:20, 21).

We said earlier that the experience of sanctification must not be equated with the gospel, rather it is the *fruit* of the gospel. Likewise, the glorification believers will experience at the second advent must not be equated with the gospel, rather it is the *hope* of the gospel. The gospel is the good news of salvation for *all* mankind, but the second advent is not good news for everyone. It is the blessed hope only for believers who are rejoicing in the gospel and who will be glorified when Jesus appears (see Titus 2:13). For unbelievers, it is the great day of God's wrath (see Revelation 6:12-17).

That is why we have to make a distinction between the gospel as an *objective truth* for all humanity and salvation as a *subjective experience* for those only who respond in faith. The gospel is the unconditional good news of salvation for every person; salvation, as an actual experience is conditional, limited to those who respond in faith.

In fact, the New Testament makes it clear that all three *experiences* of salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—are conditional. *Faith* (see John 3:16) is the condition for experiencing the "justification to life" that Christ obtained for all by His obedience (see Romans 5:18). "The just shall live by faith" (Hebrews 10:38).

*Walking in the Spirit* (see Galatians 5:16; Romans 13:14) is the condition for experiencing the sanctified life Christ accomplished for sinful humanity in His holy history (see 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11).

And finally, *our faith must endure unto the end* (see Matthew 10:22; Hebrews 10:38, 39). This is the condition for receiving a glorified body like that with which Christ was resurrected and which He took to heaven.

As long as we stand under the umbrella of justification by faith, we have full assurance of salvation. But the *experience* of salvation is subject to these conditions. That is why the Bible nowhere teaches "once saved means always saved." This is a heresy resulting from the false doctrine of double predestination—the idea that God has predetermined some to be saved and others to be lost. If so, this false doctrine teaches that those whom He has predestined to be saved cannot be lost because God is sovereign; what He chooses will happen.

When we look at these three phases of salvation that the Holy Spirit communicates, we can rejoice in the fact that God left no stone unturned when He sent His beloved Son to redeem all humanity from sin. Viewing this perfect and complete salvation, Christ could cry on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). This is the context in which we must examine the question of the human nature Christ assumed at the incarnation in order to be the Saviour of the world.

### Key Points in Chapter One Salvation Defined

1. The issue of Christ's human nature is closely intertwined with implications for our salvation. Whatever view we take on the human nature of Christ will affect the gospel we proclaim to the world.

2. Because Satan knows the importance of understanding Christ's human nature, he has produced a counterfeit teaching on this topic within Advent-ism.

3. This counterfeit is *not* the teaching that Christ took on sinless human nature—the nature Adam had before the fall, although such a view poses serious problems in terms of the full gospel.

4. Satan's counterfeit teaching on this issue is to place the correct view of Christ's humanity—the idea that He assumed fallen human nature—within the context of Christ as our Example, rather than in the context of Christ as our Saviour.

5. The New Testament clearly teaches that the primary reason Christ assumed our human nature was so that He could be the Saviour of the world (see Hebrews 2:14-17). Only *after* we have received Him as our Saviour, does Christ present Himself to us as our Example.

6. Emphasizing the humanity of Christ as our *Example* leads to legalism, perfectionism, and despair. Emphasizing the humanity of Christ as our *Saviour* leads to peace, joy, assurance of salvation, and victory.

7. The Bible describes three related, but distinct, phases of salvation: (1) the gospel; (2) the fruits of the gospel; and (3) the hope of the gospel. The failure to understand the relationship and distinction between these three phases of salvation has produced confusion regarding what the gospel actually is.

a. The gospel is the unconditional good news of the salvation Christ obtained for all humanity by virtue of His holy history—His birth, life, death, and resurrection. It is a finished or completed work to which we have made, and can make, no contribution whatsoever (see Romans 3:28, 5:18; Ephesians 2:8, 9).

b. The "fruits of the gospel," or sanctification, is a subjective experience produced by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer who has accepted the gospel by faith, experienced the new birth, and who is walking in the Spirit (see Galatians 5:16, 22, 23). Good works are not the basis of assurance, but they prove that the believer's faith is genuine (see James 2:14-26). A genuine justification by faith must express itself in behavior.

- c. The hope of the gospel refers to glorification, the ultimate reality of the gospel in our lives, which will be experienced by all believers at the second coming of Christ.
8. As an experience, all three phases of salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—are conditional.
- a. Faith (see John 3:16) is the condition for experiencing the "justification to life" that Christ obtained for all by His obedience (see Romans 5:18).
  - b. Walking in the Spirit (see Galatians 5:16; Romans 13:14) is the condition for experiencing the sanctified life Christ accomplished for sinful humanity in His holy history (see 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11).
  - c. Our faith must endure unto the end (see Matthew 10:22; Hebrews 10:38, 39). This is the condition for receiving a glorified body like that with which Christ was resurrected and which He took to heaven.
9. Unless Christ totally assumed our sinful human nature that needed redeeming, He could not completely redeem mankind from every aspect of sin.

## *Chapter Two*

### **That "Most Precious Message"**

Ever since the birth of the Christian church, and even long before that, Satan has been at work to nullify the gospel in one way or another. It matters little to him how this is done. If too much emphasis is given to one aspect of the gospel, or too little to another, the result is the same—the gospel is distorted and made of no effect.

For example, those who teach that the spiritual human nature of Christ was like Adam's sinless nature before the Fall have a tendency to stress the doctrine of justification by faith, and thus are in danger of undermining sanctification. They are sincerely attempting to restore the peace and joy of salvation which God's remnant has lost through an over-emphasis on the law and good works. But the practical result, in many cases, has been a lowering of the standards.

On the other hand, the "more insistent group" who hold to the view that in order to be our Example, Christ assumed the fallen, sinful nature with which all of us are born, generally emphasize sanctification by faith. The danger here is that they will undermine justification. They are sincerely trying to counteract the "new theology" (although it isn't really new at all), and return the church to "historic Adventism." But unfortunately, this group is preaching a subtle form of legalism akin to the legalistic errors into which the Judiazers side-tracked the Galatian churches.

It's my conviction that only through a correct understanding of the humanity of Christ, are we able to present the full truth of the gospel that God raised the advent movement to proclaim to the world. Ellen White described the 1888 message as "justification by faith ... its fruit is unto holiness," thus keeping both justification and sanctification in the forefront (*Review & Herald*, Sept. 3, 1889). To emphasize justification by faith without a balancing emphasis on sanctification, or vice versa, is to misrepresent "that most precious message" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, 91).

What can correct these unbalanced views of salvation and unite both camps within Adventism? Again, I believe the answer lies in a correct understanding of Christ's humanity and its relationship to the gospel.

Both parties agree that the eternal Son of God became man for our salvation. But they disagree about the kind of human nature He assumed. Those who take the pre-Fall view do so in order to uphold the sinlessness of Christ. "If Jesus shared our moral weakness, our bent toward sin," they argue, "He would be a sinner and need a Saviour Himself." Because they believe the very *state* in which humanity finds itself since the Fall comes under divine condemnation, they cannot agree that Jesus shared that state. Incidentally, this is the popular view of the Roman Catholic Church and most Protestant churches today.

The proponents of the post-Fall view assert that Christ assumed our fallen, sinful nature as we know it, the very nature that is in need of redeeming. In spite of this, however, He lived a perfect, sinless life and redeemed that fallen human nature at the cross. Unfortunately, many who hold this correct view go on to undermine the sin problem by insisting that our sinful nature does not make us sinners, that it is not a condemned nature until it consents to sin. They insist on this in order to counteract the argument of those taking the pre-Fall view, who believe that our sinful nature is what makes us sinners and that therefore it stands under God's condemnation.

The Bible, however, presents sin as a multi-phased problem and Christ as our Saviour from all aspects of the problem. The Bible uses a variety of words to define sin—some twelve different terms in the Hebrew Old Testament and five in the Greek New Testament. Each word emphasizes a different aspect of the sin problem. Jesus came to redeem humanity not just from one or two dimensions of sin, but from every one of them. And the *only* way I believe He could do that was to assume our sinful human nature that stood condemned and which needed redeeming. By His perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection, Christ fully rescued humanity from every aspect of sin. Thus He rose from the dead with a human nature that was redeemed from sin in every way as well. It was this glorified human nature that He took to heaven to represent us as our great High Priest.

If we are to fully appreciate this complete redemption *in Christ*, it is vital that we fully understand what constitutes the sin problem.

According to Scripture, a deliberate transgression against God's law is sin, as is the choice to live a life of lawlessness (see Romans 4:15; 1 John 3:4). Sad to say, many Adventists, especially those with a legalistic leaning, limit sin only to this act or choice. For them, sin is "the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV).

This limited definition of sin is often based on Ellen White's statement: "Our only definition of sin is that given in the word of God; it is 'the transgression of the law.'" (*The Great Controversy*, 493). Unfortunately, yet typically, those who use this quotation to support a limited definition of sin fail to read her full statement. The full statement reads: "Our only definition of sin is that given in the word of God; it is 'the transgression of the law;' it is the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government."

Clearly, Ellen White expands the definition of sin to include not only specific transgressions against God's law, but everything that contradicts God's selfless *agape* love. And this includes our very natures which are ruled by the law of sin or self, for they, too, are against the spirit of God's law and, therefore, are sin (see Romans 8:7).

Obviously, Scripture does not limit sin only to an act. This was the mistake the Jewish nation made, and we must not repeat it. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it clear that a mental consent to a temptation is sin (see Matthew 5:27, 28; see also Romans 7:7; James 1:14; Proverbs 24:9). And according to the apostle Paul, unbelief or a deliberate rejection of a biblical truth is also sin (see Romans 14:23; see also John 3:18; 16:8, 9). Other definitions of sin mentioned in Scripture include neglect of known duties or

opportunities (see James 4:17; 2:14; Luke 12:47; Matthew 23:23; 25:43-46), and doing the wrong thing or going against God's will out of ignorance (see Leviticus 5:17-19; Luke 12:28; 1 Timothy 1:13).

Even beyond this, our sinful natures, which we inherit from Adam at birth, make us sinners (see Romans 5:19, 20; Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Philippians 3:20, 21). Paul explains this in Romans chapter 7 by exposing his readers to the fact that the principle of sin resides in each of us, a force dwelling in our sinful natures which makes holy living, in and of ourselves, impossible. He actually refers to this as "sin that dwells in me" (Romans 7:17; see also verses 20-23; Matthew 23:27, 28; Luke 11:39; John 8:34). This presence of indwelling sin in each one of us is why Paul declared to the Ephesian believers that all humanity "were *by nature* the children of wrath" (2:3, emphasis supplied).

But if this is true, how could Christ assume our sinful nature that stands condemned—and yet remain sinless? This is a valid question and I will try to give a satisfactory answer later in this book (see chapters 12 and 15). At this point, my concern is that we honestly face the sin problem. We need to see its full extent so that we can appreciate the total solution God has provided. And that solution is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The view we hold regarding Christ's humanity will have a definite effect on the gospel we preach as well as on our own Christian experience and witness. For example, the so-called "evangelical gospel" proclaimed by some Adventist pastors, equates righteousness by faith only with justification. According to this gospel, Christ, in His sinless human nature, redeemed us only legally by His perfect life and vicarious death. Thus, the good news of the gospel is limited solely to a forensic righteousness that is imputed to the one who believes in Christ. In this view, sanctification is important, but it is not part of the good news of the gospel. It is not part of what Christ accomplished for us in His earthly mission; rather it is the believer's attempt to live a holy life, aided by the Holy Spirit and motivated by love for God's gift of justification.

But the precious message of righteousness by faith God brought to Adventism in 1888 went far beyond a merely legal or forensic redemption. It taught that in Christ's doing and dying, humanity was saved totally from sin—not just from its guilt and punishment. In Christ's holy history, *justification*, *sanctification*, as well as *glorification* were fully accomplished for fallen humanity (see 1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11). This is the full gospel God raised the Advent movement to proclaim. According to this gospel, *all* Christian experience, including victory over sin, is based on Christ's finished work, the objective facts of the gospel. All three aspects of salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—constitute the good news of the gospel which we receive by faith alone (see Romans 1:17).

The emphasis of the 1888 message was that Christ assumed our sinful human nature, and that in this nature He both conquered and condemned the principle of sin (love of self) by His doing and dying. What He did, thus gives to all justified believers everlasting hope to live as He did and to overcome temptation and the flesh as He did (see Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16; Revelation 3:21).

This complete gospel not only offers sinful human beings peace with God and full assurance of heaven now and in the judgment, but it also offers us total victory over the tyranny and power of the sinful flesh. A word of caution however! Such victorious living in the life of the believer has no merits and consequently makes *no* contribution to one's justification. Instead, it manifests the power of the gospel by revealing the self-sacrificing *agape* love of God in fallen human nature. This is the true fulfilling of the law (see Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13,14). This is the mystery of godliness, "God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).

All human attempts to solve the moral degeneracy of our present selfish and wicked world have failed miserably. Therefore, reproducing Christ's character of unconditional, selfless love in the lives of Christians becomes the most important evidence of the gospel's



power to save us from sin (see John 13:34, 35). Our present wicked, skeptical world desperately needs such a demonstration in the lives of Christians before the end comes. We live in an age dominated by the scientific method; people today demand clear evidence. Before they will accept the gospel's claim to be "the power of God to salvation" (Romans 1:16) they must see the evidence that it is an actual fact, not a mere theory. This is what Jesus was talking about when He said, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world *as a witness* to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14, emphasis supplied).

This is why Ellen White identified the 1888 message of righteousness by faith with the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. The ultimate goal of this gospel message is to ripen the harvest (see Revelation 14:15) and produce a people who have the faith of Jesus and who demonstrate this fact by their selfless love for their fellow men. Such an experience is the true keeping of God's commandments (see Revelation 14:12; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13, 14).

In the 1888 message, the Lord actually gave His people the beginning of the latter rain and the loud cry. If they had fully received it, this message

would have lightened the earth with God's glory, culminating in the second advent. Such a gospel is far different from the popular evangelical gospel which satisfies only our egocentric concern to qualify for heaven.

At the Fall, not only did all humanity come under the condemnation of death in Adam (see Romans 5:12, 18), but our very nature was corrupted, sold into slavery to sin (see 2 Peter 2:19; John 8:34; Romans 3:9-12; 7:14). Consequently, since the Fall it has become impossible, apart from God's grace, for human beings to live holy sinless lives (John 8:34, 36; Romans 7:14-25). And therefore, "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified" (Romans 3:20; see Galatians 2:16).

But what the law could not accomplish because of weakened human nature, God accomplished in Christ. Christ took upon His sinless, divine nature our fallen, sinful human nature, and legally saved all humanity by His holy history, His perfect life, and sacrificial death (see Romans 5:18). But even more, He also liberated fallen humanity from its slavery to sin by condemning the law of sin in the flesh (see Romans 8:2-4; John 8:32-36). Not only justification, but also sanctification is an integral part of the good news of salvation (see 1 Corinthians 6:11).

The good news of the true and complete gospel not only offers sinful humans a legal or forensic justification in Christ, but also total sanctification and glorification. Justification by faith not only makes effective in the life of the believer the legal justification Christ obtained for all humanity, but it also makes it possible for the believer to experience Christ's sanctified life and manifest His selfless love in this present evil world. And if that faith continues to the end, it will culminate in glorification at the second advent. "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Romans 6:22; see 1 John 3:8-11).

This was the essence of the 1888 message. This is the gospel, that "most precious message," that I believe God raised up the advent movement to proclaim to all nations as a witness before Christ returns to execute judgment. It is vital that we understand it and experience it. As long as we argue and attack each other over the issue of the human nature of Christ, God's purpose for this church will remain unfulfilled, and many will continue to go down into Christless graves.



## Key Points in Chapter Two That "Most Precious Moment"

1. Sin is a multiphased problem. Jesus came to redeem humanity not just from one or two dimensions of sin, but from every aspect of it. And the *only* way He could do that was to assume our sinful human nature that stood condemned and which needed redeeming.

2. Sin includes not only specific transgressions against God's law, but everything that contradicts God's selfless *agape* love. This includes our very natures which are ruled by the law of sin or self (see Romans 8:7).

3. The view we hold regarding Christ's humanity will have a definite effect on the gospel we preach.

a. Those who teach that the spiritual human nature of Christ was like Adam's sinless nature before the Fall have a tendency to stress the doctrine of justification by faith, and thus are in danger of undermining sanctification. The practical result, in many cases, has been a lowering of the standards.

b. Those who hold to the view that in order to be our Example, Christ assumed the fallen, sinful nature with which all of us are born, generally emphasize sanctification by faith. The danger here is that they will undermine justification and fall into a subtle form of legalism.

c. A correct understanding of Christ's humanity and its relationship to the gospel will correct these unbalanced views of the gospel and unite both camps within Adventism.

4. The full truth of the gospel that God raised the Advent movement to proclaim to the world keeps both justification and sanctification in the forefront.

5. The precious message of righteousness by faith God brought to Adventism in 1888 went beyond a mere legal redemption. It taught that in Christ's doing and dying, humanity was saved totally from sin—not just from its guilt and punishment, but from its power as well.

a. In Christ's holy history, justification, sanctification, and glorification were fully accomplished for fallen humanity (see 1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11).

b. All Christian experience, including victory over sin, is based on Christ's finished work—the objective facts of the gospel. All three aspects of salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—constitute the good news of the gospel which we receive by faith alone (see Romans 1:17).

6. The complete gospel not only offers sinful human beings peace with God and full assurance of heaven now and in the judgment, but it also offers us total victory over the tyranny and power of the sinful flesh.

a. Such victorious living in the life of the believer has no merits and consequently makes no contribution to one's justification.

b. Reproducing Christ's character of unconditional, selfless love in the lives of Christians becomes the most important evidence of the gospel's power to save us from sin (see John 13:34, 35).

c. The ultimate goal of the everlasting gospel message is to ripen the harvest (see Revelation 14:15) and produce a people who have the faith of Jesus and who demonstrate that fact by their selfless love for their fellow men.

7. Christ took upon His sinless, divine nature our fallen, sinful human nature, and legally saved all humanity by His holy history—his perfect life and sacrificial death (see Romans 5:18). Even more, He liberated fallen humanity from its slavery to sin by condemning the law of sin in the flesh (see Romans 8:2-4; John 8:32-36).

## Chapter Three

# Christ, Our Sympathetic High Priest

The fact that Jesus assumed human nature primarily in order to be our complete Saviour argues that the human nature He assumed was our sinful human nature that needed redeeming. Only when we fully identify Christ's humanity with the humanity of those He came to redeem, can we truly present the full gospel and Adventism's unique doctrine of Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

One of the Bible's major insights about Christ, especially in the book of Hebrews, is that He is our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. In Hebrews chapter 4, the writer (who I believe was the apostle Paul), urges his readers to enter God's "rest," a term he uses to define righteousness by faith, and of which, he says, the Sabbath is a sign. This is the context in which the apostle introduces Christ as our great High Priest (see Hebrews 4:14-16).

Our faith in Christ as our righteousness, as well as our assurance of salvation, must not be limited only to what He did during His earthly mission some 2,000 years ago. Our faith must also encompass Him as our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. His earthly mission—His birth, life, death, and resurrection—obtained for all humanity a righteousness that fully qualifies us for heaven, now and in the judgment, a salvation that is full and complete (see Romans 5:18). But in His heavenly ministry, as our great High Priest, Christ intercedes and defends that righteousness for all those who by faith have received His righteousness, who have entered into God's rest and are standing under the umbrella of justification by faith alone (see Romans 4:25; 8:34; 1 John 2:1). Based on these two facts—Christ as our perfect Saviour, and Christ as our great High Priest—we can have full confidence in our salvation.

Now, the word *priest* means one who represents the congregation before God. And the first thing we need to know about our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, is that He is able to represent us before the Father because He knows our human condition. It is not something He has heard about; it is something He knows by personal experience as a man. He was "in all points tempted as *we are*" (Hebrews 4:15, emphasis supplied)—not as God, but in the humanity He assumed at the incarnation, a humanity which was identical to our humanity (see Hebrews 2:16-18). He was tempted in all things as we are, but, of course, He never sinned.

The main point the apostle is making is that Christ, as our great High Priest, can sympathize with our *weakness*, and therefore we must not be afraid to approach Him as our representative. In other words, there is no barrier between us sinners and our sinless High Priest, because He fully understands our struggles with sinful flesh. He "became flesh" in the incarnation (John 1:14), and "was in all points tempted as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). But more than that, He is also able to help us in our need, since "in the likeness of sinful flesh," He "condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

We sinners need mercy because we have failed God so often. We also need strength because without it we cannot live the Christian life. As our great High Priest, Christ is able to supply both these needs. This is what is so wonderful about Jesus: not only is He our perfect Saviour, but He is also our faithful, sympathetic, and merciful High Priest!

Having established this truth in Hebrews 4:14-16, Paul goes on, in chapter 5:1-4, to point out four requirements that the Torah, the Book of the Law, stipulates for one who would be considered for the office of high priest. Then in verses 5-10, he shows how Christ fully meets each of these four qualifications (although he does not do so in the same order as he presents them in verses 1-4).

He also shows that although Christ meets all four requirements, there is a contrast between the Levitical priests who served in the earthly sanctuary, and Christ who serves as our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. His point is that Christ's priestly ministry in heaven is vastly superior to the earthly priesthood.

Let's look at these four qualifications for those who would be high priest, and see how the apostle presents Jesus as fully meeting each one.

1. *He must be chosen from "among men" (Hebrews 5:1) to represent them before God.* In the Old Testament priesthood, the high priest could not be an outsider; he had to belong to and be one with those he represented. This was also true of Christ as our great High Priest. "In all things He had to be made like His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17). If in any way Christ did not identify Himself with our humanity, that is, with our sinful nature as we know it, if in any way Christ did not have to battle with indwelling sin and be an over-comer, then He is immediately disqualified to be our great High Priest.

If we insist that Christ was like us only in the physical sense of being prone to fatigue, hunger, aging, etc., but that He was unlike us in His spiritual nature, we really are disqualifying Him to be our "merciful and faithful High Priest" (Hebrews 2:17) who can "sympathize with our weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15). The only difference the apostle makes in the book of Hebrews between Christ's human nature and our own is that Christ never sinned. It is in this sense that He is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26).

In His human nature, He was one with us. But because of His total victory over our sinful flesh, He is not only our Saviour, but also our perfect representative or High Priest.

2. *He must be able to "have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is beset by weakness" (Hebrews 5:2).* In the Old Testament, the high priest shared the same human weaknesses of those he represented. Thus, he was not indifferent to moral lapses, yet neither was he harsh with the people. And by *weakness* the writer of Hebrews meant more than just physical weaknesses, as some insist. The word *weakness* in Greek denotes both physical and moral frailty.

Hebrews 5:7 brings out the reality of Christ's identification with the weaknesses of our struggling, sinful humanity. "In the days of His flesh, . . . He... offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears." It's true this is primarily a description of Gethsemane, something none of us humans has experienced. But the apostle is also referring to Jesus' whole life on earth as shown by the phrase, "in the days [plural] of His flesh."

Verses 8 and 9 also clearly refer to Jesus' entire experience as a human on this earth. Christ was the Son of God, but as a man who became one with us, "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (verse 8).

What did Paul mean by this, and in what sense did Christ suffer?

Since Christ never yielded to a single temptation, His human nature was deprived of the sinful desires it wanted to experience (see 1 Peter 4:1). His victory over the flesh meant that His flesh suffered as a result—something that He would not have experienced if His spiritual human nature had been like that of Adam before the Fall.

3. *He must be able to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people he represents (Hebrews 5:3).* In the case of the earthly high priests, they had to offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people. Since Christ never sinned (see Hebrews 4:15), He had no sacrifices to offer for Himself, but He did bear our sins on the cross, because He bore us there (see 1 Peter 2:24).

Paul points out in Hebrews 9 and 10 that the animal sacrifices, which the earthly priests offered repeatedly, had no power to forgive sins or provide salvation. Salvation came in reality only when Christ offered the one sacrifice of Himself for all time (see Hebrews 10:14), ascended into the heavenly sanctuary, and sat down at the right hand of God to

intercede for us as our great High Priest. He will continue to do this until His enemies (and ours) are completely defeated.

4. *He must be appointed or "called by God" (Hebrews 5:4), not self-appointed.* The office of high priest in the Old Testament was only by divine appointment; it was not a self-appointed position. Paul quotes Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4 to prove that Christ "did not glorify Himself to become High Priest" (Hebrews 5:5), but was called and appointed to this position by the Father.

What a wonderful Redeemer we have in Christ! Not only is He our perfect and complete Saviour, but He is also our sympathetic and merciful High Priest. Because He fully identified Himself with our sinful humanity, apart from sinning, there is no area of our battle against the sin problem He does not understand from His own personal experience. He can, therefore, fully sympathize with our struggles against the flesh.

But even more than that, there is no area of our sin problem He has not combatted, overcome, and redeemed us from. Speaking of our slavery to sin, Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. . . . Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:32, 36). No wonder the apostle Paul could say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). As our High Priest, Jesus is not only able to "sympathize with our weakness" (Hebrews 4:15), but He is also "able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). Thank God for that!

As Christians who have put our whole trust in Christ and His righteousness, we can come boldly to the throne of grace with full assurance, knowing full well that God is able to save us to the uttermost because in His gift, Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, Redeemer, and High Priest, we have everything necessary for our salvation. No longer do we need to have the law of sin reign over us. Yes, the law of sin may remain in our natures until Christ comes, but we need no longer be slaves to it, for He who stepped into our shoes has set us free (see 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18).

It is, therefore, my sincere prayer that the material presented in the rest of this book will help to clarify the issue of the human nature of Christ in the light of the full gospel. I believe God has raised up the advent movement with a global mission to proclaim the everlasting gospel, a message that will one day lighten this earth with His glory.

### **Key Points in Chapter Three Christ, Our Sympathetic High Priest**

1. The fact that Jesus assumed human nature primarily in order to be our complete Saviour argues that the human nature He assumed was our sinful human nature that needed redeeming.

2. Our faith in Christ must not be limited only to what He did during His earthly mission some 2,000 years ago. Our faith must also encompass Him as our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

3. As our great High Priest, Jesus Christ is able to represent us before the Father because He knows our human condition. He knows it by personal experience as a man. He was "in all points tempted as we are" (Hebrews 4:15), but of course, He never sinned.

4. Hebrews chapter 5 points out four requirements that the Torah, the Book of the Law, lays down for those who would serve in the office of high priest—and then shows how Jesus Christ fully meets each of these four requirements.

a. A high priest must be chosen from "among men" (Hebrews 5:1) to represent them before God. In the Old Testament, the high priest had to belong to and be one with those he represented. As our great High Priest, Christ "in all things. . . had to be made like His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17). If in any way Christ did not identify Himself with our humanity, that is, with our sinful nature as we know it, He would be immediately disqualified to be our great High Priest.

b. A high priest must be able to "have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is beset by weakness" (Hebrews 5:2). The high priest in the Old Testament shared the same human weaknesses of those he represented. Christ, too, identified in reality with the weaknesses of our struggling, sinful humanity. "In the days of His flesh, . . . He . . . offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). Christ was the Son of God, but as a man who became one with us, "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (verse 8).

c. A high priest must be able to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people he represents. The Old Testament high priest had to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people. Christ never sinned (see Hebrews 4:15), so He had no sacrifices to offer for Himself. But He did bear our sins on the cross, because He bore us there (see 1 Peter 2:24).

d. A high priest must be appointed by God, not self-appointed. "Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest" (Hebrews 5:5), but was called and appointed to this position by the Father.

5. Christ is not only our perfect and complete Saviour, but He is also our sympathetic and merciful High Priest. Because He fully identified Himself with our sinful humanity, apart from sinning, there is no area of our battle against the sin problem He does not understand from His own personal experience.

6. Christ can, therefore, fully sympathize with our struggles against the flesh. We can come boldly to His throne of grace with full assurance, knowing full well that God is able to save us to the uttermost because in His gift to us—Jesus Christ—we have everything necessary for our salvation.

## Chapter Four

# The Truth As It Is in Christ

In an earlier chapter we saw that faith is more than a mere mental assent to the gospel message; it is a heart obedience to the truth as it is in Christ. The importance of this truth as it is "in Christ" cannot be overemphasized because it is the very heart of the gospel message. The *ground* of our salvation is God's *agape* love which is unconditional, self-emptying, and everlasting (see Romans 5:5-10; Ephesians 2:1-6; Titus 3:3-5; Jeremiah 31:3). But the *means* of our salvation is the truth as it is *in Christ*. We must understand what it means to be "in Christ" if we are to fully understand the gospel message. Our faith must be rooted and grounded "in Christ." Otherwise, our subjective experience of salvation will be marred.

God sent Jesus to be the gospel, the good news of salvation. But He appointed the apostle Paul to be the one to most clearly explain this good news (see Romans 1:1; Ephesians 3:8,9). Paul's letters make up almost half of the New Testament, and when we examine them carefully, we find this key phrase, "*in Christ*," running through them all. In fact, if we were to remove this phrase, "in Christ," from Paul's writings, there would be very little left of his exposition of the gospel! It is the central theme of his theology. Altogether, this phrase, in its different forms, appears more than 160 times in the New Testament. Sometimes we find the idea expressed in slightly different wording such as, "in Christ Jesus," or "in Him," or "by Him," or "through Him," or "in the Beloved," or "together with Him," etc. These all mean the same thing.



We have absolutely nothing as Christians except what we have received "in Christ." Everything we enjoy, experience, and hope for as believers—the peace that comes through justification by faith, the victorious life we experience through the process of sanctification, and the blessed hope of glorification we look forward to—is ours always and *only* "in Christ." Outside of Him we have nothing but sin, condemnation, and death.

Jesus Himself first introduced the truth behind this phrase, when He told His disciples, "Abide in Me" John 15:4). Abiding "in Christ" is the foundation of the gospel experience, so unless we understand what Jesus and Paul are talking about, we will never fully understand and appreciate the gospel.

Let's examine, then, what the New Testament means when it talks about being "in Christ." Just as Nicodemus had a difficult time understanding what Jesus meant by the new birth, so we, today, have difficulty understanding what Paul means by the phrase, "in Christ." Especially is this a difficult concept for the western mind that is accustomed to thinking in terms of the individual. When we read what Paul wrote about being "in Christ," we begin wondering, "How can I, as an individual, be *in* someone else? Even more, how can I, who was born in the twentieth century, be *in Christ* who lived almost 2,000 years ago?" The idea makes absolutely no sense to our western way of thinking. As a result, we ignore or misinterpret this expression "in Christ" and therefore miss the very core of the gospel message. Yet our whole understanding of the gospel hinges on understanding the significance of these two vital words.

When we read what Paul has written to believers in the New Testament, he seems to be saying that we Christian believers were actually together with Christ when He died, was buried, and rose to life. That somehow, "in Christ," we did those things too when He did them and that we are now actually sitting with Him in heavenly places (see Ephesians 2:5, 6).

What does Paul mean?

For Paul, the "in Christ" concept is based on the biblical idea that the whole human race shares a common life and therefore is considered to be a single unit. We call this idea, "solidarity" or "corporate oneness." What does the Bible teach about solidarity. Let's look at two texts.

The first is Romans 9:12. Speaking of the unborn twins of Rebekah, Isaac's wife, Paul quotes Genesis 25:23, "It was said to her [Rebekah], 'The older [child] shall serve the younger.' " At face value, it sounds as if God is predicting that Esau, the older twin, would serve Jacob, the younger. But the fact is, this never happened.

However, when we examine the original statement in Genesis from which Paul is quoting, we discover that God had something else in mind. In Genesis, God actually says to Rebekah, "Two *nations* are in your womb ... And the older shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23, emphasis supplied). He is saying that the *descendants* of Esau will serve the descendants of Jacob. This actually happened.

God sees not only Esau and Jacob in their mother's womb as individuals; He sees two *nations*—the descendants who would come from them. All those thousands of people who would trace their lineage back to Jacob and Esau are considered to be one with their ancestor. This is a "solidarity statement," and it is typical of the way the Bible views a whole group of people—or indeed, the whole human race—as being one single corporate unit.

The second text is Hebrews 7:7-10. Here the writer of Hebrews uses the solidarity concept to prove that Christ, as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, is superior to the Levitical priests of the earthly sanctuary. To us, today, his argument seems hard to follow. But remember, he is writing to Jewish Christians of New Testament times who would be familiar with the idea of "solidarity," so his argument based on that concept would be convincing to them.



Here is the reasoning behind his argument: Christ, he says, is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, not Levi. After all, when Christ was born, He was not born into the tribe of Levi. So from that standpoint, He isn't even eligible to be a priest. That is why the writer of Hebrews goes to some lengths to establish that Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, not Levi (see Hebrews 7:12-17).

Then he goes on to argue that Levi and the Levitical priests are inferior to Melchizedek and the priests of his order. How does he prove that? By showing that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek thus indicating that Levi acknowledged Melchizedek to be the greater.

But wait a minute! How could Levi have paid tithes to Melchizedek when Levi wasn't even alive until long after Melchizedek's time? The two individuals didn't even live at the same time!

For the writer of Hebrews and his first century Jewish readers this was no problem. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (see Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7:4-10), and Levi, Abraham's great grandson, was "in Abraham's loins" although still unborn when this happened. Given the idea of solidarity, the writer and his original readers would have no difficulty understanding that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek "in Abraham." Levi could be said to do what actually was done by his great grandfather Abraham because they were really a single unit.

According to the plain teaching of Scripture, God created all men in one man, Adam. That is why when Genesis 2:7 says that God "breathed into his [Adam's] nostrils the breath of life," the original Hebrew word for *life* is in the plural form. This means that when God created Adam, He was creating not just one man, but the whole human race in that one man (see Acts 17:26). In fact, in Hebrew, the very word, *Adam*, means "mankind."

So, when Satan caused Adam to fall, sin and condemnation were not confined only to Adam himself; sin and condemnation entered the whole human race (see Romans 5:12, 18; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22). Adam had no children when he fell; all his posterity was still "*in him*" and therefore was implicated in his sin, just as Levi was implicated in Abraham's tithe paying.

Of course, this does not make us *guilty* of Adam's sin. That is the heresy of the doctrine of Original Sin. Guilt, in a legal sense, involves personal volition or responsibility, and God does not hold us guilty for Adam's sin in which we had no choice. We do, however, suffer its consequences since Adam passed on to his children a life that had already sinned and, as a result, stood condemned to death (see Romans 5:12-18; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22).

But the wonderful good news of the gospel is that just as all are condemned to death in one man, Adam, so God has redeemed all in one man, Jesus Christ. How did He do it? By using the same principle of solidarity. At the incarnation God united, in the womb of Mary, the divine life of His Son with the collective life of the human race that stood condemned and which needed redeeming. In this way Christ became the "second Adam," or the "last Adam." In reality, He became us, and we became one "in Him."

Although this corporate oneness with Christ in His humanity did not save us, it did legally qualify Christ to be our substitute and representative, just as the first Adam was our representative when he fell. Hence, by His perfect life, which met the positive demands of the law, and His sacrificial death, which met the justice of the law, Christ re-wrote our human history. And in His resurrection, He changed humanity's status from one of condemnation to one of justification (see Romans 4:25; 5:18). This is what constitutes the fantastic good news of the gospel (see 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2:5,6).

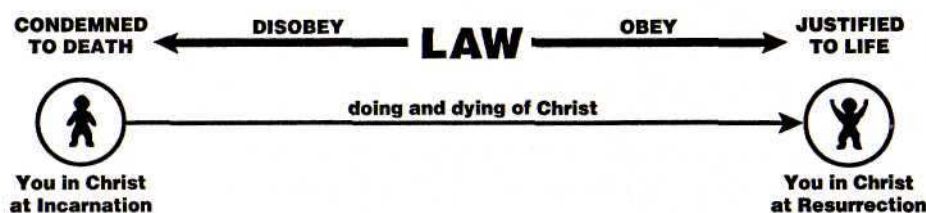
As our substitute, Christ had to meet the full demands of the law—both its positive demands, as well as its demands for justice—in order to save sinful humanity. By doing this, He obtained legal justification for all mankind and became the Saviour of the world (see Romans 5:18; 10:4; Titus 2:11; 1 John 2:2). This is God's "indescribable gift" to every human being (see 2 Corinthians 9:15).

Unfortunately, many have great difficulty understanding how this "in Christ" idea can be possible. They have no difficulty accepting the fact that all humans were created in one man, Adam. But how could God collect and put all humans into Christ 4,000 years after creation? This may seem impossible from a human standpoint, but let's not forget that "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Really, we shouldn't ask, "How can this be possible?" We should ask, "What does Scripture teach?" After all, the Bible declares many things to be true that our human minds cannot fathom, yet we accept them by faith. A good example is the uni-personality of Christ, the fact He could be at the same time fully God and fully man in one person. After struggling with this truth for some 300 years, the Christian church finally decided, at the council of Chalcedon, to accept this mystery as a fact.

Likewise with the "in Christ" motif. We may not be able to understand how all the aspects of solidarity may be possible, yet because Scripture clearly teaches it, we accept it by faith. The major issue is not whether we understand this truth; the issue is: Does Scripture present the "in Christ" motif as a fact, and if so, are we willing to accept this biblical truth?

The following diagram illustrates how God rewrote our human history in the God-man, Jesus Christ, thus changing our legal status from one of *condemnation* to one of *justification*. The circle represents Christ's divinity, while the human figure in the circle represents the corporate humanity that Christ assumed at the incarnation in order to be our substitute and the Saviour of the world.



By His perfect life, Jesus, the God-man, met the positive demands of the law. This was symbolized in the sanctuary service by the spotless lamb, the lamb without blemish. By His death, Jesus met the justice of the law, signified in the sanctuary service by the sacrificed lamb consumed by the divine fire on the bronze altar. In the resurrection, Jesus raised the redeemed human race—glorified and cleansed of its sinful nature. Thus, through His earthly mission, Christ became forever the righteousness of every child of Adam. And this righteousness is made effective individually when it is received by faith (see Acts 13:39; Romans 1:16, 17; 9:30-33; Philippians 3:7-

The "in Christ" understanding of the gospel also solves an ethical problem. Many non-Christians have difficulty understanding how God can justify and give eternal life to sinners who believe in Jesus Christ. They see the following ethical problem: God's law condemns sinners to death (see Galatians 3:10). Yet, God gives these condemned sinners life on the basis of what *someone else* (Jesus Christ) has done (see Romans 4:5)! Many see this as a make-believe righteousness and an ethical problem.

The answer lies in the idea of "in Christ." The humanity Christ assumed really was our corporate humanity that needed redeeming. Because we were "in Him," through our corporate humanity, we lived the perfect life He lived—"in Him." We died the death He died—"in Him." What He did, we did—"in Him." This is no make-believe righteousness. "Christ is the end [fulfillment or termination] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4; see also Galatians 3:13). That is why faith involves a heart

obedience to the gospel, because the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is *our* corporate history. If that history is to be effective in us, God's supreme gift to mankind, the gospel, demands our surrender to what God did with us in Christ. The objective good news of the gospel is a truth that applies to all humanity, but only those who believe will actually be saved experientially (see John 3:16).

Understood in this context, true justification by faith prevents what many conservative Adventists are afraid of—namely antinomianism, or what is commonly referred to as "cheap grace." Cheap grace is the idea that Christ did it all, and I don't have to do anything—the idea that I can live as I please, and as long as I believe in Christ, salvation is mine.

In contrast to cheap grace, true righteousness by faith means that we identify ourselves with Christ and Him crucified. And since Christ died on the cross "to sin," we likewise consider ourselves "dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:10,11). This is true obedience in faith to the gospel, and it is the true significance of baptism (see Romans 6:3-11; compare also E. G. White, *SDA Bible Commentary*, 6:1075, "Many Buried Alive").

Christian faith is more than merely a mental assent to truth; it is participation in Christ's life and death. This is what Jesus meant when He said to the Jews, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). This is the true righteousness by faith message God brought to His people some one hundred years ago. And when the church, as a corporate body, accepts this truth and surrenders to it, God will take over and lighten this earth with His glory.

Furthermore, when the gospel is proclaimed in the light of the "in Christ" motif, there is no excuse for any person to be lost. According to the New Testament, a person is not lost because he or she is a sinner, but because of *unbelief*—willful, persistent, and ultimate rejection of the truth as it is in Christ (see Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:18, 36; Hebrews 2:3; 10:26-29). This is why Christ will not come to take believers to heaven until every person who has reached the age of accountability hears this good news of the gospel and makes a choice, either for Christ or against Him (see Matthew 24:14).

Since the "in Christ" motif constitutes the very heart of the gospel message, let's note what some Bible students—Adventists and others—have said about this idea:

As human nature was present in Adam, when by his representative sin he ruined his posterity; so was human nature present in Christ our Lord---Our nature is his own. He carried it with him through life to death. He made it do and bear that which was utterly beyond its native strength (H. P. Liddon, *University Sermons*, 225, 226).

If Christ took our nature upon him, as we believe, by an act of love, it was not that of one but of all. He was not one man only among many men, but in him all humanity was gathered up. And thus now, as at all time, mankind are, so to speak organically united with him. His acts are in a true sense our acts, so far as we realize the union. His death is our death, his resurrection our resurrection (Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, 39).

When God's Son took on flesh, he truly and bodily took on, out of pure grace, our being, our nature, ourselves. This was the eternal counsel of the triune God. Now we are in him. Where he is, there we are too, in the incarnation, on the cross, and in his resurrection. We belong to him because we are in him (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 35).

Jesus Christ was the representative of humanity, and humanity centered in him, and when he took flesh, he took humanity... This is the most glorious truth in Christianity. It is Christianity itself; it is the very core and life and heart of Christianity (W. W. Prescott, *1895 G. C. Bulletin*, 24).

But I can envision some readers saying, "What about Ellen White? Does she have anything to say about the truth as it is in Christ?"

My response to this is a most definite yes! She has much to say about this glorious truth. Normally, I am not impressed when someone gives me pages of Ellen White quotations which they have collected on any given subject. The reason is simple: one can make Ellen White say almost anything by stringing together a list of carefully selected quotations, many of which are taken out of context. However, for those who would like statements by Ellen White on this subject of what Christ accomplished for the human race in His earthly mission, please consider the following:

By His obedience to all the commandments of God, Christ wrought out a redemption for men. This was not done by going out of Himself to another, but by taking humanity into Himself. Thus Christ gave to humanity an existence out of Himself. To bring humanity into Christ, to bring the fallen race into oneness with divinity, is the work of redemption (*Selected Messages*, 1:250, 251).

Blessed is the soul who can say... I am lost in Adam, but restored in Christ (*Sons and Daughters of God*, 120).

For every human being Christ has paid the election price. No one need be lost. All have been redeemed. To those who receive Christ as a personal Saviour will be given power to become sons and daughters of God (*Letter 53*, 1904).

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes, we are healed. This penalty Christ bore for the sins of the transgressor, He has borne the punishment for every man (*Manuscript 77*, 1899).

Christ came to the earth and made an offering of such value that He redeemed the race (*Letter 67*, 1902).

With His own blood He has signed the emancipation papers of the race (*Ministry of Healing*, 90).

No sin can be committed by man for which satisfaction has not been met on Calvary (*Selected Messages*, 1:343).

The world does not acknowledge that, at an infinite cost Christ has purchased the human race. They do not acknowledge that by creation and by redemption, He holds a just claim to every human being. But as the redeemer of the fallen race, He has been given the deed of possession, which entitles Him to claim them as His property (*Letter 136*, 1902).

As Christ bore the sins of every transgressor so the sinner who will not believe in Christ, . . . who rejects the light that comes to him, and refuses to respect and

obey the commandments of God, will bear the penalty of his transgression (*Manuscript 133, 1897*).

The fact that all people are resurrected, some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation (see John 5:28,29), indicates that Jesus actually redeemed the entire human race. If any are lost eternally, it will be because they have willfully and ultimately rejected the salvation God has already obtained for them in Christ (see John 3:18, 36). That is why "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations," before the end of the world will take place (Matthew 24:14.)

In concluding this important chapter, let's consider some of the glorious blessings we sinful humans receive as a result of this truth as it is in Christ, which we receive by faith alone:

1. *Peace with God.* This is the first and immediate blessing we receive through justification by faith in Christ (see Romans 5:1). This means there is "no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). In view of this fact, Christians can come boldly to God, with full assurance of salvation, since God no longer looks at them on the basis of their personal performance, but on the basis of what Christ has done for them in His holy history (see Hebrews 10:19-22).

2. *Assurance of forgiven sins.* When we accept by faith that we are "in Christ," we can *know* that all our sins have been forgiven. We can *know* that we therefore stand perfect before God in Christ—without spot or blemish, now and in the judgment (see Ephesians 1:3-7; 1 John 2:1, 2). As Ellen White admonishes us, "We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ our Substitute" (*Selected Messages*, 2:32,33).

3. *New birth.* Justification by faith also brings about the new birth. This means the old is gone and the new has come (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). This exchange of our condemned life for Christ's righteous life is the result of our faith obedience to the gospel message. It gives us not only the title to heaven, but also makes holy living possible through the power of the indwelling Spirit (see Romans 8:9-11; Galatians 5:16). As Paul expressed it: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24, 25). This is what it means to be standing in grace and rejoicing in the hope of glory (see Romans 5:2; 1 Corinthians 15:9, 10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

4. *Adoption as children of God.* Because of our faith union with Christ, one of the great privileges we receive is that we become the adopted children of God (see Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:4, 5; 1 John 3:1, 2). This means we become "joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17) and will reign with Him a thousand years during the millennium—and then throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity in the earth made new (see Revelation 20:6; 22:5)! No wonder Paul speaks of this privilege as "the exceeding riches of His [God's] grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

All these blessings come to us because "He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin [singular, meaning what we are totally by nature and performance] for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). But this wonderful truth as it is in Christ, becomes an impossibility if in any way we make a distinction between Christ's humanity and the humanity He came to redeem. As our substitute, Christ was one with us, since He was the second Adam. That is why He was called Immanuel, God with us (see Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

And since we were in Him by God's act, we can legally claim by faith all that He accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection. That's why Jesus declared that those who believe in God who sent Him, have already passed from death to life (see John 5:24). This is the incredible good news of justification by faith, the fruit of which is holiness of living.



Some, however, raise this objection to the glorious idea of "in Christ." "If we actually obeyed the law in Christ," they say, "isn't this just a subtle way of saying that we actually saved ourselves? Isn't this really a form of self-righteousness that deprives Christ of the glory He deserves?"

The answer is NO! A thousand times NO! No credit can go to us, since we weren't responsible and played no part in the actual obedience of Christ. God does not hold us responsible or guilty for Adam's sin in which we personally had no choice. In the same way, we get no personal credit for the obedience of Christ, in which we had no choice.

However, just as Adam's sin condemned all humanity to death because we were in him when he disobeyed God's command in the Garden of Eden, in the same way, we can legally claim the righteousness of Christ by faith, since God united His Son to our corporate humanity in the incarnation in order that He might be our Substitute, Representative, and Surety in His work of redemption. But all the glory must go to Christ—and Christ alone.

This is the context—the truth as it is "in Christ,"—in which we must examine the human nature of Christ. This is the only way to come to a correct and meaningful understanding of the subject.

In the first place, Christ's humanity reconciled us to God (see 2 Corinthians 5:18), since it was in our corporate humanity that He assumed in the Incarnation and in which He fully satisfied the demands of the law—both its positive demands as well as its justice (see Romans 10:4).

Second, what Christ accomplished in His humanity, through the power of the indwelling Spirit, becomes an example for us who have obeyed this gospel by faith and experienced the new birth. The same power that overcame and condemned sin in Christ's flesh, which was our very flesh, is now made available to us (see Romans 8:2-4).

This is the precious message God brought to the Adventist Church more than a hundred years ago. Unfortunately, it was rejected to a large degree. But thank God, He has not forsaken us. In His great mercy, God is trying His best to restore this message, in its fullness, if we will only be willing to put aside our preconceived ideas and come together in the spirit of humility and Christian love to study that which is everything to us—the humanity of the Son of God.

### **Key Points in Chapter Four The Truth As It Is in Christ**

1. Faith is more than a mere mental assent to the gospel message; it is a heart obedience to the truth as it is in Christ.

2. We find a key phrase running through all Paul's New Testament letters. That phrase is "*in Christ*." It is the central theme of Paul's theology.

3. Paul seems to be saying that Christian believers were actually together with Christ when He died, was buried, and rose to life. He seems to be saying that somehow, "in Christ," we believers did those things too when Christ did them (see Ephesians 2:5, 6).

4. For Paul, the "in Christ" concept is based on the biblical idea that the whole human race shares a common life and therefore is considered to be a single unit. We call this idea, "solidarity," or "corporate oneness."

a. In Romans 9:12, Paul, speaking of the unborn twins of Isaac's wife, Rebekah, quotes Genesis 25:23 that the older child (Esau) would serve the younger child (Jacob). This never happened. Genesis 25:23 actually says Rebekah would give birth to two *nations* and that the *descendants* of Esau would serve the *descendants* of Jacob. All the thousands of people who would trace their lineage back to Jacob and Esau are considered to be one with their ancestor.

b. Hebrews 7:7-10 argues that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek thus proving that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to that of Levi. But how could Levi have paid



tithes to Melchizedek when Levi wasn't even alive until long after Melchizedek's time? For first-century Jewish readers, this was no problem. *Abraham* paid tithes to Melchizedek (see Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7:4-10), and Levi, Abraham's great-grandson, was "in Abraham's loins." Levi could be said to do what actually was done by his great-grandfather Abraham because they were really a single unit.

5. According to the Bible, God was not just creating one man when He created Adam, but the whole human race (see Acts 17:26).

6. When Satan caused Adam to fall, sin and condemnation were not confined only to Adam himself; sin and condemnation entered the whole human race (see Romans 5:12, 18; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22).

a. This does not make us *guilty* of Adam's sin. That idea is the heresy of the doctrine of Original Sin. But we do suffer the consequences of Adam's sin because he passed on to his children a life that had already sinned and, as a result, stood condemned to death (see Romans 5:12-18; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22).

b. The wonderful good news of the gospel is that just as all were condemned to death in one man, Adam, so God has redeemed all in one man, Jesus Christ.

7. At the incarnation, God united in Mary's womb the divine life of His Son with the collective life of the human race that stood condemned and which needed redeeming. In this way, Christ became the "second Adam." In reality, He became us, and we became one "in Him."

8. By His perfect life, which met the positive demands of the law, and by His sacrificial death, which met the justice of the law, Christ rewrote our human history. And in His resurrection, He changed humanity's status from one of condemnation to one of justification (see Romans 4:25; 5:18).

9. The "in Christ" understanding of the gospel also solves the following ethical problem: God's law condemns sinners to death. Yet God gives life to those condemned sinners on the basis of what *someone else* (Jesus Christ) has done. Many see this as a make-believe righteousness—and an ethical problem. The answer lies in the idea of "in Christ." The humanity Christ assumed was really our corporate humanity that needed redeeming. Because we were "in Him," through our corporate humanity, we lived the perfect life He lived—"in Him." We died the death He died—"in Him." What He did, we did—"in Him." This is no make-believe righteousness.

10. Although all humanity has been corporately redeemed "in Christ," if that history is to be effective in us individually, God's supreme gift to mankind—the gospel—demands our surrender to what God did with us in Christ. The objective good news of the gospel is a truth that applies to all humanity, but only those who believe will actually be saved experientially (see John 3:16).

11. In this context, true justification by faith prevents antinomianism, or "cheap grace"—the idea that as long as I believe in Christ, salvation is mine, and I can live as I please. Christian faith is more than merely a mental assent to truth; it is participation in Christ's life and death.

12. As a result of this truth as it is "in Christ," we receive the following blessings by faith alone: (a) Peace with God (see Romans 5:1); (b) Assurance of forgiven sins (see Ephesians 1:3-7; 1 John 2:1, 2); (c) New birth (see 2 Corinthians 5:17); (d) Adoption as children of God (see Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:4, 5; 1 John 3:1,2).

13. This wonderful truth of the gospel as it is "in Christ" becomes an impossibility if in any way we make a distinction between Christ's humanity and the humanity He came to redeem.

## *Chapter Five*

# **The Two Humanities—1**

One of the apostle Paul's clearest teachings on the truth as it is in Christ is the comparison and contrast he draws between Adam and Christ. He calls them the first Adam and the last Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:45). The first Adam, Paul says, is the origin of sinful humanity, while Christ, the last Adam, is the origin of a new humanity redeemed out of the old (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul's idea of the two Adams is the most important evidence in the New Testament that Christ's humanity was similar to the corporate sinful humanity He came to redeem. It is also closely linked to the subject we examined in the previous chapter—the "in Christ" motif.

The whole force of Paul's parallel of all humanity being "in Adam" and all humanity being "in Christ" depends on the idea of human solidarity. The word "adam" appears some 510 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Only occasionally is this word used to mean the individual man God created in Eden; in the majority of cases it possesses a collective significance or the idea of corporate oneness.

Two of the key passages in Paul's writings that deal with the concept of the two Adam's, the source of two different humanities for each person, are Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22. In neither of these passages does Paul compare Adam with Christ on the basis of identical human natures. When Paul declares in Romans 5:14 that Adam "is a type of Him who was to come [Christ]," he does not mean Christ, as the second Adam, would come in the same human nature as the first Adam. To come to such a conclusion, as some Adventists do, is to take the statement out of context.

When Paul says that Adam is a "type" or "pattern" of Christ, the second Adam, he means that just as what Adam did affected all humanity, likewise what Christ did also affected all humanity. "By the one man's offense many died, much more . . . the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many" (Romans 5:15). This is the only similarity Paul makes between Adam and Christ in any of his writings. In 1 Corinthians he says: "For since by man [Adam] came death, by Man [Christ] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22). In each case, what the one man did affected all humanity.

Romans 5:12-21 is without doubt one of the most important passages in all of Scripture explaining the truth of the two Adams. Here Paul expounds how God can justify sinners while still maintaining His integrity to His law that condemns them to death. As Swedish theologian, Anders Nygren, states in his commentary on Romans 5:12-21:

The best place to begin for an inclusive view of the meaning of Romans, is the fifth chapter's comparison of Adam and Christ. This gives the key to the whole epistle.... When we attain to its height, all that precedes and all that follows, spread out before us in one inclusive view; we see how part fits directly into part, how Paul's thought moves from step to step under its inherent compulsion.

Unfortunately, this passage is also one of the most controversial and difficult to understand in all of Scripture. As a result, it is also one of the most neglected passages when it comes to the preaching of the Word. Most pastors are reluctant to preach on it, or if they do, they just skim over it. But we cannot afford to do this, if we are to truly understand the good news of the gospel, as well as the true human nature Christ assumed at the incarnation.

The reason so many have difficulty understanding Paul's reasoning in this passage is because the western mind, as mentioned in the last chapter, thinks in terms of the individual, while the people of New Testament times thought in terms of solidarity or corporate oneness. In trying to understand this passage we need to put ourselves in the shoes of those to whom Paul was writing. Then what he is saying will make sense.

The fact is God deals with humanity on the basis of solidarity both in terms of the cause of our condemnation, as well as of the source of our justification. In fact, Scripture clearly teaches three clear facts regarding the human race:

*Fact No. 1.* All men and women were created in one man, that is, in Adam. According to Acts 17:26, the human race is the multiplication of one man's life, the corporate life of Adam.

*Fact No. 2.* All men and women were also made sinners in that one man, Adam. This the apostle Paul clearly states in Romans 5:19, "By one man's disobedience many [the entire human race] were made sinners [past historic tense]."

*Fact No. 3.* Likewise, all men and women were redeemed and reconciled to God in one man, Jesus Christ. "God was in Christ reconciling the world [the human race] to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). This is the wonderful unconditional good news of the gospel.

Yes, we *accept* salvation as individuals, but humanity was condemned corporately *in Adam* and redeemed corporately *in Christ*. This is what Romans 5:12-21 is all about.

Let's look carefully at Romans 5:11, 12. Here is what Paul says in these two verses:

We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Notice Paul states three separate, but related, facts in verse 12:

1. Sin entered the world, or the human race, through one man.
2. This one sin resulted in that one man, Adam, being condemned to death.
3. Because Adam's one sin entered the human race, his death sentence naturally spread to all human beings as well.

Notice, too, that Paul begins verse 12 with the word "therefore," implying a link with verse 11. Why did he do that?

Because, he is pointing out to his readers that, just as Adam is the cause of our sin problem and therefore responsible for it, in the same way Christ is the means of our salvation, or reconciliation, and therefore deserves all the credit when it comes to our redemption. As the apostle told the Corinthian Christians, "He who glories [boasts], let him glory [boast] in the Lord [that is, in what the Lord has done]" (1 Corinthians 1:31; 2 Corinthians 10:17).

Notice, too, the word "world" in verse 12, "through one man sin entered the world." By this Paul means the human race. The word "world" has the same meaning here as in John 3:16, "God so loved the world." It means *mankind* or *all humanity*.

Paul continues by saying that after sin entered the human race through Adam, so also did "death through sin." God made it absolutely clear to our first parents that "in the day that you eat of it [the forbidden fruit] you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). And because Adam's sin, which resulted in his death, entered the whole world, naturally, Adam's death sentence also spread to all mankind.

In saying this, Paul is fully aware that his readers would shout "*Unfair!* Why should all men die for the mistake of one?"

Surely, a just and holy God could not allow such an unethical thing to happen? But the fact is He does, and He does so, Paul says at the end of Romans 5:12, "because all sinned."

It is this last statement that has caused much controversy in the history of the Christian church. Notice that verse 12 is not a complete sentence; it simply ends dangling without clearly completing the thought. So the question is: Did Paul mean all die because all have sinned *like* Adam sinned, that is, because each person has chosen to sin just as Adam chose to sin? Or did Paul mean all die because all sinned *in* Adam, that is, the whole human race participated corporately in Adam's sin? The answer we give to this question is crucial, because it will dramatically affect our interpretation of this whole passage.

Why is this so? Remember, Paul is using Adam as a "type" or "pattern" of Christ (see verse 14). So what we say of Adam, we will end up saying of Christ as well. If we insist all die because we all have chosen to sin *like* Adam did, then to be fair to Paul's analogy, or parallelism, we have to conclude that all live because all choose to obey *like* Christ did. Not only does this make Paul teach salvation by works of the law—something he fought against in all his writings—but the fact is, none of us have obeyed *like* Christ, which is certainly not good news.

I believe what Paul meant was that all die because all sinned *in* Adam. The reason Paul didn't complete this last phrase in verse 12 by adding the words *in Adam* is because he goes on to explain what he means in verses 13 and 14. In addition, the context of the whole passage makes his meaning clear. Let me give you four reasons why I believe the apostle is saying that all mankind die because all have sinned *in* Adam and not *like* Adam.

1. In Greek, the verb, all *sinned*, is in the aorist tense. In Greek grammar this is a past historic tense, used to describe something that took place once in the past at a particular point in time. Had Paul meant that all die because they personally choose to sin *like* Adam chose to sin, he would have used the present tense, rather than a past historic tense.

2. In the next two verses, verses 13 and 14, the apostle proves that his point is that we all die because we all have sinned *in* Adam, not *like* Adam. In these verses, Paul says that the human race that lived from Adam to Moses were certainly sinning, that is, missing the mark. But God could not legally condemn them for breaking His law because He had not yet posted the law, or explicitly spelled it out, until the time of Moses. Nevertheless, these people who lived from Adam to Moses were dying, even though their sins (missing the mark) were unlike the deliberate transgression of Adam, who willfully broke a specific command God gave him. Therefore, the only reason they could be dying is because Adam's sin had "entered the world" and as a result, his death sentence had also spread to the whole world, the whole human race.

3. This interpretation of verses 13 and 14 is further supported by what Paul says in verses 15 to 18. There, the apostle states emphatically that we are judged, condemned, and die because of Adam's sin, with no mention of our personal sins being the cause of our death.

4. If we insist that all die because of their personal sins which are *like* Adam's sin, we have to conclude that all live because of their personal obedience which is *like* Christ's obedience. Otherwise Paul's entire analogy in these verses is destroyed. But, of course, such a conclusion completely contradicts the message of Paul's whole letter to the Romans—the message of justification by faith.

Having explained our situation *in Adam* (verses 12-14), Paul can now use Adam as a "type" or "pattern" of Christ in verses 15-21. He begins, in verse 15, by pointing out the contrast between Adam and Christ, as well as the similarity between the two.

First the contrast. He says, "But the free gift [Jesus Christ and His righteousness] is not like the offense [Adam's sin]" (verse 15). The contrast is that Adam and Christ are opposites when it comes to what each one did. Adam sinned; Christ obeyed.

Then the similarity. Paul continues, "For if by the one man's offense [the] many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to [the] many" (verse 15). The similarity is that although Adam and Christ did opposite things, what each did affected the entire human race.

Clearly, Paul is stressing that just as what Adam did affected "[the] many," likewise what Christ did also "abounded [or overflowed] to [the] many" (verse 15). Some translations have omitted the definite article, *the*, before the word *many*. This is unfortunate because it distorts Paul's meaning. Paul is not referring to a large number from the whole group, but to *all* humanity. This will become apparent when we come to verse 18, where the apostle applies the phrase "[the] many" to "all men."

Paul's point is that because all men and women were *in Adam* by creation, what he did at the Fall affected or implicated all mankind. All humanity was still *in Adam* when he sinned. In the same way, God incorporated all men and women *into Christ* at the incarnation, making Him the second Adam, or mankind. So what Christ did in His life and death also affected "[the] many," that is, all mankind. All humanity was *in Christ* and therefore was implicated in His holy history. It is in this sense, and this sense only, that Adam and Christ are similar. This is why Paul can use one as a "type" or "pattern" of the other.

But Paul not only points out that Adam and Christ are similar; he also presents them as opposites. Adam and Christ are opposites in what they did. Adam sinned; Christ obeyed. So, naturally, the result of their actions on humanity will be different. Because Adam sinned, all humanity stand condemned to death *in him*. But the fantastic good news is that because Christ obeyed, the condemnation that rests on all humanity because of Adam's sin has been reversed! All humanity has been acquitted or justified to life *in Christ*!

"Wait a minute!" some will object. "Are you saying everyone will go to heaven because Christ justified all humanity by His life of obedience?"

No, I am not teaching the heresy of universalism. While the Bible teaches that no one will be in heaven apart from Christ's act of redemption, it also teaches that many, unfortunately, will be lost.

"But if Christ has *already* justified all men by His act of obedience, why then will some be lost? Aren't you contradicting yourself?"

Not at all. We must understand the distinction between the *objective* facts of the gospel which apply to all humanity, and the *subjective* application of those facts which apply only to believers.

Please notice Paul uses the words "gift" or "free gift" repeatedly in verses 15-18 when he is talking about Christ's obedience and the result it has on all mankind. In verse 15, he refers to Christ's act of obedience as a "gift" that comes by "the grace of God." Like any gift, the gift of Christ's obedience and God's grace cannot be enjoyed if we refuse to accept it. That is why so many will be lost—not because Christ did not save them, but because they *refused* the gift of salvation *in Christ*. Christ Himself taught this in John 3:18.

What Adam did is ours by inheritance; we have no choice in the matter. We are "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). But what Christ did is not experienced by us automatically. Salvation or justification is a *gift* that has to be *received*. Romans 5:17 clearly states that "those who *receive* abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (emphasis supplied).

In verse 15, Paul is saying that what Adam and Christ did, *objectively* affected the status of all human beings. That is why Paul uses the aorist tense— "[the] many *died*" (past historic tense) because of Adam's trespass, and "the gift . . . *abounded* to [the] many" (also past historic tense) because of the obedience of Christ. This is the good news of the gospel that is made effective by faith alone.



Perhaps we can put it this way. Although Adam's sin *objectively* condemned all mankind (see verse 18), this condemnation does not become effective, or a reality, to us as individuals until we are born in this world. In the same way, although Christ's obedience *objectively* justified to life all mankind (verse 18), this justification is not made effective, nor becomes a subjective experience in us individually, until we receive it and experience the new birth. Jesus Himself made this clear to Nicodemus. "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

We are born the first time *in Adam* by procreation—something in which we have no choice. But we experience the second birth, the new birth, *in Christ* through faith. And as we saw in an earlier chapter, faith is the individual's heart obedience to the gospel. Paul commended the Roman Christians for this very thing: "God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you *obeyed from the heart* that form of doctrine [the gospel] to which you were delivered" (Romans 6:17, emphasis supplied). Thus, only those who *receive* the gift of salvation and are *justified by faith* have "peace with God" (Romans 5:1).

Because God created us human beings with a free will, He will not coerce or force the gift of salvation on us. The gospel does demand a human response. Faith is saying *yes* to God's gift in Christ, and only those who by faith *receive* God's abundant gift of grace will reign in life. That is why Christ made it clear in Matthew 24:14 that this world will not come to an end until "this gospel of the kingdom" has been preached into all the world for a witness. The gospel makes it inexcusable for any to be lost.

Some believe that if we interpret Romans 5:12-21 as I have done in this chapter, that it necessarily leads to the doctrine of universalism. They argue that if all humanity was justified to life by Christ's act of obedience, then all humanity will eventually be saved. But it is not necessary to infer universalism from this interpretation. All that I am saying is what Paul is saying in his presentation of the two Adams: All the human race is *in Adam* and therefore die. And that all persons can enjoy the gift of Christ's obedience because all humanity was *in Christ* in His holy history.

If Adventism accepts this biblical truth, I believe it will not only remove the confusion we have concerning what constitutes the good news of the gospel, but, that to a large degree, it will also solve the issue of what human nature Christ assumed when He became a man. It seems impossible, to me, to honestly teach on the one hand that Christ was the second Adam [mankind] and that the whole sinful race that needed redeeming was in Him, and then, on the other hand, insist that as a man, He was different from us in His spiritual make-up, implying that we were not completely in Him.

Adam's sin affected the human race in every aspect, physically, morally, and spiritually. There is nothing in fallen men and women that has not been touched by the sin of Adam. Therefore, if Christ did not assume our humanity as we are because of the Fall, He could not save us totally from the sin problem. Consequently, we undermine the good news of the gospel, when we ascribe to Him a humanity that was in anyway different from ours.

In Romans 5:18, Paul continues his exposition of the two Adams by taking the position that all humanity stand condemned to death because of Adam's sin, and that likewise, all humanity have been justified to life by the obedience of Christ. He then adds another dimension to our sin problem and its solution in verse 19, "For as by one man's disobedience [the] many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience [the] many will be made righteous."

The word *made*, used twice in this verse, actually means *constituted*. Paul is saying here that when Adam sinned, not only did he and his posterity come under the sentence of condemnation and death, but a radical change took place in Adam's very nature so that he passed on to his posterity a sinful nature that *makes*, or *constitutes*, us as sinners. As a result, we are not only sinners by performance, but also by very nature.



To understand this we need to realize what happened to Adam's nature at the Fall. According to Genesis 1:26,27, Adam and Eve were created in God's image. The apostle John tells us in 1 John 4:8, 16 that God is *agape love*, a love that is unconditional and selfless. Since Adam and Eve were created in God's image, their natures were likewise controlled by this agape love that "does not seek its own" (1 Corinthians 13:5). This is what constitutes sinless human nature.

But at the Fall, when Adam chose to go against his sinless nature, this nature itself made a U-turn toward self. This is how Ellen White put it: "But through disobedience, his [Adam's] powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love" (*Steps to Christ*, 17). And because Adam could pass on to us only the nature that he had, all of us were born with a egocentric nature controlled by this love that has made a U-turn from selflessness to selfishness (the Hebrew word for this is "iniquity"), which at it's very core is ruled by self (see Isaiah 53:6). Therefore, Sin, with a capital S, is what constitutes our very natures. Our acts of sins are only the *evidence* of that nature. Hence, in order to be a complete Saviour from Sin, Christ not only had to save us from Adam's sin plus our own many sins that condemn us to death, but He also had to save us from the very nature of Sin, spelled with a capital S. It is this fantastic good news of the gospel that Paul declares in the second half of Romans 5:19.

It is extremely important that we take note of the verb tenses the apostle uses in verse 19 to describe the effects of Adam's sin and Christ's obedience on our human natures. When it comes to our situation *in Adam*, Paul uses the aorist tense (a past historic tense). When he turns to the truth as it is *in Christ*, he uses the same verb, "made" or "constituted," but please note that he uses the future tense, "will be made righteous."

Why is this so?

Because when we receive the righteousness of Christ by faith, no change takes place to our nature; it still remains totally sinful, bent toward self, until the day we die or until the day Jesus comes, when "this corruptible must put on incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:53).

The New Testament clearly teaches what Luther declared: a Christian is "*simul justice et percarte*" simultaneously righteous and sinful. Until our dying day, we believers stand righteous *only* in Christ, who is the means or source of our righteousness and surety (see 1 Timothy 1:15). Further, in view of the fact that Paul uses the future tense when it comes to our situation *in Christ*, this hope of being made righteous applies only to believers who have by faith received the gift of righteousness Christ obtained for all men.

In Romans 5:20, Paul explains how God convinces us humans that Adam's sin actually made us sinners. He says: "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound." What does the apostle mean?

God had promised fallen humanity the good news of salvation *in Christ*, beginning with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. But it was not until centuries later that God "added" the law through Moses. Was it added as a requirement for salvation? The answer is a definite NO, since if the law was added as a requirement for salvation, that would contradict the *promise* of salvation *in Christ* (see Romans 4:14-16; Galatians 3:17, 18). Why then did God add the law to the gift of salvation? This is the question Paul answers in verse 20.

The law "entered" or was "added" to the promise, says Paul, not to solve the sin problem, but to expose it. To convince the human race that "the offense" (singular, that is, Adam's one sin) has produced a whole human race of sinners who, in turn, can produce only sins. But the good news is that Christ's obedience not only took care of Adam's sin that condemns us, as well as our own many sins that add to that condemnation (see verse 16), but "much more," we have been made positively righteous in Christ—*in Him* believers stand perfect in performance, in justice, as well as in nature. This is the abounding grace of the gospel. No wonder Paul exclaimed in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

Paul concludes his line of reasoning with Romans 5:21, "so that as sin [singular, that is, Adam's sin] reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness [Christ's righteousness] to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

All that Paul has said in this passage about the two Adams, as well as what he wrote about the same subject in 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22, and elsewhere, becomes meaningful only as we identify the human nature Christ assumed at the incarnation with the corporate sinful human nature of the human race He came to redeem. The moment we, in any way, make a distinction between our sinful nature that needs redeeming and the human nature Christ assumed, we separate Him from us and destroy the central theme of Paul's theology—the "in Christ motif" and the concept of the two Adams.

Christ did not come primarily to be our example and to show us that we can keep the law aided by the Holy Spirit. I believe that it is certainly true that those who stand justified by faith and have experienced the new birth, can obey God's law with the aid of the Holy Spirit. But Christ did not assume our humanity primarily to demonstrate this truth as our Example. He became a human being to reverse the condemned history we inherit in Adam and rewrite that history in Himself. Thus, by His perfect life, which met the positive demands of the law, and by His sacrificial death, which met the justice of the law, Jesus changed the legal status of all humanity from condemnation to death to justification to life. This is what I believe constitutes the incredible good news of the everlasting gospel. I believe it is this gospel that God raised up the advent movement to proclaim to a doomed world before He brings it to an end.

In the next chapter, as we continue to consider this vital truth of the two Adams, all this will become more and more apparent.

### **Key Points in Chapter Five The Two Humanities—1**

1. Paul draws a comparison and a contrast between Adam and Christ. He calls them the first Adam and the last Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:45). The first Adam, Paul says, is the origin of sinful humanity, while the last Adam, Christ, is the origin of a new humanity redeemed out of the old (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

2. The force of Paul's parallel between all humanity being "in Adam" and all humanity being "in Christ" depends on the idea of corporate oneness.

3. When Paul says that Adam is a "type" or "pattern" of Christ, the second Adam, he means that just as what Adam did affected all humanity, likewise what Christ did also affected all humanity (see Romans 5:15).

4. In Romans 5:12-21 Paul uses the figure of the two Adams to show that God deals with humanity on the basis of solidarity, or corporate oneness— both in terms of the cause of our condemnation, as well as in terms of the source of our justification.

5. Scripture teaches three clear facts regarding the human race:

a. All men and women were created in one man, that is, in Adam.

b. All men and women were made sinners in that one man, Adam (see Romans 5:19).

c. All men and women were redeemed and reconciled to God in one man, Jesus Christ—the second Adam (see 2 Corinthians 5:19).

6. We *accept* salvation as individuals, but humanity was condemned corporately in Adam and redeemed corporately in Christ.

7. Because Adam's sin, which resulted in his death, entered the whole world, Adam's death sentence naturally spread to all mankind as well. Paul says (Romans 5:12) that all human beings die "because all sinned." This statement can mean:

a. All human beings have sinned *like* Adam sinned, that is, because each person has chosen to sin just as Adam chose to sin.

b. All human beings have sinned *in Adam*, that is, the whole human race participated corporately in Adam's sin.

8. If we say all human beings die because we have all chosen to sin like Adam chose to sin—then to be fair to Paul's analogy in Romans 5, we have to conclude that all human beings live because we have all chosen to obey like Christ chose to obey. This is obviously not true, and it makes Paul teach salvation by works of the law—something he fought against in all his writings.

9. But if we say that all human beings die because we have all sinned "in Adam," that is, because we have participated corporately in Adam's sin, then Paul's analogy teaches the wonderful truth that all human beings live because we have all obeyed "in Christ," that is, because we have participated corporately in Christ's holy history—His life, death, burial, and resurrection.

10. Paul's point in Romans 5:12-21 is that all men and women were *in Adam* by creation and that what Adam did at the Fall affected or implicated all mankind. In the same way, God incorporated all men and women *into Christ* at the incarnation, making Him the second Adam. So what Christ did in His life and death also affected all mankind.

11. If all humanity was justified "in Christ," doesn't this mean, then, that everyone will go to heaven?

a. Not at all. There is a distinction between the objective facts of the gospel, which apply to all humanity, and the subjective application of those facts, which apply only to believers.

b. Like any gift, the gift of Christ's obedience and God's grace cannot be enjoyed if we refuse to accept it. Many will be lost— not because Christ did not save them, but because they refused the gift of salvation in Christ (see John 3:18, 36).

12. This biblical truth of the two Adams will not only remove the confusion within Adventism concerning what constitutes the good news of the gospel, it will also solve, to a large degree, the issue of what human nature Christ assumed when He became a man. Adam's sin affected the human race in every aspect—physically, morally, and spiritually. There is nothing in fallen men and women that has not been touched by the sin of Adam. Therefore, if Christ did not assume our humanity as we are because of the Fall, He could not save us totally from the sin problem. We undermine the good news of the gospel when we ascribe to Christ a humanity that is in any way different from ours, apart from actually participating in sin.

13. When we receive the righteousness of Christ by faith, no change takes place to our nature; it still remains totally sinful, bent toward self, until the day we die or until the day Jesus comes, when "this corruptible must put on incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:53). Until our dying day, we believers stand righteous only "in Christ," who is the means or source of our righteousness (see 1 Timothy 1:15).

14. All that Paul has said in Romans 5:12-21 about the two Adams becomes meaningful only as we identify the human nature Christ assumed at the incarnation with the corporate, sinful human nature of the human race He came to redeem. The moment we, in any way, make a distinction between our sinful nature that needs redeeming and the human nature Christ assumed, we separate Him from us and destroy the central theme of Paul's theology—the "in Christ" motif and the concept of the two Adams.

## Chapter Six

# The Two Humanities—2

Unfortunately, many conservative Adventists oppose the glorious message of the two Adams and the universal justification of the human race *in Christ*. Their opposition is primarily based on one or more of three objections:

1. This teaching sounds very much like the Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin.
2. This teaching is federal theology.
3. This teaching undermines the doctrine of substitution, the idea that Christ died for, or instead of, us.

To ignore these objections would certainly undermine the purpose and object of this book—to bring about unity in the faith and in the message of righteousness by faith that God brought to this church some one hundred years ago. I believe these objections are, for the most part, coming from sincere individuals and deserve a response. The following, therefore, is my answer to these three objections to the message we examined in the last chapter—Paul's teaching of the two Adams and universal justification of the human race *in Christ*.

*Objection No. 1. This teaching sounds very much like the Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin.* Most Adventists have only a vague idea of what the doctrine of original sin really teaches. All most Adventists know about the doctrine is that it is held by the Roman Catholic Church and is, therefore, a heresy to be shunned. As a result, very few Adventists are able to intelligently discuss or evaluate this doctrine.

I believe this is precisely Satan's plan. One of the devil's crafty ways to pervert the gospel is to mix truth with error so that sincere Christians reject the truth along with the error. They throw out the baby with the bath water. Satan has been most successful in this, and we need to be on guard not to fall into his trap. This is especially true concerning the doctrine of original sin.

The term *original sin* is not found in the Bible; it is a theological label. The fact that the term isn't found in the Bible, however, doesn't necessarily mean that the idea is a heresy. Many doctrines taught by Adventism and within Christianity have been given theological labels that don't appear in the Bible. Good examples are the doctrine of the "investigative judgment" and the doctrine of "substitution." These terms are not found in the Bible either, but they are labels for concepts that are biblical.

But what about original sin? What does it teach, and is it biblical?

Augustine, the fourth-century bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was the first to formulate and teach the doctrine of original sin. The Roman Catholic Church adopted the teaching, and the Reformers, especially John Calvin, believed it as well. This is how the Augsburg Confession defines it:

After Adam's fall, all men begotten after the common course of nature, are born with sin; that is, without the fear of God, without trust in Him, and with fleshly appetite; and that this decease, or original fault is truly sin, condemning and bringing eternal death now also upon all that are not born again by baptism and the Holy Spirit. (Article 11 of original sin—formulated by Philip Melancthon, 1530 A.D.).

Original sin refers to the *effect* Adam's sin had on his posterity. Today, the doctrine of original sin is defined to include four major effects of the Fall on the human race. They are:

- guilt
- condemnation
- alienation
- weakness

Guilt and condemnation are closely connected, but in a legal sense they do not mean the same thing. Guilt involves personal volition and responsibility, both of which have to do with the deliberate choice of the will. Condemnation, however, is the *result* of that wrong choice and can affect others who have had no part in that choice.

For example, suppose you are an American serving as a missionary in a foreign country, and it so happens that the leaders of America declare war against the country in which you are living and working. Even though you may have been opposed to that decision, the government of the foreign country in which you are living will condemn you simply because you are an American. You stand condemned even though you are not guilty.

Regarding Adam's original sin, not a single text anywhere in the Bible teaches his descendants share the *guilt* of his sin. God does not hold us responsible for Adam's sin in which we personally had no choice. Therefore, the idea that we inherit the *guilt* of Adam's sin is unbiblical and must be rejected. The doctrine of original sin is in error to teach that the guilt of Adam's sin passes on to his posterity. This is how one of the latest commentaries on the Bible puts it:

Paul could be said to hold a doctrine of original sin, in the sense that from the beginning (birth) everyone has been under the power of sin with death as the consequence, but not a doctrine of original guilt, since individuals are only held responsible for deliberate acts of defiance against God and his law (*The Word Biblical Commentary*, 38a:291).

The Bible does not teach that humanity inherits the guilt or responsibility of Adam's sin, but it most definitely teaches that all of Adam's children were implicated in the Fall and therefore suffer the consequences of Adam's sin. It is in this respect that Paul declares that as a result of Adam's one sin, condemnation, judgment, and death came to all human beings (see Romans 5:12-18).

The idea that the guilt of Adam's sin passes to his posterity, taught in the doctrine of original sin, is the main reason the Roman Catholic, and some Protestant churches, practice infant baptism. But nowhere in Scripture do we find the idea that the guilt and condemnation we inherit from Adam is terminated at baptism; there is, thus, no necessity for infant baptism. It was at the *cross* that the condemnation we inherit as a result of Adam's sin, as well as the guilt and condemnation incurred by our many personal sins, was terminated. It is the blood of Christ that cleanses us of *all* sin as we walk in the light of the gospel (see 1 John 1:7, 9).

Therefore, while Adam's sin did bring the judgment of condemnation to all his posterity, we can praise God that in the original righteousness of Christ—His perfect life and sacrificial death—justification came as a gift to all humanity as well. This is the good news of the gospel which makes possible the experience of justification by faith (see John 5:24; Acts 13:38, 39; Romans 8:1).

Ellen White fully supports this concept. Please consider the following statements, keeping in mind that she uses the word "guilt" to mean "condemnation."

As related to the first Adam, men receive from him nothing but guilt and the sentence of death (*SDA Bible Commentary*, 6:1074).



We have reason for ceaseless gratitude to God that Christ, by His perfect obedience, has won back the heaven that Adam lost through disobedience. Adam sinned, and the children of Adam share his guilt and its consequences (*Faith and Works*, 88).

Blessed is the soul who can say... I am lost in Adam, but restored in Christ (*Sons and Daughters of God*, 120).

Thus, the doctrine of original sin is incorrect when it teaches that Adam's posterity inherits the guilt of his sin. But it is biblical when it teaches that we receive condemnation as a result of Adam's sin. It is also correct and biblical when it teaches that there is a third effect of Adam's sin on his posterity— alienation. Ellen White tells us:

The inheritance of children is that of sin. Sin has separated them from God (*Child Guidance*, 47 5).

From eternal ages it was God's purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for the indwelling of the Creator. Because of sin, humanity ceased to be a temple for God. Darkened and defiled by evil, the heart of man no longer revealed the glory of the Divine One. But by the incarnation of the Son of God, the purpose of Heaven is fulfilled (*The Desire of Ages*, 161).

This is what the doctrine of original sin means by *alienation*. Because of the Fall every one of us were born spiritually dead (see Ephesians 2:1). But through the incarnation of Christ, when His divinity was united to our spiritually dead, corporate humanity, we were made spiritually alive *in Christ* (see Ephesians 2:5). It is this fact that makes it possible for us to individually experience the new birth and once again become the temple of God. This is the fulfillment of the New Covenant promise: "For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them" (2 Corinthians 6:16). This objective fact, that first took place *in Christ*, makes the subjective experience of the new birth possible. Therefore, born-again Christians are no longer alienated from God; they have become His adopted children and can address Him as "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15, see also verses 14-17; 1 John 3:1, 2). This is part and parcel of the good news of the gospel. This is what makes it possible for us to walk in the Spirit as Christ did in our corporate humanity. This is what makes it possible for us to experience the life of God in the process of sanctification, a life that is pleasing to Him.

Finally, the doctrine of original sin teaches that Adam's sin resulted in the human race becoming slaves to sin. This, too, is an undeniable biblical truth. Paul concludes his discussion on the universal sin problem in Romans 3:9 by informing both the Jews and the Gentiles that all are "under sin." This means we are born slaves to it, and Paul confirms this in Romans 7:14. It is because of this fact, as we shall see later, that even after conversion, we are unable, *in and of ourselves*, to live the holy life (see Romans 7:15-25).

As a result of Adam's sin, we are born slaves to sin. David makes this clear in Psalm 51:5. He says, "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Some apply this statement to David's mother, rather than David himself, ie. that she committed adultery when she conceived David. But the context, as well as the principle of parallelism in Hebrew poetry will not allow this interpretation. Luther, I believe was correct when he wrote:

He [David] is not talking about certain actions but simply about the matter, and he says: 'the human seed, this mass from which I was formed, is totally corrupt with faults and sins. The material itself is faulty. The clay, so to speak, out of which this vessel began to be formed is damnable. ... This is how I am; this is how all men are {*Luther's Works*, 12:347-351}.

When it comes to weakness, our slavery to sin, as a result of Adam's original sin, Ellen White has much to say. Here are a few quotes showing she clearly taught that Adam's sin affected our nature in such a way that, apart from the saving grace of Christ, human beings are helpless to save themselves:

Because of sin his [Adam's] posterity was born with inherent propensities of disobedience (*SDA Bible Commentary*, 5:1128).

When man transgressed the divine law, his nature became evil, and he was in harmony, and not at variance, with Satan (*The Great Controversy*, 505).

The result of eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifested in every man's experience. There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he can not resist (*Education*, 29).

As a result of Adam's disobedience, every human being is a transgressor of the law, sold under sin... serving Satan (*Signs of the Times*, July 23, 1902).

This brief study of the doctrine of original sin, demonstrates that it contains a mixture of truth and error. Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church rightfully rejects this doctrine. However, in doing so we must not make the mistake of also rejecting the truth this doctrine contains. If we do, we undermine not only the sin problem, but also God's solution to the sin problem—the gospel. The Bible nowhere teaches that humanity inherits Adam's guilt, the personal responsibility for his sin. But it does definitely teach that we inherit condemnation, alienation, and weakness as a result of his sin.

The good news of the gospel is that because Christ assumed the selfsame human nature we inherit from Adam, that human nature was made spiritually alive at the incarnation (see Ephesians 2:5), its weakness was overcome by the power of the Spirit of life in Christ (see Luke 4:14), and finally this condemned nature was executed at the cross (see John 12:31; Romans 8:2, 3). The result of all this is that Christ obtained for all humanity a salvation that is full and complete, one which we can all experience by faith.

*Objection No. 2. This teaching is federal theology.* Federal theology, like the doctrine of original sin, is also a mixture of truth and error. In a nutshell, federal theology teaches that just as Adam was the first federal head of the human race, and by his sin condemned all humanity, Christ, as the second federal head of the human race, redeemed all humanity by His act of righteousness.

This idea sounds quite biblical. However, almost all those who teach federal theology today go on to draw certain unbiblical implications from this teaching. Almost all are either Calvinists or Universalists.

*Calvinists.* John Calvin's understanding of salvation was based on the doctrine of predestination; he applied the biblical "in Christ motif *only* to the elect, those whom God had predetermined He would save. Therefore, Calvinists today apply the "all men" in the universal texts of the New Testament, not to all humanity, but *only* to the elect—those predestined to be saved.

*Universalists.* Universalists, on the other hand, teach that all men will eventually be saved since Christ, as the second federal head of the human race, redeemed all humanity by His life, death, and resurrection. Such a view fails to take into account that Scripture clearly teaches that those who reject the gift of salvation in Christ through unbelief will be eternally lost (see Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:18, 36). I condemn both Calvinism and Universalism as being unscriptural. Therefore, the "in Christ motif," as presented in this book, cannot be honestly labeled as federal theology.

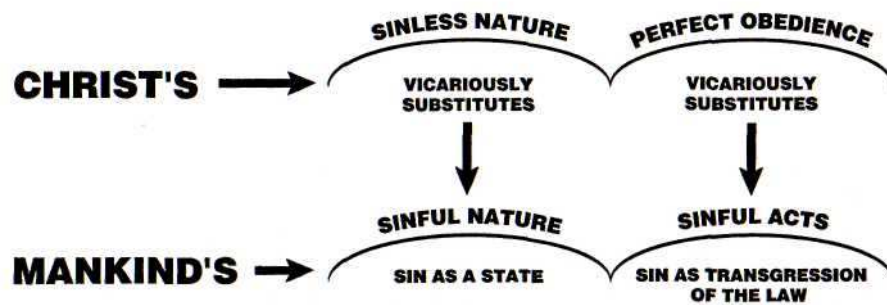
But the real problem I find with those who object to the concept of the "in-Christ motif and the two Adams, as presented in this book, and who accuse this teaching of being "federalism," is that they themselves fail to give an adequate exegesis of Romans 5:12-21 and other related passages to prove their point. Rather than simply labeling this view "federal theology"—a term unfamiliar to many pastors and administrators, not to mention church members—why do they not prove from Scripture where they disagree with my interpretation of Romans 5:12-21? When the brethren who opposed the 1888 message were critical of Jones' and Waggoner's message of righteousness by faith, Ellen White insisted on more than one occasion that they had no right to accuse their brethren of error until they could prove from Scripture where they were wrong (see, for example, E. G. White, *1888 Materials*, 2:529; 3:122).

*Objection No. 3. This teaching undermines the doctrine of substitution, the idea that Christ died for, or instead of, us.* Substitution is no doubt a central pillar of the gospel. The word *substitute* means one person acting on behalf of another. In our education system, we have substitute teachers, and substitute players are a common practice in sports. The doctrine of substitution teaches that Christ, as the second Adam, saved us as our Substitute, because He lived and died for, or instead of, us.

In no way do I deny this clear teaching of Scripture. But the doctrine of substitution has its dangers—even as does the teaching of salvation by grace alone. Even the fact Christ did it all for us can be misused and turned into cheap grace, as Paul suggests in Romans 6:1, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" The doctrine of substitution also faces this same danger: it can be turned into a license to sin. Because Christ lived and died for or *instead of us*, some believers have decided they have the liberty to live as they please. "Why not," they reason, "since my salvation is guaranteed as long as I believe in Christ as my Substitute?" It is this *misuse* of the doctrine of substitution that I oppose—the idea that because Christ died instead of me, I can therefore live as I please.

As I see it, such a misuse of the doctrine of substitution is the result of a *vicarious view* of substitution. Evangelical Christianity as well as most present-day Seventh-day Adventism understands the doctrine of substitution as teaching that Christ substituted Himself vicariously (in the place of) fallen humanity during His earthly mission. But this understanding of substitution is not explicitly taught in Scripture or in Ellen White's writings. What Scripture does clearly teach is the "in Christ" understanding of substitution.

According to the vicarious view of substitution, Christ's sinless human nature was substituted *in the place of* mankind's sinful nature. His perfect obedience and His sacrificial death, were substituted *in the place of the* sins of the human race. Such a view presents Christ as a Substitute who does not truly identify Himself with the sinful human race He came to redeem. He does not become one with us; instead, He substitutes His sinless nature in the place of our sinful natures. The following diagram illustrates how the vicarious view of substitution redeems us from the twofold problem of sin—sin as a state, and sin as transgression of the law:



As the illustration above demonstrates, the vicarious view of substitution is in complete contrast to the "in-Christ" view of substitution by which Christ *actually* redeemed humanity from the twofold problem of sin (see diagram in chapter four, page 40). Therefore, one of the major issues that the Adventist Church needs to settle before it can unitedly fulfill its global mission to present the everlasting gospel to the whole world is this: Which view of Christ as our Substitute is the true, biblical view of substitution? What constitutes the everlasting gospel that God has called us to proclaim?

The vicarious view of substitution denies that the humanity of Christ was fully identified with the sinful human nature of those He came to redeem; therefore, it leaves a big gulf between Christ and us. Such a gulf creates major problems concerning the gospel's power to save sinful humanity from the power and slavery of sin.

In the minds of many, the vicarious understanding of substitution also raises a valid question regarding the legality of salvation. Legally, how could Christ qualify to be our Substitute, to take our place?

No law allows an innocent man to die instead of the guilty. This is one of the main objections against the doctrine of substitution that the Christian church faces from the non-Christian world, especially Moslem scholars. They accuse Christianity of being the most unethical religion in the world. This ethical problem needs to be solved if we Christians are to make any headway with the Muslim world, one of the fastest growing religions of the world.

Had the Christian church been proclaiming the doctrine of substitution in the context of the "in Christ" motif and the two Adams, both of which are solidly grounded in the concept of solidarity or corporately oneness, this ethical stumbling block to the non-Christian world would never have arisen. The "in Christ" motif and the truth of the two Adams, as presented in this book, do not undermine the doctrine of substitution, rather, they actually strengthen it.

The real question that needs to be answered is not: Did Jesus die instead of us? The Bible clearly teaches that He did. The real questions we need to answer are: What qualified Jesus to live and die instead of us? How could He lawfully be our Substitute? If Christ took our place simply as a sinless Man, there would still be a deep and impassable gulf between Him and us. Yet it was this gulf, created by the sin problem, that had to be bridged before we could be united with Christ. To be an effective substitute on our behalf, Christ must bridge the chasm that exists between man and God, the chasm created by sin (see Isaiah 59:2). He could not do this simply by coming as a sinless Man to vicariously substitute Himself for us. He could bridge the chasm caused by sin only by assuming our fallen sinful nature in order to be the Saviour of the World. By His divinity, He laid hold of the throne of God, while by His identification with our sinful humanity, He laid hold of the human race He came to redeem.

God's messenger fully supported the "in-Christ" understanding of the doctrine of substitution, rather than the vicarious view. In fact, Ellen White does not use the term "vicarious" when she presents Christ as our substitute and surety. Here are some

quotations from her pen that are typical of the statements she makes supporting the "in-Christ" view of substitution:

Clad in the vestments of humanity, the Son of God came down to the level of those He wished to save. In Him was no guile of sinfulness; He was ever pure and undefiled; yet He took upon Him our *sinful nature*. Clothing His divinity with our humanity, that He might associate with fallen humanity, He sought to redeem for man that which by disobedience Adam had lost {*Review and Herald*, August 22, 1907, emphasis supplied}.

*In Christ* were united the divine and the human—the Creator and the creature. The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and *the nature of Adam, the transgressor*, meet in Jesus—the Son of God and the Son of man {*Lift Him Up*, 345, emphasis supplied}.

Coming as He did, as a man, to meet and be subjected *with all the evil tendencies to which man is heir*, working in every conceivable manner to destroy His faith, He made it possible for Himself to be buffeted by human agencies inspired by Satan, the rebel who had been expelled from heaven (*Letter K-303*, 1903, emphasis supplied).

Adam was tempted by the enemy, and he fell. It was not indwelling sin which caused him to yield, for God made him pure and upright, in His own image. He was faultless as the angels before the throne. There were in him no corrupt principles, no tendencies to evil. But when Christ came to meet the temptations of Satan, He bore "the likeness of sinful flesh" (*Signs of the Times*, October 17, 1900).

He left the glories of heaven, and clothed His divinity with humanity, and subjected Himself to sorrow, and shame, and reproach, abuse, denial, and crucifixion. Though He had *all the strength of the passions of humanity*, never did He yield to temptation to do that which was not pure and elevating and ennobling (*Ibid.*, November 21, 1892, emphasis supplied).

It is a mystery too deep for the human mind to fathom. Christ did in reality unite *the offending nature of man* with His own sinless nature, *because by this act of condescension, He would be enabled to pour out His blood in behalf of the fallen race* (*Manuscript Releases*, 17:26, emphasis supplied).

The union of divinity with humanity brings to the fallen race a value which we scarcely comprehend. The human and divine were united in Christ, in order that he might represent those who should believe in him. He took our nature, and passed through our experiences, and as our representative he assumed our responsibilities. The sins of men were charged to Christ, and innocent though he was, he engaged to suffer for the guilty, that through faith in him the world might be saved.... O, what compassion and love are here revealed! How is humanity exalted through the merits of Christ! His sacrifice was ample and complete. The Holy One died instead of the unholy. He clothed himself in our filthy garments, that we might wear the spotless robe of his righteousness, which was woven in the loom of heaven (*Signs of the Times*, May 23, 1895).



In assuming humanity Christ took the part of every human being. He was the Head of humanity. A Being divine and human, with His long arm He could encircle humanity, while with His divine arm, He could lay hold of the throne of the Infinite (*Selected Messages*, 1:252).

The sin of our first parents had cut off this world from Heaven. But Christ took upon himself our weaknesses and sins. He was tempted; he was ridiculed; he was beset on every hand. He suffered all the woes, all the griefs and sorrows of humanity, without a murmur, that he might leave us an example. He descended step by step in the path of humiliation, until he hung as a criminal upon the cross, that with his right arm of infinite love he might encircle the race, while he grasped the throne of Infinite Power, connecting earth with Heaven (*Signs of the Times*, December 3, 1885).

Here is His real identification with the human race He came to redeem. Yet because of His total victory over sin He is able to be our perfect substitute and representative before God in the heavenly sanctuary. It would appear, therefore, for the substitution theory of the cross to be fully adequate to meet the sinful human situation, there needs to be incorporated within its structure a Christological position similar to the one presented in this book—that Christ assumed our sinful nature with all its liabilities at the incarnation, but in His case He totally overcame and redeemed that rebellious nature from every aspect of sin, and took to heaven a glorified humanity, there to represent us as our great High Priest.

In concluding this important subject of the two Adams, may I share a real burden on my heart? Those who oppose the "in Christ" motif and the truth of the two Adams are robbing God's people of their joy and assurance of salvation, the prerequisite for genuine sanctification. As a result, they have subconsciously turned the unconditional good news of the gospel into good advice. They believe they have to take the initiative for their own salvation by repenting (which many understand as turning away from sin) and believing in Christ before God will put them in Christ and justify them.

The problem with this teaching is that repeated failures to live the sanctified life destroys one's confidence in one's repentance. If I have truly turned away from sin, why am I still falling? The result is that whatever joy and hope the believer had when he or she first came to Christ disappears. Many decide, "I might as well leave the church and enjoy sin, since I cannot make it to heaven." Sad to say, I have met far too many Adventists who are experiencing exactly these results from this so-called gospel teaching and consequently either leave the church or become nominal Christians.

The truth of the matter is that it is the "goodness of God" (Romans 2:13) revealed through the gospel that leads us to repentance. When one experiences such repentance, he or she is motivated by a heartfelt appreciation for Christ and Him crucified so that Christian living is no longer motivated by fear of punishment or desire for reward. This is true sanctification.

My plea, therefore, is that before you oppose these wonderful truths that have brought so much peace, joy, and victory to many who were once trapped in a subtle form of legalism, please put aside your preconceived views and your pride and study with an honest heart what the Scriptures say about this matter. And may the truth, as it is in Christ Jesus, set you free.

## Key Points in Chapter Six The Two Humanities—2

1. Many conservative Adventists oppose the teaching of the two Adams and the universal justification of the human race *in Christ*. Their opposition is based primarily on three objections:

- a. This teaching sounds very much like the Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin.
- b. This teaching is federal theology.
- c. This teaching undermines the doctrine of substitution, the idea that Christ died for, or instead of, us.

2. The doctrine of original sin teaches that the entire human race received four major effects as a result of Adam's Fall: (a) guilt; (b) condemnation; (c) alienation; and (d) weakness.

3. The Bible teaches that all Adam's children were implicated in the Fall and therefore suffer the consequences of Adam's sin. Paul says that as a result of Adam's one sin, condemnation, judgment, and death came to all human beings (see Romans 5:12-18). However, the Bible nowhere teaches that humanity inherits the *guilt* or *responsibility* of Adam's sin.

4. Although Adam's sin did bring the judgment of condemnation to all his posterity, we can praise God that in the original righteousness of Christ— His perfect life, and sacrificial death—justification came as a gift to all humanity as well. This is the good news of the gospel.

5. The doctrine of original sin contains a mixture of truth and error. The Bible rejects the idea that humanity inherited Adam's guilt, the personal responsibility for his sin. But it does teach that we inherit condemnation, alienation, and weakness as a result of Adam's sin. The good news of the gospel is that because Christ assumed the selfsame human nature we inherit from Adam, that human nature was made spiritually alive at the incarnation, its weakness was overcome by the power of the Spirit of life, and finally this condemned nature was executed at the cross. The result of all this is that Christ obtained for all humanity a full and complete salvation that we can experience by faith.

6. Federal theology is also a mixture of truth and error. It teaches that just as Adam was the first federal head of the human race, and by his sin condemned all humanity, Christ, as the second federal head of the human race, redeemed all humanity by His act of righteousness. This sounds quite biblical. Yet those who teach federal theology go on to draw one of two unbiblical implications:

- a. Calvinists apply the "in Christ" motif only to the elect, those whom God has predetermined to save. Therefore, they apply the "all men" in the universal texts of the New Testament, not to all humanity, but only to those predestined to be saved.
- b. Universalists teach that all men and women will eventually be saved because Christ, as the second federal head of the human race, redeemed all humanity by His life, death, and resurrection. Such a view fails to take into account that the Bible clearly teaches that those who reject the gift of salvation in Christ will be eternally lost (see Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:18, 36). Both Calvinism and Universalism are unscriptural.

7. The doctrine of substitution, the idea that Christ died for, or instead of, us is no doubt a central pillar of the gospel. But it faces the same danger as does the gospel itself: it can be turned into a license to sin. After all, if Christ lived and died for us, or instead of us, some have decided that they have the liberty to live as they please. Such a misuse of the doctrine of substitution is the result of a *vicarious* view of substitution.

8. Evangelical Christianity, as well as much of Seventh-day Adventism, understands substitution as *vicarious* substitution. According to this view, Christ's sinless human nature was substituted in the place of mankind's sinful nature. His perfect obedience and His sacrificial death were substituted in the place of the sins of the human race. Such a view

presents Christ as a substitute who does not truly identify Himself with the sinful race He came to redeem. He does not become one with us; instead, he substitutes His sinless nature in the place of our sinful nature.

9. The vicarious view of substitution is in complete contrast to the "in Christ" view of substitution, by which Christ actually assumed our corporate, sinful humanity in order to redeem it from the twofold problem of sin.

10. Adventism needs to settle this issue before it can unitedly fulfill its global mission: Which view of Christ as our Substitute is the true, biblical view of substitution? What constitutes the everlasting gospel that God has called us to proclaim?

11. The real question that needs to be answered in connection with substitution is not: Did Jesus die instead of us? The Bible clearly teaches that He did. The real question we need to answer is: What qualified Jesus to live and die instead of us? How could He lawfully be our Substitute?

12. A fully adequate theory of substitution at the cross must incorporate the idea that Christ assumed our sinful human nature with all its liabilities at the incarnation, but in His case he totally overcame and redeemed that rebellious nature from every aspect of sin, and took to heaven a glorified humanity, there to represent us as our great High Priest.

## *Chapter Seven*

# **The Cross of Christ**

At the very heart and core of New Testament preaching stood the cross of Christ. Especially was this true for the apostle Paul, the greatest preacher, evangelist, and theologian of the New Testament. Notice this sublime statement he made about the cross: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:17, 18)

I want you to pay attention to two significant points Paul makes in these verses:

First, as far as he is concerned, preaching the cross and preaching the gospel are one and the same thing. Adventists should always keep this in mind—we who "of all professing Christians ... should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world." (Ellen White, *Evangelism*, 188). We Adventists need to keep this in mind because too often in our evangelistic meetings, we preach many things in the name of the gospel that are really *the fruits* of the gospel or the *hope* of the gospel. Important as these things are, the gospel is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Second, Paul says that the cross is where the power of God resides. He hammers home the point even more clearly in Romans 1:16. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," he insists, "for it is the power of God to salvation." God's power of salvation is in the cross of Christ.

For Paul, the cross of Christ was central. "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews [the legalists] a stumbling block and to the Greeks [the philosophers] foolishness, but to those who are called [those who are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and Him crucified], both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23, 24). He goes on to say, "I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or

of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). And to the Galatians he wrote, "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

Does the gospel provide a solution for the principle of sin that has humanity in its grip and that makes it impossible for us, in and of ourselves, to live the Christian life? Can the power of the cross deliver us from our slavery to sin? The answer is a most definite YES! In fact, these Pauline statements emphasize that we need to discover how the cross of Christ is able to save us completely from sin—not just from its guilt and punishment, but also from its power and slavery. We need to experience the full power of the gospel against the power of sin. This is the topic we will examine in this chapter and the two that follow.

The cross of Christ exposed Satan as a murderer (see John 8:44), saved humanity from the guilt and punishment of sin (see 1 John 1:7, 9), reconciled the world to God (see 2 Corinthians 5:19), removed all barriers between different classes and races of human beings (see Ephesians 2:14, 15), and demonstrated God's unconditional love for sinful humanity (see Romans 5:6-10). But perhaps even more importantly, it also set humanity free from the law (or principle) of sin and death (see Romans 8:2, 3).

As we saw in the second chapter of this book, sin is more than an act, a choice, or even a mental assent to a temptation. It is also a power that has us in its grip. Here is what Jesus told the Jews who failed to understand this aspect of sin: "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). This is precisely the problem Paul deals with in Romans 7, which we will be considering in detail in the next chapter of this book. But first we must discover *how* the cross of Christ delivers us from this predicament—the power of sin in the life.

God can forgive sinful *acts* because Christ's shed blood is able to cleanse us from all sins. But *sinfulness*—sin as a power that controls our lives—cannot be merely forgiven; it must be destroyed. When we first come to Christ, our main concern is to be saved from our many sins which condemn us. Only after being a Christian for some time, do we discover that sin is more than just an act that we commit. We discover that sin is also a power that dominates us. And if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we can do nothing to escape this power. Like Paul, we have to admit "O wretched man [or woman] that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24).

One of the mistakes most of us make when we become Christians is to think that, through God's help, we can change our sinful nature so that it will become pleasing to God. Well, I have bad news for you. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is [always] flesh." God's answer for our sinful flesh is not to make it better, but to crucify it (see Galatians 5:24).

The flesh must die. That is God's solution to our sinful flesh. God forgives you for your sinful acts through the blood of Christ, but He doesn't forgive the sinfulness that dominates our lives. He strikes the tree down at the roots! If you have an apple tree that produces nothing but sour apples and *can* produce nothing but sour apples, the only solution is to cut it down and plant a new apple tree. Paul says that is exactly what the cross of Christ accomplishes. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17.)

The power of the gospel does not lie in making us good, but in the principle of "not I, but Christ." This is how Paul expressed it to the Galatian Christians: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The famous modern martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died at the age of thirty-nine in Germany under Hitler, said, "When God calls you, He calls you to die." If you have not died, if

you have not surrendered your old life of sin to the cross of Christ when you were baptized, you were buried alive by your pastor—you "did not rise to newness of life in Christ" (Ellen White, *SDA Bible Commentary*, 6:1075).

According to Paul, the death of Christ was not one man dying *instead of* all men (vicarious substitution), rather His death was all men dying *in* one man (actual substitution). He explained it to the Corinthian Christians this way: "We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14, NIV). This is the true meaning of biblical substitution. Yes, Christ did die for us, or in our place, in the sense that He tasted death instead of all mankind (see Hebrews 2:9). You and I, as Christians, will never have to experience the second death which Christ tasted on the cross on behalf of all humanity (see Revelation 20:6). Thank God for that!

But when Christ died, it wasn't just one Man dying instead of all men. That would be illegal, since no law, God's or man's, would allow it (see Ezekiel 18:20). Rather, according to the New Testament, all mankind died in one Man. The death of Christ was a corporate death. "If One died for all, then all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14). When an American wins an Olympic gold medal, who is happy, who rejoices? Not just one person, but the whole nation rejoices because that one represents America. So when Christ died, He died as *us*. Just as all humanity sinned in Adam, so also all humanity died in Christ, the second Adam. We saw all this in chapters 4 and 5 dealing with the "in Christ" motif and the two Adams.

What did Christ say concerning His own death on the cross? "Now is the judgment of this world [the human race]" (John 12:31). When Adam sinned, his condemnation came upon all mankind because all men and women were implicated in his sin (see Romans 5:12,18). Likewise, the entire human race was put into Christ at the incarnation so that when He died, we died *in Him*. This is what Jesus means when He says the whole world was judged by His cross.

When you accept this truth by faith, the cross of Christ becomes your cross. Jesus says, "When you follow Me, you must deny self and take up your cross daily" (see Luke 9:23). But many have failed to see what He is talking about. They define the Christian's cross as an individual cross separate from the cross of Christ. After all, didn't Jesus say, "Take up *your* cross"? Doesn't this mean that God has given every one of us an individual cross to bear? And because we identify the believer's cross with the hardships of life, they naturally differ for each of us. Some of us have big crosses to bear, and some have small crosses. Some have heavy crosses, and some have light crosses depending on our individual circumstances. That's why when we go through difficult times, we say, "The Lord has given me a very heavy cross to bear."

But that is not at all what the Bible teaches. God doesn't give each of us an individual cross. There is only one cross that saves—the cross of Christ, and that cross is a corporate cross. When you become a Christian, the cross of Christ becomes *your* cross (see Galatians 6:14). We must not equate the hardships of life with the cross of Christ. After all, unbelievers also have to face the hardships of life. We Christians are not the only ones who have to face problems in this sinful world. We identify ourselves with the cross of Christ when we accept Him as our Saviour. His cross becomes my cross, your cross, the moment we join ourselves to Him by faith.

The repentant thief on the cross, literally carried his own cross to the place of execution, but that cross could never save him. Christ's cross saved him. When we realize that our cross, as believers, is the cross of Christ, we understand that by faith we have identified ourselves with His death. And since Christ died to sin, we must likewise consider ourselves "to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:10,11).

In Christ I have freedom, not only from my many sins which condemn me, but also freedom from the source and power of sin in my life. John the Baptist introduced Jesus as



the promised Messiah in these words: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Note that the word *sin* is in the singular. Jesus didn't come simply to forgive you. He came to take away the sin of the world, to eradicate sin as a power in the world. On the cross, "He condemned sin [singular] in the flesh" (Romans 8:3). That is to say, He condemned the law of sin in His flesh, which was the corporate flesh of the human race He came to redeem. He executed the law of sin—the power of sin—and put it to death in order that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in you and me who walk no longer after the flesh but after the Spirit (see Romans 8:4).

The solution God has for us in regard to the principle of sin is found in Christ and Him crucified. Because Christ accepted the wages of sin, our sins, His blood cleanses us from all sins. But because we died in Him, God struck at the very foundation, the very root, of the sin problem—the power or principle of sin. Peter says of Christ, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree [the cross], that *we*, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24, emphasis supplied).

Now, let us sum up this glorious truth of the cross. Our death in Christ is essential for two reasons, because sin is a twofold problem. In the first place, it is essential that we died in Christ in order for our justification to be legally acceptable. "He who has died," wrote Paul to the Roman Christians who were baptized into Christ, "has been freed [Greek, *justified*] from sin" (Romans 6:7). It is true that objectively all men and women died in Christ; but if you reject or refuse to acknowledge that death as *your* death, if you refuse to identify yourself with the cross of Christ by your faith obedience, the blood of Christ cannot lawfully forgive you. That is why Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). "If we walk in the light as He is in the light [the truth of the cross], we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sins" (1 John 1:7).

Second, it is essential that we died in Christ in order to deal with the root of our sin problem. Our death in Him brings to an end the principle of sin that is in our flesh. "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:11). Have you ever taken a can of beer to a funeral of an alcoholic? As you pass by his casket at the funeral service, have you ever held out this can of beer and said, "Why don't you have one for the road?" Would he accept it? Or has he finished with alcohol? Because he is dead, he is no longer alive to alcohol. Similarly, God's solution for the sin problem is not to make you better. God's solution for the power of sin is to strike at its very root by the cross of Christ and His death to sin. The cross of Christ, therefore, becomes the power of God unto salvation.

The flesh with all its desires belongs to the cross of Christ. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lust" (Romans 13:14). The basis for such counsel is founded on the objective fact that our sin in the flesh was condemned in Christ some 2,000 years ago.

Do you want victory over the power of sin in the flesh? You will find it in the cross of Christ, not in your promises, not in your resolutions. They are like ropes of sand. Christ makes it clear, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24).

I enjoy gardening, but I know that keeping the packet of tomato seeds on my shelf will not produce anything. Those seeds have to be planted in the ground and die. When they die, they sprout up—not as seeds but as shoots—and they grow and produce many tomatoes. Further, if I were to chop down the apple tree in my garden because the apples it produces are sour, and in its stead plant a new apple tree that is capable of producing sweet apples, it may take five years to produce apples, but when it does, you can be sure it will produce sweet apples because it is the right tree.

When you and I die in Christ and accept His life of righteousness in exchange for our life of sin, we will bear fruit. In the parable of the sower, Jesus said the seeds that fell on good ground produced results—some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some one-hundredfold. The amount doesn't matter. That is the message of the cross for today. It is the power of God unto salvation from sin.

The greatest truth men and women of the world need to know is that Christ shed His blood for their sins. That's what the unbeliever needs to know. But the greatest need of the Christian who is already forgiven, who is standing justified by faith and who has peace with God, who is standing before God as if he had never sinned, is not that Christ shed His blood for him. He knows that already. He needs to know that he died in Christ that he might "bear fruit to God" (Romans 7:4). I repeat, God's method of bearing fruit is not to make you better. God's method is to do away with your life entirely and to give you the life of His Son in exchange, a life that is well-pleasing to Him (see John 15:1-8).

This glorious truth of the cross of Christ becomes meaningful only when we identify the humanity of Christ with the sinful humanity of the human race He came to redeem. It may be possible for Christ to bear our many sins vicariously on His cross—although that would be illegal—but it is impossible for Him vicariously to overcome and condemn the principle of sin that resides in our sinful flesh. The fact is that Christ could not bear our sins without bearing us (see 1 Peter 2:24). When you cut down the sour apple tree, the sour apples that the tree produced also come down with it. So also when Christ bore us on the cross, our sins (our sinful actions) were included in what He did.

In the next chapter, we will see more clearly that the only way Christ could redeem the fallen human race from the principle of sin and death was by assuming our sinful human nature at the incarnation and condemning it at the cross, after He produced a perfect righteousness through the power of the indwelling Spirit. When our eyes are opened to this glorious truth, we will join the apostle Paul in confessing: "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). By the word *world*, the Bible means "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

### **Key Points in Chapter Seven The Cross of Christ**

1. The cross of Christ is able to save us completely from sin—not just from its guilt and punishment, but also from its power and slavery.

2. Sin is more than an act, a choice, or even a mental assent to a temptation. It is also a power that has us in its grip.

3. God can forgive sinful acts because Christ's shed blood is able to cleanse us from all sins. But *sinfulness*—sin as a power that controls our lives—cannot be merely forgiven; it must be destroyed.

4. One of the mistakes most of us make when we become Christians is to think that, through God's help, we can change our sinful nature so that it will become pleasing to God. However, God's answer for our sinful flesh is not to make it better, but to crucify it (see Galatians 5:24).

5. The flesh must die. That is God's solution to our sinful flesh. The power of the gospel does not lie in making us good, but in the principle of "not I, but Christ." Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

6. The death of Christ was not one man dying *instead of* all men, rather His death was all men dying *in* one man. "We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14, NIV).

7. Jesus didn't come simply to forgive you. He came to take away the sin of the world, to eradicate sin as a power in the world. That is, He condemned the law of sin in His flesh. He executed the law of sin—the power of sin—and put it to death in order that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in you and me who walk no longer according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (see Romans 8:4).

8. Our death in Christ is essential for two reasons, because sin is a twofold problem:

a. First, it is essential that we died in Christ in order for our justification to be legally acceptable (see Romans 6:7). It is true that objectively all men and women died in Christ, but if you reject that death as *your* death, if you refuse to identify yourself with the cross of Christ by your faith obedience, the blood of Christ cannot lawfully forgive you.

b. Second, it is essential that we died in Christ in order to deal with the root of our sin problem. Our death in Him brings to an end the principle of sin that is in our flesh. God's solution for the sin problem is not to make you better. His solution is to strike at the very root of the sin problem by the cross of Christ and His death to sin (see Romans 6:10, 11). The cross of Christ, therefore, becomes the power of God to salvation.

9. When we die in Christ and accept His life of righteousness in exchange for our life of sin, we will bear fruit. God's method of bearing fruit is not to make you better. God's method is to do away with your life entirely and to give you the life of His Son in exchange.

10. The glorious truth of the cross of Christ becomes meaningful only when we identify the humanity of Christ with the sinful humanity of the human race He came to redeem. Christ could not bear our sins without bearing us (see 1 Peter 2:24).

## *Chapter Eight*

### **"O Wretched Man That I Am"**

No passage in all of Scripture deals with the problem of the principle, or the power, of sin that resides in our sinful nature as does Romans 7, especially the last twelve verses. Ellen White says, that when Adam sinned, "his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil" (*Steps to Christ*, 17).

With such a nature, you and I were born. And this nature we still retain as long as we live—even after conversion. Not until the second coming of Jesus will we be delivered from this body dominated by the law of sin and death (see 1 Corinthians 15:50-57; Philippians 3:20, 21).

Consequently, the greatest enemy to holy living in the Christian life is our own sinful nature that we carry with us all through our earthly life. Does the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ have a solution to this problem? Or must we put up with it until this corruption puts on incorruption? This is the desperate dilemma of every true Christian who is sincerely trying to live a life that is well pleasing to God—but failing miserably. And the apostle Paul gives us a ringing answer: Yes! God has a solution to this problem! He says, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25).

"O wretched man that I am!" (Romans 7:24), Paul cried out as he reviewed his struggles with sin. Is this desperate cry referring to his preconverted or postconverted state? This has been one of the big questions throughout the history of the Christian church, even to this

day. Many, including the famous church father Origen, John Wesley, James Moffatt, and C. H. Dodd, have insisted that Paul is referring here to his preconverted past. Surely, they say, the graphic inner turmoil described in Romans 7:15-24 could not be the experience of the regenerate and mature saint Paul.

On the other side of the argument, however, are such prominent Christians as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Anders Nygren, and John Stott, who insist that Paul is here describing his experience as a fully converted man.

Who are we to believe? In this chapter we are going to take an honest look at Romans 7:15-25, because I believe these verses have a very important lesson for all of us who are sincerely trying to live the Christian life. To look at this passage honestly, we must put aside all our preconceived ideas and presuppositions and look at what Paul is saying in the light of those whom he is addressing as well as in the light of the context of the whole chapter.

Paul begins by saying, "I speak to those who know the law" (Romans 7:1). He is obviously addressing this chapter to the Jewish believers in Rome, many of whom still believed and taught that the law was binding on Christians as a requirement for salvation (see Acts 15:1, 5). The apostle argues against this view, explaining in verses 2-6 that God had delivered them from being under the law through their corporate death in the body of Christ. God did this in order that they might serve Him "in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (verse 6).

Following this, Paul goes on in verses 7-13 to vindicate the law as being responsible for neither sin nor death. The law, he says, is "holy, and the commandment holy just and good" (verse 12). But sin has deceived us into thinking we are able to save ourselves by our own good works. Therefore, one of the reasons God gave the law was to open our eyes to the fact that not only are we sinners, but we are also slaves to sin—to the power of sin in our lives. The law does this by pointing out that sin is more than just sinful acts; the sinful desires we cherish, even though we may not committed the act, are also sin. As Paul realized in his own experience that the law condemned him even for the sinful desires he coveted—whether or not he acted on them—he came to understand his own sinfulness and the impossibility of saving himself by the works of the law (see verses 7-9).

This is the context in which he concludes in verse 14, "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin" (NIV). Who is Paul referring to by that personal pronoun "I"? This is the big question. In verses 14-25, Paul repeats this pronoun, "I," some twenty-five times. Is he referring to himself or to someone else? And if he is referring to himself, is he talking about his situation *before* his conversion or *after* his conversion?

Today, modern Biblical research leans toward the idea that Paul is using the pronoun "I" in this passage in a generic sense. In other words, Paul is not necessarily referring to his own experience in these verses, pre- or post-conversion; rather, he is describing the experience of all believers—even after their conversion—who have not yet discovered the exceeding sinfulness of the flesh.

When we take into consideration that this chapter is addressed to Jewish Christians in Rome, and when we honestly look at what the chapter is saying, it becomes clear that Paul is describing here the experience of truly converted, born-again Christians. He is describing believers who honestly and sincerely want to live a life that is pleasing to God, but who are meeting with nothing but failure because of the exceeding sinfulness of the flesh.

Consider the following facts that lead us to such a conclusion:

1. Each of the verbs in this passage, Romans 7:15-25, are in the present continuous tense. In verses 7-11, all the verbs are in the past tense because Paul is referring to his own past experience. Why has he changed to the present tense in verses 15-25 if he is still describing his own past experience?

2. Do unconverted people delight in the law of God? Yet we read in verse 22, "I delight in the law of God." In fact, all through this passage, Paul describes a person who hates evil and desires to do good. This is hardly the attitude of an unconverted person.

3. If Paul is describing here his own experience before conversion, he is certainly contradicting what he said in Philippians 3:3-6 about his preconverted situation. There, he insists, "Concerning the righteousness which is in the law [I was] blameless" (verse 6).

4. The phrase "the inward man," (verse 22), is a common Pauline expression, a term he always uses to refer to a converted person. See, for example, 2 Corinthians 4:16 and Ephesians 3:16.

5. Clearly, Paul is addressing born-again Christians in Romans chapters 5 through 8. Consequently, we must understand Romans 7:15-25 as also being addressed to believers. The apostle is describing in these verses a problem that all sincere Christians face. It is for this very reason Paul informs believers, in Romans 8, that Christians continually groan, waiting for their body to be redeemed of its sinfulness at the second coming of Christ (see verses 22-25).

6. Paul's cry for deliverance (verse 24) and his triumphant assurance of victory in God through Christ (verse 25) indicate one who has been converted and who clearly understands the power of the gospel. After his description of the inner struggle between the converted mind, that delights in the law of God, and the flesh, that is enslaved to sin, the apostle concludes with a desperate cry to be delivered from "this body of death" (verse 24). According to Romans 8:7, this body of death is "enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." Both Paul's cry for deliverance, as well as his answer, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 25), are clearly the words of one who has been converted and has come to understand the full power of the gospel.

These facts, I believe, demonstrate that Romans 7:15-25 refers to the desperate struggle against sin that we all face as converted, born-again Christians. But that raises another question: Why is the Christian life so full of frustration? If we are truly converted, why do we have such an inner battle with sin?

The reason we all experience this struggle as Christians is because *no change takes place in our sinful human natures at conversion.*

Before we are converted, we serve sin both with our sinful natures, as well as with our minds (see Ephesians 2:3). But when we experience the new birth, a radical change takes place within our minds; that is what repentance is all about. The word *repent* comes from two Greek words—*meta*, meaning "to turn around," and *noia*, meaning "the mind." But although there is a radical change in our minds, our attitude toward sin, this experience does not change the flesh, our human nature, one bit. It still remains sinful—and will remain sinful until the day we die or until Christ returns.

According to Christ, the flesh is unchangeable this side of eternity (see John 3:6). But within this sinful human nature, true Christians have the mind of Christ (see Philippians 2:5). What is the result? The spiritual mind—what Paul refers to as "the inner man"—and the unconverted and unchangeable flesh are at constant war with each other. The sinful flesh is dominated by the principle of sin, a constant force pulling us towards its selfish desires, similar to the law of gravity that pulls everything towards the center of the earth. For this reason, we are unable, in and of ourselves, to defeat the flesh. This is the experience Paul is describing in Romans 7:15-24.

The will is the driving force of the mind, but it is no match against the "law of sin" (verse 23) residing in our sinful human natures. Why? Because the will is a force, but it is not a law or a principle. By that, I mean it is not a *constant* force, and therefore, its strength fluctuates. Sometimes our wills are strong, and we can defy the law of sin. But at other times, especially when we are tired or depressed, our wills become weak, and sin takes over, and we cry, "O wretched man [or woman] that I am!" (verse 24).



This is the point Paul is trying to get across in Romans 7:15-25. He says that the law of God is spiritual, but fallen humanity, even after conversion, is unspiritual and totally dominated by sin as the slave is to his master (see verse 14). Then he goes on to prove what he has said by graphically describing the struggle of any Christian who is sincerely trying to live the Christian life in his or her own strength (see verses 15-25).

I call this passage "the great Christian discovery." Why? Because when we first come to Christ, our one and only concern is to obtain forgiveness for sins so that we may escape punishment and make it to heaven. We have no idea how exceedingly sinful our flesh is. So the first thing we do, as we become Christians, is to make all kinds of promises and resolutions. Only after repeated failures do we discover what Paul is describing in Romans 7:13-25.

This is how he sums it all up, "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (verse 25). Unfortunately, the phrase "I myself is a very weak translation of the Greek words *ego autos*. The word *ego* itself could be translated by the expression "I myself. However, by adding the word *autos*, the apostle is saying, "Left on my own, without the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, I am totally unable to conquer the sinful flesh."

You will notice that while the personal pronoun "I" appears some twenty-five times in Romans 7:14-25, no mention is made of the Holy Spirit. This is because Paul is describing here the experience of a sincere, born-again Christian who has not yet lost all "confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3), and who is therefore trying to live the Christian life in his or her own strength. The result is defeat and frustration.

But don't despair! This discovery, as negative as it may seem, is actually the gateway to victorious Christian living in Christ. Remember that Paul concludes his desperate longing for deliverance with a shout of triumph, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (verse 25). He then turns, in the first half of Romans chapter 8, to explain the victorious life in the Spirit. This will be our study in the next chapter.

However, before we do, I would like to draw your attention to one more important truth that all Adventists must take note of. The word *wretched* mentioned in Romans 7:24 appears only twice in all of the Greek New Testament. The first time it is used is in Romans 7:24, where Paul admits "O wretched man that I am!" The second time it appears is in Revelation 3:17 where Christ, the true witness, points out to the Laodicean church that she is unconscious of the fact she is "wretched." Could the reason for this be that, generally speaking, Adventists have applied Romans 7:15-25 to the experience of Paul *before* his conversion? By doing this we have missed the whole point and purpose of Romans 7. Only when we recognize with Paul how wretched we are will we be able to join with him and say "I thank God— through Jesus Christ."

### **Key Points in Chapter Eight "O Wretched Man That I Am"**

1. We are born with a nature weakened by sin so that it is impossible for us, in our own strength, to resist the power of evil. This nature we will retain as long as we live—even after conversion. Not until the second coming of Jesus will we be delivered from this body dominated by the law of sin and death (see 1 Corinthians 15:50-57; Philippians 3:20, 21).

2. The greatest enemy to holy living in the Christian life is our own sinful nature that we carry with us all through our earthly life.

3. One reason God gave the law was to open our eyes to the fact that not only are we sinners, but we are also slaves to sin—to the power of sin in our lives. The law does this by pointing out that sin is more than just sinful acts; it is also the sinful desires we cherish, even though we may not commit the act.

4. Romans 7:15-25 refers to this desperate struggle against sin that we all face as converted, born-again Christians. But that raises the question: Why is the Christian life so full of frustration? If we are truly converted, why do we have such an inner battle with sin?

5. As Christians, we all experience this fierce struggle with sin because no change takes place in our sinful human natures at conversion. Before we are converted, we serve sin with both our sinful natures as well as with our minds (see Ephesians 2:3). When we experience the new birth, a radical change takes place within our minds; that is what repentance is all about. But this experience does not change the flesh, our human natures, one bit. It still remains sinful—and will remain sinful until the day we die or until Christ returns. The result is that the spiritual mind and the unconverted, unchangeable flesh are at constant war with each other (see Galatians 5:16, 17).

6. The will is the driving force of the mind, but it is no match against the "law of sin" (Romans 7:23) residing in our sinful human natures. Why? Because the will is a force, but it is not a law or a principle. It is not a constant force; its strength fluctuates. Sometimes our wills are strong, and we can defy the law of sin. But at other times, our wills become weak, and sin takes over.

7. When we first come to Christ, our one and only concern is to obtain forgiveness for sins so that we may escape punishment and make it to heaven. We have no idea how exceedingly sinful our flesh is. But this discovery, as negative as it may seem, is actually the gateway to victorious Christian living in Christ.

## *Chapter Nine*

# **Redeemed From the Law of Sin**

When the Bible writers wrote the Scriptures, they did not include any chapter or verse divisions. These were added in the fifteenth century to make Bible reading easier. But sometimes, in order to get the correct meaning of the text, it is advisable to ignore either the chapter or the verse division. This is true when we come to study Romans 8, especially verses 1-4.

Notice that chapter 8 begins "There is therefore . . ." This is telling us that the first verse of chapter 8 is really the conclusion of what Paul has been saying at the end of chapter 7. It really belongs with chapter 7.

In the last chapter, we established the fact that the inner turmoil described in Romans 7:15-24 is referring to a born-again Christian who sincerely and honestly wants to do what is right as defined by the law of God. We found that the sinful nature prevents this from happening, since it is dominated by the law of sin which the believer is unable to overcome in his or her own strength. Paul sums up this struggle between the converted mind and the unconvertible flesh in verse 25, "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

This is the context, then, for the first verse of chapter 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Incidentally, this is *all* that Paul wrote in verse 1. The King James Version, as well as the New King James Version, adds the following statement, "who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." But this last phrase is not found in any of the older manuscripts. It is a later addition by those who were

copying the Scriptures and should be ignored. Yes, Paul did write that phrase in verse 4, but it does not belong to verse 1, for in that context it contradicts Paul's whole message of justification by faith alone.

When Paul wrote, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," what did he mean?

In the light of Romans 7:25, he means that a Christian who is struggling with the flesh and experiencing defeat does not stand condemned before God.

"How can this be?" you say. This can be true because, unlike us human beings, God does not judge us by our outward performance, but by the intent of the heart or mind (see 1 Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 17:10; Romans 8:27). In the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you will discover that, again and again, Jesus judged the Jews of His day by what they were thinking rather than by what they were saying or doing. God does not judge our Christian experience by our performance, but by what our minds are preoccupied with. Since we humans cannot read minds we must leave judging each other to God, who will judge us by our motives on judgment day (1 Corinthians 4:5). That's why the apostle Paul warns believers to stop judging each other (see Romans 14:10).

Twice in Romans 7, Paul states that he finds himself doing those very things that he doesn't really want to do. And, he says, when that happens, "it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me" (verses 17,20). By this he means, the converted mind is not responsible for the failure to live the good life, since its desire, as well as its choice, is to do what is good (see verse 18). It is the sinful nature that must take the blame—the flesh which is dominated by the law of sin and which brings the mind into captivity to sin (see verses 21-23).

Clearly, the man of Romans 7 has no cherished sins even though he is struggling and being defeated by besetting sins. A cherished sin is one your mind refuses to give up, while a besetting sin is one your converted mind has relinquished, but which still has a hold on you. Today, a besetting sin is commonly referred to as a compulsion, something we all struggle with.

Remember, it is the converted mind that Christ saves and will take to heaven, along with a glorified body which He will give us at His second coming; our sinful natures are not redeemable and will be destroyed. Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 and Philippians 3:20, 21. If we have the mind of Christ, a mind emptied of self (see Philippians 2:5), then we are safe to be saved because that is what we will take to heaven.

But if the sinful flesh is so strong and so unchangeable, is there no hope for Christians? Must those who long to live the victorious life, who are struggling with the flesh, who hate the evil they are doing, and who delight in the law of God and want very much to live a life pleasing to God—must they simply give up? Is there a solution to this problem?

Paul answers with a definite Yes! "I thank God," he exclaims, "—through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:25). Thank God that Jesus Christ is not only our Saviour from the guilt and punishment of sin, but that He also came to this world to save us from the power and slavery of sin!

When we first became Christians, our main concern was to be saved from our sins (plural) because we realized that these sins condemned us and would deprive us of life and heaven. But after being a Christian for some time, we discovered that sin is more than an act, it is also a force, a principle, a power that resides in our sinful natures and which we are unable to conquer, in and of ourselves, try as we may. This is the experience Paul describes in Romans 7:15-24.

We believers can thank God, that the blood of Christ forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (see 1 John 1:7, 9). But if we are truly converted and appreciate Christ, we want more than forgiveness from sin, wonderful as this is. We want *victory* over sin. Not in order to be justified or to make it to heaven; that is already ours in Christ. "There

is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Rather, we want victory over sin because we want to glorify God while we are waiting patiently for the blessed hope, the appearing of our Lord and Saviour (see Titus 2:11-14).

The big question is this: "Is total victory over the flesh possible this side of eternity?"

Many Adventists today say, "not possible." And their proof is the challenge: "Show me someone who has done it." I call this salvation based on *human experience* rather than salvation by *faith in God's Word*. This mindset is the influence of the scientific method creeping into the church—a method that rejects anything that is supernatural.

My response to those who must have empirical evidence before they can believe is this: "What would you have done if you were in Noah's or Abraham's shoes? Noah had never experienced rain; Abraham had no scientific evidence that a woman could have a child after passing the age of childbearing. In fact, he had evidence that such a thing could not happen. Yet both men took God at His Word, and their histories are recorded for our benefit. (Read Romans 4:16-18 to find out what true faith involves.)

Because we live in a scientific age that largely accepts only what can be demonstrated in the laboratory, even Christians—even many Seventh-day Adventist Christians—find it difficult to believe that total victory over the power of sin in the flesh is impossible this side of eternity. But what answer does the apostle Paul give to this question in Romans 8? Does Paul believe that total victory over the flesh is possible in this life? The answer is a definite YES!

In Romans 8, Paul has some wonderful, encouraging good news for us, who long for victory over our sinful flesh. He assures us that victory over the power of sin is possible and that the source of that victory is none other than "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (verse 2). Paul expounds this glorious truth of victory over the sinful flesh in the first half of chapter 8. He says that *in Christ* we have salvation full and complete. Just as we once came to Him for forgiveness and justification, so also we must now come to Him for power to overcome the flesh and for grace to live the sanctified life. "I can do all things," Paul says, "through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). "Not I, but Christ" is the gospel formula for experiencing both justification as well as sanctification.

With this in mind, let's now proceed to examine carefully what Paul is saying about Christ's victory over the sinful flesh in Romans 8:2-4.

In verse 2, the apostle Paul states a fact. He says, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me [and all mankind] free from the law of sin and death." This became reality *in Christ* some 2,000 years ago, when, as the second Adam, He redeemed all humanity by His death. Paul is not referring here to the Christian's subjective experience, but to an objective fact that actually took place at the cross. He uses the Greek aorist (past) tense—the tense which means that something occurred once and for all in the past.

All through His earthly life, two forces struggled within Christ's humanity, trying to dominate Him—the law of the Spirit of life versus the law of sin and death. Please notice, both of these forces are described as a *law*, that is, a constant force or principle. And the good news is that in Christ's humanity, the law of the Spirit of life defeated and overcame the law of sin and death—and finally condemned it on the cross! This proves that the power of the Holy Spirit is far superior than all the power that the devil can muster through the sinful flesh. This is a vital part of the incredible good news of the gospel that is often ignored.

Those who insist that we cannot totally overcome the sinful flesh—even by the power of the indwelling Spirit—are not only undermining God's power, they have also failed to understand the full implication of what Paul says in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it is the *power of God to salvation* for everyone who believes" (emphasis supplied).

The secret of victory for the Christian is stated in this fact: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). Every believer is conscious of an inner influence or impulse moving him or her to do wrong. This is the law of sin which produces death, because death is always the consequence of sin (see Romans 6:23). But in the believer this law of sin is to be replaced by a new, vitalizing force, "the law of the Spirit" (verse 2), which gives spiritual life (see Romans 8:11). In other words, the indwelling Holy Spirit moves us constantly to do the right. But more than that, the Spirit actually provides the power and strength we need to do it! He is not only an influence; He is a positive force, enabling us to live righteously.

What a wonderful exchange! Not I, but Christ. By applying the truth of the cross daily to our lives (see Luke 9:23; Galatians 5:24), we surrender to the cross the inner influence toward sin. And, in exchange, we receive a living Person to control our lives, One who will guide us and empower us!

In verse 3, the apostle explains what happened to make all this possible. He says, "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin [the law of sin]: He condemned sin in the flesh." The moral law of God was incapable of producing righteousness in sinful flesh. But what the moral law could not accomplish, God accomplished in Christ's humanity—a humanity which was identical to our sinful humanity.

Some insist, however, that when Christ clothed Himself with humanity at the incarnation, He was exempt from the "law of sin" (Romans 8:2) with which we are born. They argue that Paul says God sent His Son "in *the likeness* of sinful flesh" (verse 3, emphasis supplied), and that the word "likeness" does not mean "identical." They argue that Christ's humanity was *like* ours in that He experienced fatigue, hunger, aging, etc., but that it was *unlike* ours when it came to possessing a sinful nature dominated by the law of sin. If He had a sinful nature, just like ours, they insist, He Himself would be a sinner in need of a Saviour.

If you look at a Greek lexicon, however, you will find that the Greek word translated "likeness" has different shades of meaning and therefore can be used in more than one way. For example, according to *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* by Arndt and Gingrich, this Greek word may also be translated as "make like," "compare," "likeness," "copy," "form," "similar to," etc.

How can we understand, then, exactly what Paul had in mind when he used this word in Romans 8:3? The only way to know is by looking at the context, the setting, in which he uses it. The whole issue Paul has been addressing in the last half of Romans 7 and the first half of chapter 8 is the issue of the law, or principle, of sin that resides in the Christian's human nature. He says that we cannot, of ourselves, overcome this law of sin in our lives. But Christ "condemned sin in the flesh" when He came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). The phrase "sin in the flesh," (NKJV) or "sin in sinful man" (NIV), is synonymous with "the law of sin and death" (verse 2) as well as with "sin dwelling in me" (Romans 7:17, 20). The context clearly indicates that Christ condemned sin in the very same human nature that you and I possess—a human nature in which the "law of sin" resides.<sup>i</sup>

Furthermore, the word "sin" in Romans 8:3, is singular (not sins) and therefore could not be referring to our many sins which Christ bore on the cross, but to "the law of sin" which Christ also condemned by His death on the cross. It was because this "law of sin" was executed on the cross in Christ's humanity, that Paul could declare in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," even though the sinful human nature of the believer is still serving the law of sin.

As we saw earlier, Romans 5:12-21 makes it clear that when Christ redeemed humanity as the second Adam, He could do so lawfully only by assuming our corporate sinful humanity as we know it. But this did not make Him a sinner because that humanity was not



His by native right. He *assumed* our sinful humanity in order to redeem us totally from every aspect of sin. This is why the New Testament writers always add a qualifier when they speak of Christ's humanity. Thus Christ was "*made* flesh" (John 1:14, emphasis supplied); He was "*made* sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21, emphasis supplied); He was "*made* of a woman" (Galatians 4:4, emphasis supplied); etc. The word *made* in these texts means He was made to be something that, in and of Himself, He was not. This is why Paul says that God sent Christ "*in the likeness* of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3, emphasis supplied) in order that He might first overcome sin by His life, and then condemn that law of sin on the cross by His death.

Had Christ consented to any of the desires of that sinful nature He assumed, even by a thought (the consent of the mind), He would indeed have become a sinner in need of a Saviour. But by His perfect life and His sacrificial death, He became our perfect Saviour and gave us everlasting hope, not only from our many sins which condemn us but also from the law of sin and death which disqualifies us from heaven and makes holy living impossible, in and of ourselves.

The result of this glorious truth is that the righteousness of the law, which we are incapable of attaining in our own strength, is now possible for us who walk in the Spirit, as Christ did when He was on this earth (see Romans 8:4). In verses 5-17, Paul proceeds to explain what walking in the Spirit actually involves. He says that this is the secret to holy living that God has prepared for those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour.

All this is wonderful news. But we must be very clear on one point: As long as we are depending on our performance, even in the slightest way, for our assurance of salvation, the Holy Spirit will not reproduce in us the victorious life of Christ.

Why is this so?

Because, in the first place, the Holy Spirit is not a redeemer with Christ. His function in the plan of salvation is to communicate to us the perfect salvation God has *already* obtained for all men in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the active agent in the plan of salvation, but *only* Christ is the redeemer.

Second, for the Holy Spirit to produce righteousness in us, in order to save or justify us, He would have to contradict the gospel which already has justified all who believe in Christ (see Romans 5:1). The Godhead does not contradict itself. In other words, if we are not resting in Christ and His perfect salvation which He obtained for us some 2,000 years ago, we are not safe for victory and therefore cannot experience it.

We cannot be justified by faith *alone* in the righteousness of Christ, we cannot admit that there is nothing good in us and that we are 100 percent sinners, and then turn around and try to add our own good works to that perfect righteousness we received in Christ. This is what the Galatian Christians were attempting to do (see Galatians 3:3). Paul warned them, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Galatians 5:4, 5).

We must constantly keep in mind that we are justified by faith alone in the righteousness of Christ and by nothing else. Sanctification, holy living, is *the fruit* of that justification. As long as we fail to understand, or as long as we are unwilling to accept, this fundamental truth of the gospel, the Holy Spirit cannot manifest the power of God to overcome our sinful flesh.

This is one of the major reasons Christians today are such poor witnesses to the world when it comes to manifesting the power of the gospel over sinful flesh. This is why so many who live in so-called Christian countries have turned their backs on Christianity. Understanding and accepting the truth of justification by faith alone is the crying need of Christians today. Without it, the Church will fail to experience the victorious life that Christ

is longing to bestow upon His believers through the power of the indwelling Spirit. And what the Church does not experience, she cannot witness to.

We can be set free from our ego-centric preoccupation with our own personal salvation only when we understand and accept justification by faith alone— set free so that the Holy Spirit may take over and lighten this earth with the glory of Jesus Christ. I believe this was God's purpose some one hundred years ago when He brought this most precious message to the Adventist Church. Thank God, He has not abandoned His purpose; He still longs to make it a reality today. So let's stop slinging mud at each other over this issue of the human nature of Christ. In Christian love, let's study this subject prayerfully, putting aside our pre-conceived ideas and earnestly seeking truth as did our pioneers in the formative years of this church. The result will be that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4).

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i i A number of reliable Bible scholars have understood Paul's use of the word *likeness* in this way. Please note that in the quotations given below, the italicized words indicate where the author used the actual Greek words appearing in the New Testament text.

For it was to be right in sin's own realm that the Son was to bring sin to judgment, overcome it, and take away its power. It is therefore important that with Christ it is actually a matter of *sinful flesh*.... Christ's carnal nature was not unreality, but simple, tangible fact. He shared all our conditions. He was under the same powers of destruction. Out of *the flesh* arose for Him the same temptations as for us. But in all this He was master of sin (Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, 312, 315).

By *sinful flesh* Paul clearly meant... fallen human nature. But why did he say *in likeness of sinful flesh* rather than just *in sinful flesh*? At any rate, five alternative solutions to this problem have to be considered: (solutions ii and v are the two taught within conservative Christianity and will be quoted here).

(ii) That he introduced *likeness* in order to avoid implying that the Son of God assumed fallen human nature, the sense being: like our fallen flesh, because flesh, but only like, and not identical with, it, because unfallen. This, though it is the traditional solution, is open to the general theological objection that it was not unfallen, but fallen, human nature which needed redeeming.

(v) That the intention behind the use of *likeness* here was to take account of the fact that the Son of God was not, in being sent by His Father, changed into a man, but rather assumed human nature while still remaining Himself. On this view, the word *likeness* does have its sense of "likeness;" but the intention is not in any way to call in question or to water down the reality of Christ's *sinful flesh*, but to draw attention to the fact that, while the Son of God truly assumed *sinful flesh*, He never became *sinful flesh* and nothing more, nor even *sinful flesh* indwelt by the Holy Spirit and nothing more, but always remained Himself (i.e., the Son of God)...

We conclude that (v) is to be accepted as the most probable explanation of Paul's use of *likeness* here, and understand Paul's thought to be that the Son of God assumed the selfsame fallen human nature that is ours, but that in His case that fallen human nature was never the whole of Him—He never ceased to be the eternal Son of God.

But if we recognize that Paul believed it was fallen human nature which the Son of God assumed, we shall probably be inclined to see here also a reference to the unintermittent warfare of His whole earthly life by which He forced our rebellious nature to render a perfect obedience to God.

Those who believe that it was fallen human nature which was assumed have even more cause than had the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism to see the whole of Christ's life before His actual ministry and death was not just a standing where unfallen Adam had stood without yielding to the temptation to which Adam succumbed, but a matter of starting from where we start, subjected to all the evil pressures which we inherit, and using the altogether unpromising and unsuitable material of our corrupt nature to work out a perfect sinless obedience (C.E.B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary*, Romans, 1:379-383, 1982 edition).

Here, however, the fundamental thought is added that God achieved his purpose for man not by scrapping the first effort and starting again, but by working through man in his fallenness, letting sin and death exhaust themselves in this man's flesh, and remaking him beyond death as a progenitor and enabler of a life *according to the Spirit*. Hence whatever the precise force of the *likeness*, it must include the thought of Jesus' complete identification with *sinful flesh* (cf. NJB: "the same human nature as any sinner").

God sent his Son to deal with sin, or more precisely "sin in the flesh." Since it is through the flesh, through man as he belongs to and is determined by this age, that sin exerts its power (7:5, 14, 17, 18), it is in the flesh that the power has to be combatted and broken.

Hence the importance of being able to affirm Christ's complete oneness with humankind's sinful flesh. For Paul the breaking of that power was achieved by Christ's death as a sacrifice whereby God condemned that sinful flesh. In the two phrases "for sin" and "condemned" lies the key to Paul's soteriology.... The logic of Paul's thought here is that sinful flesh could not be healed or redeemed, only destroyed.... God did not redeem flesh by an act of incarnation; he destroyed flesh by an act of condemnation (James Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 38a:420-440).

## Key Points in Chapter Nine Redeemed From the Law of Sin

1. The inner turmoil described in Romans 7:13-24 is referring to a born-again Christian who sincerely wants to do what is right. The sinful nature, however, prevents this from happening, because it is dominated by the law of sin which the believer is unable to overcome in his or her own strength.

2. In spite of this, Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). A Christian who is struggling with the flesh and experiencing defeat does not stand condemned before God.

3. This is true because, unlike human beings, God does not judge us by our outward performance, but by the intent of the heart or mind (see 1 Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 17:10; Romans 8:27).

4. The converted mind is not responsible for the failure to live the good life, since its desire, as well as its choice, is to do what is good. It is the sinful nature that must take the blame—the flesh which is dominated by the law of sin and which brings the mind into captivity to sin.

5. It is the converted mind that Christ saves and will take to heaven, along with a glorified body which He will give us at the second coming. Our sinful natures are not redeemable and will be destroyed (see 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; Philippians 3:20, 21).

6. If the sinful flesh is so strong and so unchangeable, is there no hope for Christians? Must those who long to live a victorious life, who are struggling with the flesh, and who hate the evil they are doing—must they simply give up? Is there a solution to this problem? Thank God that Jesus Christ is not only our Saviour from the guilt and punishment of sin, but that He also came to this world to save us from the power and slavery of sin!

7. If we are truly converted, we want more than forgiveness from sin; we want *victory* over sin—not in order to be justified or to make it to heaven; that is already ours in Christ. Rather, we want victory over sin because we want to glorify God while we are patiently waiting for Jesus to return. Is total victory over the flesh possible this side of eternity?

8. Paul assures us in Romans 8 that victory over the power of sin is possible and that the source of that victory is none other than "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (verse 2). In Christ, we have salvation full and complete. Just as we once came to Him for forgiveness and justification, so also we must now come to Him for power to overcome the flesh and for grace to live the sanctified life. "Not I, but Christ" is the gospel formula for experiencing both sanctification as well as justification.

9. When Paul says, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2), he is not referring to the Christian's subjective experience, but to an objective fact that actually took place at the cross. All through His earthly life, two forces struggled within Christ's humanity, each trying to dominate Him—the law of the Spirit of life versus the law of sin and death. The good news is that in Christ's humanity, the law of the Spirit of life defeated and overcame the law of sin and death—and finally condemned it on the cross. This proves that the power of the Holy Spirit is far superior than all the power the devil can muster through the sinful flesh.

10. Every believer is conscious of an inner influence moving him or her to do wrong. This is the law of sin. But in the believer this law of sin is to be replaced by a new, vitalizing force, the law of the Spirit which gives spiritual life (see Romans 8:11). The indwelling Spirit moves us constantly to do the right. But more than that, the Spirit actually provides the power and strength we need to do it! He is not only an influence; He is a positive force, enabling us to live righteously.

11. Some insist that when Christ clothed Himself with humanity, He was exempt from the "law of sin" with which we are born. They argue that Paul says God sent His son "in the *likeness* of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3, emphasis supplied), and that the word "likeness" does

not mean identical. They believe that Christ's humanity was like ours in that He became tired, hungry, etc. But that He was unlike us when it came to possessing a sinful nature dominated by the law of sin.

12. The context of Romans 8:3 clearly indicates that Christ condemned sin in the very same human nature that you and I possess—a nature in which the "law of sin" resides.

13. When Christ redeemed humanity as the second Adam, He could do so lawfully only by assuming our corporate sinful humanity as we know it. But this did not make Him a sinner. That humanity was not His by native right; He only assumed it in order to redeem us totally from every aspect of sin. This is why the New Testament writers always add a qualifier when they speak of Christ's humanity.

14. God sent Christ "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3) in order that He might first overcome sin by His life, and then condemn that law of sin on the cross by His death.

15. The righteousness of the law, which we are incapable of attaining in our own strength, is now possible for us who walk in the Spirit as Christ did when He was on this earth. This is the secret to holy living that God has prepared for those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour.

16. We are justified by faith alone in the righteousness of Christ and by nothing else. Sanctification, holy living, is *the fruit* of that justification.

## Chapter Ten

### A Brief History

At this point, we should pause for a brief historical background of how our own denomination has related to the issue of Christ's human nature. An overview is important if we are going to appreciate the unique Adventist message and mission to the world.

In the May 27, 1976 *Adventist Review* a group of church leaders provided a statement on righteousness by faith and certain related truths, including the humanity of Christ. After explaining both views (pre-Fall and post-Fall), the article stated that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a definite position on this issue and that members may therefore may hold either view. This was confirmed recently by the present editor of *Adventist Review*.

Clearly, then, both views on Christ's humanity are acceptable within Adventism today. However, this is true only in theory, not in practice. Generally, anyone teaching or preaching the post-Fall view is frowned upon by many of the brethren, and sometimes such an individual is looked upon as a heretic. The reason is twofold.

First, because in the past (especially during the 1950s) the post-Fall view has contributed to other Christians bodies looking upon Adventism as a cult or a sect. Remember that during this era almost no Christian Bible scholars or commentaries taught the post-Fall view of Christ's human nature.

Second, the post-Fall view, as presently taught by most of the major independent ministries and by some conservative Adventists, leads to a focus primarily on Christian living. Important as victorious Christian living is, it leads to legalism when presented to a people who have very little assurance of salvation. As presented by these independent

ministries, the post-Fall view of Christ's human nature focuses on Him as our Example, the One who has shown us how to overcome our sinful natures. The emphasis is on perfect victory over sin as essential to our salvation, especially for those living in the last days and who will have to go through the time of trouble "without a mediator." These legalistic Adventists fail to realize that living "without a mediator" does not mean living without a Saviour. We will not need a mediator after the verdict of the Investigative Judgment is passed, but we will always need a Saviour this side of eternity.

This legalistic approach naturally leads to viewing the experience of sanctification as being meritorious, the idea that we are saved by faith in Christ *plus* what He is doing in us through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. As a result, this legalistic approach has robbed many sincere Adventists of the joy of salvation and has brought them to the point of despair as they continue to struggle with the problem of indwelling sin. Although I believe the post-Fall view of Christ's human nature is correct, I also believe presenting it in a context that leads to legalism has done great damage to the cause of God, and therefore, does deserve the church's frown.

But how did this present situation regarding Christ's human nature come about within the Adventist Church?

Adventism may never have had an officially defined position on the human nature of Christ, but a careful look at our history shows that the general teaching of the church in periodicals, books, and Sabbath School lessons published prior to the 1950s, was that Christ took on His sinless divine nature our sinful human nature in order to be the Saviour of the world. The Anglican theologian, Geoffrey Paxton, documented this some years ago, in his book *The Shaking of Adventism*.

But, clearly, there has come a change in thinking on this topic within Adventism. What brought it about?

Beginning in the early 1950s, dialogue with non-Adventist theologians gradually began to bring about a shift in our position on the humanity of Christ. This was first noticeable in articles published in *The Ministry* magazine, followed by such books as *Questions on Doctrine* and *Movement of Destiny*. Older books, such as *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* and *Answers to Objections*, were revised to present the modified view on the human nature of Christ. What motivated this change?

Only the judgment will reveal the secrets of men's minds, but many feel that the change was an attempt to gain acceptance with popular evangelical scholars and churches and to remove the stigma of being called a "sect" or a "cult."

But not all in our midst surrendered to this theological shift on Christ's humanity. Foremost in opposition was M. L. Andreasen. Others followed, until the church was forced, at the Palmdale Conference in 1976, to declare both views acceptable within Adventism—even if one view was more "acceptable" than the other. But Palmdale was not the final word on this debate. Most of the independent ministries have taken up the cause of the post-Fall view on Christ's human nature. As a result, this controversy continues and is fragmenting the church.

The Adventist Church is presently divided into two major camps on this issue. On the one hand is the popular view that Christ's humanity was like ours *only* in the physical sense. That is, He was prone to fatigue, hunger, aging, etc., but His spiritual nature was like that of Adam before the Fall. This camp holds to the pre-Fall view. On the other hand are those who believe and teach that Christ assumed our total sinful nature, the same nature we are born with, but that He never sinned—not even by a thought. This camp holds the post-Fall view.

Unfortunately, most Adventists who hold the popular pre-Fall view of Christ's human nature lump all post-Fall proponents into a single class—when actually there are presently three groups within Adventism who believe and teach the post-Fall view of Christ's human nature.



1. The vocal group. This is the "more insistent group" as the editor of the *Adventist Review* has called it. This group consists mainly of independent ministries. Those in this group teach the post-Fall view of Christ's human nature in the context of His being our example and vicariously substituting Himself for us.

2. The silent group. These are mainly liberals who believe the post-Fall view but who don't make an issue of it. As a result, it is difficult to evaluate where their emphasis lies in this matter.

3. The minority group. This group also hold to the post-Fall view of Christ's human nature and are presenting it as it was taught in the 1888 message—with Christ as the perfect and complete Saviour from every aspect of sin. The One who *actually*—not vicariously—substituted Himself and His humanity for the whole human race, the One who assumed our corporate, sinful humanity at the incarnation in order to be the Saviour of the world.

Of these three groups, it is the "more insistent" group, the major independent ministries, those that are presenting the post-Fall view of Christ's human nature in the context of Him being our example, who have greatly hindered the restoration of that "most precious message" of righteousness by faith as God brought it to His people in 1888. Their emphasis on presenting Christ as primarily our example, rather than as our Saviour, has resulted in many sincere Adventists being trapped in a subtle form of legal-ism or perfectionism. For this reason, I believe this approach is a counterfeit teaching that has done more harm to the cause of God's remnant than have those who are proclaiming the pre-Fall view of Christ's humanity.

There are two reasons I believe these independent ministries, this "more insistent" group, are presenting an incorrect view of Christ's human nature. First, as already mentioned, their emphasis in presenting the post-Fall view is in the context of Christ as our example. This leads naturally to legalism or perfectionism. Second, they present the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity (as does the pre-Fall view) in the context of a *vicarious* substitution. This undermines the truth of Christ's *actual* substitution as expounded by Paul in his teaching of the *in Christ* motif and the truth of the two Adams (see chapters 4 and 5 of this book).

Some years ago *Ministry* magazine published two articles on the human nature of Christ. Both were written by Adventist scholars, but one defended the pre-Fall view and one the post-Fall view, with the emphasis of Christ being our example and our vicarious substitute. Not long after these articles were published, I had the opportunity to speak to the editor. He told me that these two articles generated more response, from both sides, than any other articles published by *Ministry* magazine during his time as editor. But what disturbed him most about these responses, he told me, was the spirit of many of the letters coming from those who upheld the post-Fall view. Some were so nasty, he said, and un-Christlike, that it made him want to cry. In fact, he even questioned in his mind if these people were truly converted Christians. He saw this attitude as the natural fruit of a wrong view of the nature of Christ; naturally, this turned him away from the post-Fall view of the human nature of Christ.

Sad to say, he has not been the only one to experience such negative attitudes on the part of those holding the post-Fall view. This critical and un-Christlike spirit, coming mainly from this "more insistent" group, has turned many a sincere pastor and church member from objectively studying the correct post-Fall view. As a result, many in our midst today identify the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14, the most precious message of 1888 which Ellen G. White defined as righteousness by faith in verity, with the evangelical gospel, the so called "new theology." The vision God gave this movement, of proclaiming the unique Elijah message in preparation for the second advent, is gradually being destroyed in the minds of

Adventists. Most Adventist youth today no longer see this church as having a unique message with a global mission.

I believe this critical spirit on the part of many who teach the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity is instigated by the enemy of souls, not the Spirit of Christ. I believe it calls for serious reevaluation on the part of those who have misrepresented the post-Fall view and have caused so many to look at the correct understanding of Christ's human nature as heresy. Nothing is gained when we take pot shots at each other and call each other names, as some on both sides of the debate are doing today.

A friend sent me the following quotation. I have not been able to locate the source, but it gives excellent counsel regarding our search for truth— counsel that is very relevant to our present discussion on the human nature of Christ.

### **Fellowship in the quest of truth**

The quest for truth unites us in a bond of fellowship with all fellow Christians who are engaged in the same endeavor. We will never permit this quest to degenerate into an attempt to prove our own opinions right and someone else's wrong. Truth is truth, despite all of the ingenious arguments that can be arrayed either for or against it. If we are sincere in our own search for truth we will credit other men (or women) with being as sincere as we are, and leave with God any question as to their motives. They are His sons (or daughters) and our brothers (or sisters) in Christ, and it is infinitely more important to be motivated by the Spirit of Christ than to take the kingdom of heaven by force of argument.

Unless we are willing to come together in the spirit of love and mutual understanding, God will never be able to settle our differences on this important topic. The apostle Paul declared in his great chapter of love, "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love [agape], I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2).

As a result of the present Christological controversy within Adventism, the church is sadly divided over the gospel. Therefore, we find ourselves in a confused state of affairs regarding our God-given mission, especially when it comes to proclaiming the all-important doctrine of "substitution."

One group within Adventism, that "more insistent" group, is proclaiming a *vicarious* substitution in the context of the post-Fall view—the idea that one man, Jesus Christ, took fallen human nature *instead of*, or *in the place of*, all mankind. They claim that this is historic Adventism.

Another, more popular, group is also proclaiming *vicarious* substitution, but in the context of the pre-Fall view—the idea that one man, Jesus Christ, substituted Himself for all of fallen mankind by taking an *unfallen* spiritual human nature. This is *evangelical* Adventism.

The third group is desperately trying to restore the 1888 message of a post-Fall view in the context of an *actual* substitution—the idea all mankind was *actually* in the humanity of one Man, Jesus Christ, who assumed our corporate, condemned, sinful human nature at the Incarnation in order to be the Saviour of the world. This is the *unique* Adventist message God brought to our church more than a hundred years ago.

As the Anglican theologian Geoffrey Paxton challenged us some fifteen years ago, "Will the true Seventh-day Adventist please stand up?"

Let us, then, press together as we see this wicked world plunging deeper and deeper into sin. Men and women are searching everywhere for solutions to their problems; mankind desperately needs to see Christ in His people, "the hope of glory" (Colossians

1:27). We face today the same challenge Mahatma Gandhi flung down before the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, when he was fighting apartheid as a young lawyer: "When you Christians live the life of your Master, all India will bow down to Christianity."

This is the challenge Adventism faces today in our God-given mission. "Where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you," said Paul to the Corinthian believers, "are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3). Only when we Adventists love one another unconditionally, as Christ loved us unconditionally, will all men know that the gospel is indeed God's power unto salvation and that we are truly the followers of Christ (see John 13:34, 35).

### **Key Points in Chapter Ten A Brief History**

1. According to the May 27, 1976 *Adventist Review*, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a definite position on the human nature of Christ, and members are free to hold either a post-Fall or a pre-Fall view. In actual practice, however, the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity is frowned upon.

a. First, because in the past the post-Fall view has contributed to other Christian bodies looking upon Adventism as a cult or a sect.

b. Second, because the post-Fall view, as taught by most of the independent ministries, leads to a focus primarily on Christian living and Christ as our Example in overcoming sin. This focus results in a legalism that has robbed many sincere Adventists of the joy of salvation and has brought them to the point of despair as they continue to struggle with the problem of indwelling sin.

2. Although Seventh-day Adventists have never had an official position on the human nature of Christ, a careful look at the general teaching of the church, as reflected in periodicals, books, and Sabbath School lessons prior to 1950, shows that the dominant view was that Christ assumed our sinful nature in order to be the Saviour of the world.

3. Clearly, there has been a change in thinking on this topic within the church since the 1950s, brought about by dialogue with non-Adventist theologians.

4. Presently, the Adventist Church is divided into two groups regarding the human nature of Christ:

a. The pre-Fall group. Those who believe Christ's humanity was like ours only in the physical sense; He was prone to hunger, fatigue, aging, etc., but His spiritual nature was like that of Adam before the Fall.

b. The post-Fall group. Those who believe that Christ assumed our total sinful human nature—the same nature we are born with— but that He never sinned even by a thought.

5. The post-Fall group can be further divided into three groups:

a. The more insistent group. Those who teach the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity in the context of Christ as our Example who substituted His life for ours vicariously.

b. The silent group. These are mainly liberal individuals who believe the post-Fall view, but who don't make an issue of it.

c. The minority group. Those who teach the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity in the context of Christ as a perfect and complete Saviour from every aspect of sin, and who actually substituted His life for ours since it was our sinful, corporate humanity He assumed at the Incarnation in order to be the Saviour of the world.

6. Although it is the correct view, when the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity is presented in the context of Christ as primarily our Example, rather than as our Saviour, it does more harm to God's remnant church than does the pre-Fall view. In this way, it becomes a counterfeit teaching that leads to perfectionism or a subtle form of legalism.

7. Today the Adventist Church finds itself sadly divided over the gospel.

- a. One group proclaims *vicarious* substitution in the context of the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity. They see the gospel as one man, Jesus Christ, taking a fallen human nature instead of all men. This, they say, is historic Adventism.
- b. Another group proclaims *vicarious* substitution in the context of the pre-Fall view of Christ's humanity. They see the gospel as one man, Jesus Christ, substituting Himself for all of fallen mankind in an unfallen human nature. This is evangelical Adventism.
- c. A third group proclaims *actual* substitution in the context of the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity. They see the gospel as all mankind being in the humanity of one man, Jesus Christ, who assumed our corporate, condemned, sinful nature at the Incarnation in order to be the Saviour of the world. This is the unique Adventist message God brought to the church in 1888—more than one hundred years ago.

## Chapter Eleven

### Views of Modern Scholarship

In this chapter, we will examine what a number of reliable, careful Bible scholars have written about Christ's human nature. Of course, just because a particular scholar—or even the majority of scholars—holds a certain view doesn't mean it is true. However, it is reassuring to know that many present-day biblical and systematic theologians fully support the view of Christ's humanity taught in the 1888 message.

Today, the emphasis is on scholarship as the basis for arriving at truth. Sound scholarship is important to a true understanding of Scripture, but we must also realize that scholars have often gone wrong. Jewish scholars, for example, failed to see the Messiah in the suffering servant of the Old Testament. This greatly contributed to the rejection of Jesus by the leaders of Israel.

Likewise, many Bible scholars of today still cling to such errors as the natural immortality of the soul and Sunday as the Christian Sabbath—neither of which are supported by Scripture. Modern scholarship is often influenced by speculation and liberalism, based on human reason or the opinions of scientists. The popular historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible sets up the human mind as the ultimate measuring stick for determining truth—rather than "*thus saith the Lord*."

This does not mean, however, that we should totally discard modern biblical scholarship. It has done much to give us a clearer, deeper understanding of Scripture. This is especially true in regard to the humanity of Christ. Practically all schools of theological thought today take the humanity of our Lord much more seriously than Christian theologians have ever done before.

Ever since the Incarnation, human beings have been confronted with the question Jesus posed to His disciples: "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" (Matthew 16:13). The New Testament writers did not argue for, or try to explain, the twofold nature of Christ; they simply proclaimed as a fact that He was truly God and truly man in one Person. This is the mystery of the Incarnation.

As the early church grew, gentile Christians, who were mainly of Greek origin, found it difficult to accept this fact at face value. Many of them believed that the physical body was intrinsically evil. "How could a holy God," they argued, "coexist in human flesh?" And so

began the great christological controversies, with some denying our Lord's divinity and others denying His true humanity.

It required a period of more than 300 years and two church councils, Nicea and Chalcedon, for the Christian church to finally restore and accept the simple apostolic declarations concerning the unipersonality of Christ— that He was fully God and fully man at the same time. Even though it did not solve all the christological problems, this was the generally-held position in the Christian church until "the age of enlightenment" in the eighteenth century. At that time, scholars and theologians again began to question the person and work of Christ, and the discussion still goes on today.

In the early 1960s, a British scholar, Harry Johnson, earned his doctoral degree from London University for his biblical and historical research on the subject of the humanity of Christ. In 1962, he published his conclusions in the book, *The Humanity of the Saviour* (Epworth Press, London). This is what appeared on the flyleaf of that book:

The eternal Son of God became man for our salvation; but what kind of human nature did He assume? The answer of this book is that He took human nature as it was because of the Fall. Despite this, He lived a perfect, sinless life, and finally redeemed this "fallen nature" through His Cross; in this victory is the basis of Atonement. This Christological position is supported by the New Testament, and there are several indications which suggest that it gives a deeper interpretation to some sections of the Gospel narrative. It is clearly taught by Paul, and is the obvious implication of certain aspects of the Christology of Hebrews.

Johnson's book is out of print today, but I believe it did more than any other work to stir up the minds of scholars to take a second look at the human nature of Christ as taught in Scripture. As a result, many modern biblical scholars have come to the same conclusions as did Harry Johnson— that in order to be the Saviour of the world and redeem mankind from every aspect of sin, Christ assumed the self-same fallen human nature all of us are born with. For example, in 1982 *The International Critical Commentary* changed its position on the human nature of Christ from a pre-Fall to a post-Fall position. Swedish theologian, Anders Nygren, presents the post-Fall view of the human nature of Christ in his commentary on Romans. James Dunn, writer of the section on Romans in *The Word Biblical Commentary*, clearly defends the view that Christ assumed our sinful nature to be the Saviour of mankind. (See the note at the end of chapter 9 of this book.) Of course, not all modern Bible scholars agree on this issue of the humanity of Christ. But among those who do are Karl Barth, J. A. T. Robinson, T. F. Torrance, C. E. B. Cranfield, Nels F. S. Ferre, Harold Roberts, and Leslie Newbigin. All these prominent students of the Bible base their arguments that Christ assumed a post-Fall human nature on the teachings of the New Testament. Let's look at some of their statements giving their reasons for taking such a position.

It was to be right in sin's own realm that the Son was to bring sin to judgment, overcome it and take away its power.... Paul is concerned to affirm that when Christ came into the world, He actually stood under the same conditions as we, and under the same destroying powers as had man in bondage... Christ's carnal nature was no unreality, but simple, tangible fact. He shared all our conditions. He was under the same powers of destruction. Out of "the flesh" arose for Him the same temptations as for us. But in all this He was master of sin. . . . Christ overcame sin in its own realm, in the flesh, when He Himself came in the form of sinful flesh (Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* 8:1-11).



Harry Johnson explained in these words how Christ could live a sinless life in spite of the fact He assumed our sinful nature that was dominated by the law of sin:

The central line of Christian thought has always affirmed that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God. For this reason it is not possible to make statements about Jesus as though He were only a man and nothing more. He was divine as well as human, two natures within one unified personality. Jesus shared our "fallen human nature," a nature which, while it did not make sin inevitable in such a way as to undermine responsibility, yet did, nevertheless, make sin "highly probable"—some would say with Aulen and Luther that for the natural man it made it "inevitable."... Through the power of this divine nature (controlled by the Holy Spirit) the weaknesses of His human nature were overcome so that He did live a perfect life.

The Son of God came to be our Saviour in order that His victory should be ours; any "advantage" which He possessed He used for our benefit (Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour*, 30, 31).

Another issue that crops up regarding the post-Fall view of Christ's human nature is this: How could Christ have an unbroken connection with His Father, if He assumed our sinful nature that is alienated from God? Note Johnson's reply:

It must be underlined, however, that in the definition of "fallen human nature" that has been given, the alienation involved in the assumption of this nature was in no way personal. Personal alienation only arises when personal sin and rebellion enter into the situation and guilt is incurred. Jesus, even though born into an alienated race, into the aeon of sin and death, still enjoyed unbroken the Son's fellowship with His Father....

This whole position may be challenged as too paradoxical. Jesus assumed "fallen human nature," yet He was free from actual sin. He was born into a race alienated from God, yet had a perfect fellowship with His Father and possessed a deep experience of Sonship. But paradox cannot be escaped. The Incarnation and Atonement are both full of paradox (ibid., 33, 34).

One of the arguments presented by proponents of the pre-Fall view is that since Christ did not have a human father, but was born by the intervention of the Holy Spirit, His human nature was exempt from the sinful bent we are born with. Johnson answers this argument in these words:

The fact that one human parent was involved in the birth of Jesus is sufficient to mean that there would be a strand of human heredity. ... As long as one human parent was involved, the strain would be passed on. To say that it is only passed on when concupiscence is present is hardly accepted. If the strain was not transmitted, we must assume that in some mysterious way the chain of heredity was broken between Mary and Jesus, but we have no basis on which to found this assumption (ibid., 43).

The Roman Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception teaches that Mary herself was conceived without the taint of sin, so that when Jesus was conceived in her by the Holy Spirit, He, in turn, could be exempt from being born with a sinful human nature. Johnson condemns this idea:

The Son of a human mother, even born without a human father, is still organically related to the whole human situation; and the doctrine of the immaculate conception of his mother is a mere gesture in the overwhelming dilemma; for an infinite regression of immaculate conceptions would hardly serve to remove the taint (ibid., 43).

Ellen White wrote, "For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation" (*The Desire of Ages*, 117). Harry Johnson came to the same conclusion:

To have a real identity with mankind whom He [Christ] came to save, to be the "Son of Man," it was essential that He should become a part of the human race in the very fullest sense. Does this mean that He became part of the humanity that had been weakened by the sin of generation after generation? Certainly, if He did assume this "fallen human nature," then in reality He was one with mankind (ibid., 56).

Johnson then goes to answer to the question "in what sense did Christ stand alone from the rest of humanity He came to save?"

He alone among all mankind had never yielded to sin, and the "fallen human nature" that He had inherited had never been allowed to issue in rebellion against the will of God. Not only was the "Son of Man," bound to humanity with the ties of self-identification, but He was "Son of God," and throughout His incarnate life He lived in perfect obedience to the will of His Father (ibid., 56, 57).

Having shown the link between Jesus, as the "Son of Man," and the human race He came to redeem, Johnson goes on to point out the relevance this truth has for us:

Before there could be a Parousia, before the Kingdom of God could come in power, Jesus had to face the supreme struggle, enter the lists against the power of darkness, and triumph over them through His Cross. He did this as "Son of Man," as One having an affinity with the rest of mankind, One who through His act of self-identification was one with fallen humanity. If we are to keep the representative idea of the "Son of Man," an important concept which cannot be ignored, and if we are to give its communal aspect any real significance, then in some essential way there must be a unity between the "Son of Man" and the rest of mankind. This unity is maintained on the hypothesis that Christ assumed "fallen human nature."...

Only as Jesus redeemed the "fallen human nature" that He assumed was He able to found a new and redeemed humanity, so paving the way for the coming of the Kingdom of God in all its fullness, and to become the One who will come with power and majesty at the consummation of the ages (ibid., 57, 58).

Turning to the cross of Christ as the power of God unto salvation from all and every aspect of sin, Johnson comes to this conclusion:

The Cross was the final battle with the power of sin, and the battle was decisive, once and for all. In that struggle the "fallen nature" which He assumed was nailed to the Cross, purged and cleansed even through death; thus in Jesus, risen and victorious, there is a root of sinless humanity (ibid., 62).

The Bible (see Romans 7:25; Ephesians 2:3) makes a clear distinction between the flesh (our sinful nature) and the mind (the seat of the will). One of the clearest statements made by both E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, upholding the sinlessness of Christ, was the distinction they made between the fallen human nature Christ assumed, which was dominated by the law of sin, and His mind, which never consented to sin. Jones and Waggoner both insisted that we should never drag the mind of Christ into sin. Harry Johnson comes up with a similar conclusion:

Jesus assumed "fallen human nature," but He never added to this nature His will, and there was no break in fellowship between Himself and His Father. On the Cross, there took place the decisive battle between Jesus and the powers of evil, not simply powers that were external, but also the power of the "fallen nature" that He had inherited. Here on the Cross there was the purging of human nature (ibid., 62,63).

Ellen White agreed when she linked Jesus' cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem with His mission of cleansing the human temple He came to redeem. Here is what she says:

In the cleansing of the temple, Jesus was announcing His mission as the Messiah, and entering upon His work. That temple, erected for the abode of the divine Presence, was designed to be an object lesson for Israel and for the world. From eternal ages it was God's purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for the indwelling of the Creator. Because of sin, humanity ceased to be a temple for God. Darkened and defiled by evil, the heart of man no longer revealed the glory of the Divine One. But by the incarnation of the Son of God, the purpose of heaven is fulfilled (*The Desire of Ages*, 161).

Since the post-Fall view has been presented in a wrong light by so many within Adventism, please note carefully in this final quote from Harry Johnson, what he has to say about the results of misrepresenting the post-Fall view of the human nature of Christ:

No doubt the idea that Jesus assumed "fallen nature" is a doctrine that needs careful exposition if serious errors are to be avoided; it is also true that often it has been expounded by unfortunate advocates; and coupled with these factors is the truth that other doctrines have tended to cloud the issue. All these factors have tended to militate against the acceptance of the doctrine; yet the result is that Paul's doctrine of redemption has been robbed of some of its meaning. Something of the wonder of redemption, the grandeur of deliverance, the infinite love of the condescension of the Incarnation has been lost when Paul's pattern of redemption has been not given this interpretation. To do justice to the thought of Paul it is necessary to accept the doctrine that Christ assumed "fallen human nature" (ibid., 105).

If we Adventists are to restore the full gospel and complete what the Reformers began some 400 years ago, we need to seriously consider what Thomas F. Torrance has to say about the human nature that Christ assumed in the Incarnation and the need of re-learning this truth.

Perhaps the most fundamental truth which we have to learn in the Christian Church, or rather relearn since we have suppressed it, is that the Incarnation was

the coming of God to save us in the heart of *our fallen* and *depraved* humanity, where humanity is at its wickedest in its enmity and violence against the reconciling love of God. That is to say, the Incarnation is to be understood as the coming of God to take upon himself our fallen human nature, our actual human existence laden with sin and guilt, our humanity diseased in mind and soul in its estrangement or alienation from the Creator. This is a doctrine found everywhere in the early Church in the first five centuries, expressed again and again in the terms that the whole man had to be assumed by Christ if the whole man was to be saved, that the unassumed is unhealed, or that what God has not taken up in Christ is not saved.... Thus the Incarnation had to be understood as the sending of the Son of God in the concrete form of our own sinful nature and as a sacrifice for sin in which he judged sin within that very nature in order to redeem man from his carnal, hostile mind (*The Mediation of Christ*, 48, 49).

Could this be the reason *The International Critical Commentary* has changed its position on the humanity of Christ from a pre-Fall to a post-Fall view? This is what it has to say, as a result of this change:

If we recognize that Paul believed it was fallen human nature which the Son of God assumed, we shall probably be inclined to see here also a reference to the unintermittent warfare of His whole earthly life by which He forced our rebellious nature to render a perfect obedience to God (*Romans*, 1:383).

No longer do we Seventh-day Adventists have any reason to feel ashamed of the truth taught in the 1888 message regarding the humanity of Christ. We need have no fear that taking a post-Fall view of Christ's humanity will brand us as a cult or sect, out of harmony with evangelical Christianity. We do not look to modern biblical scholarship as the basis for what we believe, but it is clear that a growing number of Christian scholars today are backing up the view of Christ's humanity that was presented in the 1888 teachings.

### **Key Points in Chapter Eleven Views of Modern Scholarship**

1. Just because a particular scholar—or even the majority of scholars— holds a certain view doesn't mean it is true. However, it is reassuring to know that many present-day biblical and systematic theologians fully support the view of Christ's humanity taught in the 1888 message.

2. The New Testament writers didn't argue for, or try to explain, the twofold nature of Christ; they simply proclaimed as fact that He was truly God and truly man in one Person.

3. It required more than 300 years and two church councils—Nicea and Chalcedon—for the Christian church to finally accept the simple apostolic declarations concerning the fact that Christ was fully God and fully man at the same time.

4. Many modern biblical scholars have come to the conclusion that in order to be the Saviour of the world and redeem mankind from every aspect of sin, Christ assumed the self-same fallen human nature all of us are born with. These scholars include Harry Johnson, Anders Nygren, James Dunn, Karl Barth, J. A. T. Robinson, T. F. Torrance, C. E. B. Cranfield, Nels F. S. Ferre, Harold Roberts, and Leslie Newbigin. All these prominent students of the Bible based their arguments that Christ assumed a post-Fall human nature on the teachings of the New Testament.

5. Seventh-day Adventists need have no fear that taking a post-Fall view of Christ's humanity will brand us as a cult, out of harmony with evangelical Christianity. Although we do not look to modern biblical scholarship as the basis for what we believe, it is clear that a

growing number of Christian scholars today are supporting the view of Christ's humanity that was presented in the 1888 teachings.

## *Chapter Twelve*

# **The Significance of Christ's Humanity to Us**

At the heart of the Christian faith is the affirmation that Christ, the Son of God, became man in order to be the Saviour of the world. Ellen White declared that "the humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden linked chain which binds our souls to Christ and through Christ to God. This is to be our study" (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 904). She also wrote:

In assuming humanity Christ took the part of every human being. He was the head of humanity. A Being divine and human, with His long human arm He could encircle humanity, while with His divine arm He could lay hold of the throne of the Infinite (*Selected Messages*, 1:252).

But mystery has always surrounded the coming of the Son of God in human flesh. We can never fully comprehend it, yet our finite minds must endeavor, within the limits of divine revelation, to grasp this central truth of our faith. For what Christ accomplished in His humanity is "everything to us," concerning our redemption—our justification, sanctification, and glorification.

If we are to appreciate the full significance of Christ's humanity to us, it is essential that we answer two vital questions concerning that humanity. First, "What was the *primary* purpose for which Christ was made flesh?" And second, "How did Christ, in His humanity, save mankind from sin?" Let's look at each question in turn.

*What was the primary purpose for which Christ was made flesh?* The answer to this question is the starting point of a true understanding of Christ's nature and of the incarnation. Within Adventism today, three answers are being given to this question. They are: (1) to prove human beings can keep God's law; (2) to be our example in sinless living; and (3) to redeem mankind from sin. Let us examine each of these three answers.

*1. To prove human beings can keep Gods law.* This answer is, of course, part of the "great controversy" doctrine, a unique understanding of Adventism. But in expounding this idea, many have often emphasized the letter of the law rather than its spirit. The result has been that a great number of God's people have failed to see the real issue in the great controversy. Instead, their understanding of the "great controversy" doctrine has led them into legalism.

The real issue between God and Satan in the great controversy is not so much a matter of obedience to the letter of the law as it is a battle between God's nature and character of *agape* love—a love that "does not seek its own" (1 Corinthians 13:5), and which is the law of His government (see 1 John 4:8, 16)—and the principle of *self*, introduced by Lucifer when iniquity entered his heart and he became Satan (see Ezekiel 28:15; Isaiah 14:12-14). Ellen White's opening and closing statements of her famous "Conflict of the Ages" series says it all:



"God is love." 1 John 4:16. His nature, His law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be... Every manifestation of creative power is an expression of infinite love (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 33).

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation.... From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love (*The Great Controversy*, 678).

Between these two sublime statements lies the great controversy between God, the Creator of the universe, and Satan, the originator of sin. This is the "Conflict of the Ages." So one reason Christ became a man was to manifest God's love, His glory, in human flesh (see John 1:14; 17:4). But the Bible does not present this as the *primary* reason Christ assumed our humanity.

Likewise, the fact that Christ perfectly kept the law in His humanity *did* prove that human beings, controlled by God's Spirit, can fully meet the law's demands, that is, fully reflect God's love (see Galatians 5:14; Revelation 14:12). But, again, the Bible does not teach that this is *the primary* reason Christ became a man.

2. *To be our example in sinless living.* This answer to the question of why Jesus became a man is the answer given by most of the independent ministries as they attempt to prepare God's people to stand in the final crisis "without a mediator." Of course, the Bible does point to Christ as our example (see 1 Peter 2:21; Philippians 2:5). However, as already pointed out in chapter 10, it does not present Him as the example for the whole human race, but *only* for believers who have accepted Him as their Saviour, who have experienced the "peace with God" that comes through justification by faith alone (Romans 5:1), and who are standing under the grace of God. To such, Christ's strength and power are made available because they have experienced the new birth (see 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Peter 1:1-4).

The independent ministries within Adventism that are presenting this answer to our question see themselves as standing against the "creeping compromise" that is infiltrating the church. But those who emphasize Christ as our Example, without first clearly presenting Him as the Saviour of the world, give the impression that they are teaching the "example theory" of the atonement—the idea that we are saved by following Christ's example rather than by what He did for us some 2,000 years ago. This is why they are often accused of the heresy of perfectionism or legalism (see, for example, "From Controversy to Crisis" by Kenneth Samples, *Christian Research Journal*, summer 1988, 9).

Again, although the Bible does present Christ as an example for born-again believers, it does not give this as the *primary* reason He assumed our humanity.

3. *To redeem mankind from sin.* At the very heart of the doctrine of Christology is the glorious truth that Christ assumed humanity so that He could be the Saviour of the world. Scripture presents this as the *primary* reason the Son of God became a man (see Matthew 1:21; Galatians 4:4,5; Hebrews 2:14-17). Only to those who have first experienced that redemption, who have received Him as their Saviour, and who are basking in His righteousness as the only hope of their salvation—only to those, does Jesus stand in His humanity as an example.

Once we have established that the *primary* reason Christ became a man was to redeem fallen humanity from every aspect of sin, this leads us to the second important question raised above:

*How did Christ, in His humanity, save mankind from sin?* Christianity (and Adventism) have given two answers to this question: (1) Christ saved mankind "vicariously." (2) Christ saved mankind "in actuality." While the issue of *vicarious* and *actual* substitution was

discussed in some detail in chapter six it deserves further attention here since each of these answers demands a different view on the human nature of Christ.

*/.* Christ saved mankind "vicariously." The word *vicarious* means "in the place of," or "one person acting in place of another." The Reformers in the sixteenth century believed that Christ saved mankind vicariously. So do most Evangelical Christians today. Most of those who hold this view teach that Christ took on the sinless human nature Adam had before the Fall. Here is their basic argument:

Sin, they say, is a dual problem. It is, first of all, a condition or a state of being. A sinful nature is, by definition, one that is indwelt by sin and that therefore stands condemned. So if Christ took on Himself the nature of Adam *after* the Fall—a nature that is indwelt by sin—He would have been a sinner Himself, even though He did not commit a single act of sin. Consequently, they argue, Christ had to assume a sinless human nature in order to *vicariously* substitute His sinless nature for our sinful nature which stands condemned. They insist that if Christ had taken our sinful nature as we know it, He would have needed a Saviour Himself.

Second, they say, sin is also an act, the transgression of the law. So the perfect life of Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross was the vicarious substitute for our sinful performance. Thus, according to this view, Christ's sinless human nature was the vicarious substitute for our sinful nature; His perfect performance, His doing and dying, was the vicarious substitute for our sinful performance. And on this basis, Christ redeemed mankind from sin (see diagram on page 73).

This is the traditional view of the Christian church, and it has been accepted by Adventism at large, especially by those who hold to the pre-Fall view of the human nature of Christ. But this vicarious view of how Christ saved mankind presents a twofold problem:

*A. It makes the gospel unethical.* No law, God's or man's, will allow guilt or righteousness to be transferred from one person to another. Therefore, those who teach "vicarious" substitution are rightly accused of teaching a "legal fiction" or a make-believe righteousness, an "as-if-passed-on righteousness." Osiender and Newman in the counter-reformation made these accusations against the idea of a vicarious substitution, as do Islamic scholars today.

For some Adventist scholars, too, these problems with the idea that Christ saved humanity by a vicarious substitution are becoming more of a real issue. So they are turning to a modified form of "the moral influence theory of the atonement" to answer the question: Why did Christ have to die? In *The Remnant in Crisis*, Dr. Jack Provonsa clearly rejects forensic justification as taught by the Reformation, charging that it is based on faulty Roman law (see pages 116-118). Incidentally, the "moral influence theory" is not heretical in what it teaches (that Christ died to influence us), since His death clearly does demonstrate God's love for sinners. Rather, it is heretical in what it denies (that Christ's death was legally essential for our justification).

How, then, do we answer the ethical problem created by the idea of a vicarious substitution as the basis for our salvation? How do we solve the ethical problem of an innocent man who died *instead* of sinful human beings?

All attempts to solve this ethical problem by saying such things as "Christ is above the law," or "it is ethical since He volunteered to die in man's stead as his Creator," are unacceptable. Not even God's law will allow sin to be transferred from the guilty to the innocent (see Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 18:1-20).

Yet, as we saw in chapter six, the idea of substitution *is* biblical. The New Testament clearly teaches that Christ died "for us" and "in place of us." But the real question is: *What qualified Him to die for us or instead of us?*

Christ could die for us only if He assumed our self-same corporate humanity that needed redeeming. He had to be "made sin," "made under the law," before He could redeem

humanity from the "curse of the law" (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; 4:4, 5). Only when His humanity and our corporate humanity that needed redeeming are linked together, does Christ qualify to be the second Adam. Only then could he die for us or in our stead. This is the only context in which the substitution theory of the atonement becomes legally acceptable.

*B. It very easily turns the gospel into cheap grace.* This is the second problem with the "vicarious" view of how Christ redeemed mankind. If Christ did it all without having to identify Himself with us, if He lived and died *instead of* us without first assuming our sinful humanity that needed redeeming, then we can receive the blessings of His holy history without identifying ourselves with Him and Him crucified as true faith and baptism demand (see Galatians 2:19, 20; Romans 6:1-8; Colossians 2:11-13). We can be saved by a faith which is defined as a mere mental assent to truth. In short, the vicarious view can very easily turn the gospel into cheap grace.

The fruit of cheap grace has given Christianity a bad name and continues to be one of the reasons so many are turning their backs on Christ and accepting man-made religions, all of which teach salvation by works.

*2. Christ saved mankind in actuality.* This is the second answer Christianity (and Adventism) have given to the question of how Christ, in His humanity, has saved mankind from sin. This was the view presented in the 1888 message. Those who take this position generally teach the post-Fall view of the human nature of Christ. They argue that since Christ came to save fallen humanity, He had to assume the same fallen, sinful humanity that needed redeeming. Thus by identifying Himself in every way with our corporate, fallen humanity, Christ qualified Himself to be the second Adam; He was thus legally qualified to be our Substitute in His saving mission.

According to this view, Christ did not simply live a perfect life *in our place*; He did not simply die *instead of us*. Rather, His doing and dying, His perfect life and sacrificial death, actually changed mankind's history. All humanity was legally justified at the cross because all humanity was *in Christ*. When He lived a perfect life, all humanity lived a perfect life *in Him*. When He died, all humanity died *in Him*. This is very different than defining the gospel as only a provisional salvation, as do those who teach the vicarious view of substitution.

The concept of substitutionary atonement presently taught by evangelical Christianity, as well as within Adventism, does not take us far enough in understanding the profound truth of the atonement, especially as taught by the apostle Paul. Substitution, generally understood, is an exchanged experience. I once read of a woman who died under the wheels of a bus, saving the life of a child; her death can truly be described as substitutionary, since she died in order that the child might live. But this definition of substitution is inadequate when it comes to explaining the true meaning of the atonement. It is for this reason, I believe, the word *substitute* is not used in the Bible to explain the atonement.

Christ did not die so that in exchange we might live; rather He died and rose as us in order that we might by faith share in His death and resurrection. By assuming our corporate sinful condemned humanity that needed redeeming Christ was made sin, what we are, in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). As the second Adam (mankind) Christ took our place and died our death in order that we might be identified with Him, both in His death and resurrection. This is what our baptism was all about (see Romans 6:3-11).

This is where *vicarious* substitution and *actual* substitution part company. The former teaches an exchanged experience; while the latter teaches a shared experience. Only when we by faith identify ourselves with the cross of Christ does the gospel become the power of God unto salvation in our lives (see Galatians 2:20; 6:14). This is the true significance of baptism by immersion which saves (see Mark 16:15, 16).

But this actual substitution does not mean that all humanity is automatically saved experientially. This is the heresy of universalism. This legal justification is God's supreme gift to mankind (see John 3:16). In addition, God created human beings with a free will (see Acts 5:3, 4). His supreme gift demands a human response in order for it to be made effective (see Romans 5:17). That necessary response is faith. Justification by faith is making effective in the life of the believer the legal justification Christ achieved for all mankind by His actual substitution.

In this view, faith becomes more than a mere mental assent to the truth of the gospel. It is a heart-felt appreciation for what God did to us and for us *in Christ*. That appreciation, in turn, demands obedience, a total surrender of the will, to the truth as it is in Christ (see Romans 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; Galatians 5:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8). Such obedience of faith is the basis of true holy living, the fruits of justification by faith (see Galatians 2:20, Romans 6:10-13).

According to the apostle Paul, baptism, which is the believer's outward confession of his or her faith-obedience to the gospel, is always "into Christ" (see Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). He means that by this act, the believer is confessing what Paul expresses in these words: "In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11, 12, NIV).

Clearly, this subjective experience of salvation is based on what God *actually* did to humanity in Christ. Our corporate, sinful nature that Christ assumed at the incarnation, *was put off at* the cross and replaced by the righteous life of Christ in the resurrection. This certainly could not have been done vicariously. This is what righteousness by faith is all about—"not I, but Christ," the fruits of which is holiness of living.

However, those holding the "vicarious" view make a serious charge against this idea that Christ saved mankind in actuality. They insist that if Christ fully identified Himself with our sinful human nature—which they believe stands condemned under sin—then we are dragging Christ into sin and making Him a sinner like us and in need of a Saviour Himself.

Note how William G. Johnsson, editor of *The Adventist Review*, put it:

In a penetrating analysis, Paul describes sin as a force, an indwelling principle, a state—'sin living in me' (Romans 7:14-20). So not only are our acts sinful; our very nature is at war with God...

Did Jesus have such a nature? ... No. If He had, He would Himself need a Saviour (*The Adventist Review*, August 26, 1993).

This serious charge deserves an answer. Johnsson is correct in defining sin as "an indwelling principle" and not merely sinful acts. Paul clearly teaches that our sinful human nature is indwelt by sin (see Romans 7:17, 20, 23) and that therefore we are "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). Yet the Bible also clearly teaches that Christ assumed the same flesh as that of the human race He came to redeem (see Hebrews 2:14-17). So how do we solve the problem the *Adventist Review* editor raises?

The correct solution is not to water down Christ's full identification with the sinful race He came to redeem. Nor is the solution to undermine the sin problem, limiting it only to a choice or an act, as do some who teach the post-Fall view of the human nature of Christ. Instead, the solution lies in taking note of the qualifying word used by the New Testament writers when they refer to the humanity of Christ.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1:14, KJV).

When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law (Galatians 4:4, KJV).

He [God] hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21, KJV).

These three key texts that refer to the humanity of Christ all use the word *made* in reference to the human nature of Christ. What does this word, *made*, mean?

The Greek words translated in these texts as *made* mean "to become." When Christ became a man, He actually *became* what He was not. The sinful nature He assumed was not His by native right, but something He *took* upon Himself, or *assumed*, or was *made to be*. He did this in order to redeem that sinful nature. Ellen White says, "He [Christ] took upon His sinless [divine] nature our sinful [human] nature, that He might know how to succor those that are tempted" (*Medical Ministry*, 181). The words *took part* (Hebrews 2:14) and the word *likeness* (Romans 8:3) carry the same connotation as the word *made*.

Had Christ consented to the sinful desires of that nature which He assumed, even by a thought, then He would have *become* a sinner in need of a Saviour Himself. That is why it *must* be stressed, as did Waggoner and Jones in the 1888 message, that in dealing with the human nature of Christ we must be "exceedingly careful" not to drag His mind or His will into sin, or say that He "had" a sinful nature. I believe this is the reason Ellen White condemned Baker for his views on the human nature of Christ. Apparently, this evangelist from "down under" was making Christ "altogether like us." Ellen White told him that this can never be. Christ was God who was "made flesh" in order that He could qualify to be the Saviour of the world. He fully identified Himself with our sin problem, but He did not in any way *participate* in our sin, not even by a thought (see Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15; 1 Peter 4:1, 2).

The fact is that Christ did actually *assume* our condemned, sinful nature—the nature that "is enmity against God" and "not subject to the law of God" (Romans 8:7). But, in His case, He totally defeated "the law of sin and death" (verse 2) that resided in that sinful human nature, and then He executed that condemned nature on the cross. As we saw in chapter 9, this is Paul's main thought in Romans 8:1-3, which is his explanation of Romans 7:24, 25.

By assuming our corporate, sinful humanity at the incarnation, Christ was *qualified* to be the second Adam, the second head and representative of mankind (the word Adam in Hebrew means "mankind"). Thus in His doing and dying as our Substitute, He wrought out a redemption that was full and complete for all humanity (see 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31; Ephesians 1:3-6). This is the good news of the gospel.

But in identifying Himself with fallen humanity, He also demonstrated that man, as he is after the Fall, born and controlled by God's Spirit, can live a life of total obedience to the law of love (see 1 Corinthians 13). This is why the New Testament presents Christ also as the believer's Example. Such a life of complete obedience should be the hope and goal of Christian living (see John 13:34, 35). This was the emphasis of the 1888 message.

We may therefore conclude that the *primary* purpose of the Incarnation was to qualify Christ to be the second Adam, so that He could lawfully substitute Himself for, and represent, fallen mankind in His redemptive work. The *secondary* purpose for which He assumed our fallen humanity was to become the believer's Example and Surety in restoring God's image in man. This is the twofold purpose of the Incarnation we must keep in mind as we examine the humanity of Christ.



## Key Points in Chapter Twelve The Significance of Christ's Humanity to Us

1. Within Adventism today, three answers are being given to the question: What was the primary purpose for which Christ was made flesh?

a. To prove humans can keep God's law. This answer is part of the "great controversy" doctrine, a unique understanding of Adventism. But the Bible does not teach that this is the primary reason Christ became a man.

b. To be our example in sinless living. The Bible does point to Christ as our example (see 1 Peter 2:21; Philippians 2:5). However it does not present Him as the example for the whole human race, but only for believers who have accepted Him as their Saviour. And it does not give this as the primary reason He assumed our humanity.

c. To redeem mankind from sin. Scripture presents this as the primary reason the Son of God became a man (see Matthew 1:21; Galatians 4:4, 5; Hebrews 2:14-17).

2. Likewise, Adventism today gives two answers to the question: How did Christ, in His humanity, save mankind from sin?

a. Christ saved mankind "vicariously." The word *vicarious* means "in the place of." Those who give this answer argue that Christ had to assume a sinless human nature in order to vicariously substitute His sinless human nature for our sinful, condemned nature. They insist that if Christ had taken our sinful nature, He would have needed a saviour Himself.

According to this view, Christ's sinless human nature was the vicarious substitute for our sinful nature; His perfect performance was the vicarious substitute for our sinful performance. But this view has two problems: First, It makes the gospel unethical and teaches a "legal fiction" or a "make believe" righteousness. Guilt and righteousness cannot simply be transferred from one person to another. Second, it can easily turn the gospel into cheap grace. If Christ lived and died instead of us, we can be saved by a faith that is simply a mental assent to truth.

b. Christ saved mankind in actuality. Those who give this answer argue that Christ had to assume the same fallen, sinful humanity that needed redeeming. According to this view, Christ did not simply live a perfect life *in our place*; He did not simply die *instead of* us. Rather, all humanity was legally justified at the cross because all humanity was *in Christ*. When He lived a perfect life, all humanity lived a perfect life *in Him*. When He died, all humanity died *in Him*.

This does not mean all humanity is automatically saved. God's supreme gift demands a human response of faith in order to be effective. And this faith is more than a mere mental assent to the truth of the gospel; it is a heartfelt appreciation that demands a total obedience and surrender to the truth as it is in Christ (see Romans 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; Galatians 5:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8).

3. By assuming our corporate, sinful humanity, Christ was qualified to be the second Adam, the second representative head of the human race. Thus in His doing and dying as our Substitute, He wrought out a redemption that was full and complete for all humanity.

4. The primary purpose of the incarnation was to qualify Christ to be the second Adam so that He could lawfully substitute Himself for fallen mankind in His redemptive work.

5. The secondary purpose for which Christ assumed our fallen humanity was to become the believer's Example and Surety in restoring God's image in man.

## Chapter Thirteen

# Christ, Our Redeemer

In the last chapter, we established the fact that at the Incarnation Christ joined Himself fully to the fallen human race that needed redeeming, assuming all its liabilities, in order to be the Saviour of the world. Now we must examine, in detail, this question: In what sense did He redeem mankind from the sin problem? It is extremely important for us to answer this question if we are to understand and proclaim our unique gospel message to the world and demonstrate its power.

According to the apostle Paul, the fundamental truth of the New Testament is found in Jesus Christ. He says, "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). He goes on to say that we must build our Christian experience and doctrines on this foundation (see 1 Corinthians 3:12-14). Unless we are clear about this foundation that Christ laid by His holy history, we will be confused about the distinction between what Christ accomplished in His earthly mission and what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in our lives.

As already indicated earlier, what the Holy Spirit does in the lives of believers does not add one iota to the objective facts of the gospel—the salvation obtained for all humanity through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit is not a coredeemer with Christ, but a communicator to us of Christ's redemption. He reproduces the holy life of Christ in the church. Jesus made it clear to His disciples that the Holy Spirit's work would be to guide them into all truth concerning Himself (see John 16:13). And Paul tell us that the Holy Spirit is the means of our sanctification—making real in the believer's experience what Christ has already accomplished for the fallen human race (see 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14).

Once we realize the difference between what Christ did for us on the cross and what the Holy Spirit does for us in our lives, we will begin to understand the full significance of the Saviour's final words on the cross: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). What was finished? Salvation full and complete for all mankind was finished. That is why Paul could declare to the Christians at Colosse, "You are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:10). This fact is the basis, or foundation for all our Christian experience. "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Colossians 2:6; see also Ephesians 2:10).

In one of the last letters he ever penned before his martyrdom, his letter to the Philippian church, Paul admits that he had not yet reached perfection in his Christian walk, "but," he adds, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me... I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things" (Philippians 3:12-15, NIV).

What did Paul mean when he said he was pressing on "to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me"? He meant simply that his goal in life was to reach the heights that had already been obtained for him *in Christ*. "To me," he said, "to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). In other words, all the believer's subjective experience must be founded on the finished work of Christ. All our Christian experience, as well as our goals in life, must be directly related to what Christ already accomplished for us in His earthly mission—the gospel. Christianity is more than merely believing in Christ; it is *participating* in Him (see 1 Corinthians 10:16-18 NIV).

Thus, if our understanding of the redemption Christ obtained for humanity is limited, so will be our experience because all Christian experience is founded on the finished work of Christ. So we need to ask ourselves, as the people of God with a special mission to the world: How much of the sin problem did Christ take care of by His birth, life, death, and resurrection? Or putting it more simply: How complete is the good news of the gospel?

If, in any way, Christ did not save us from our total sin problem, then the gospel is incomplete and we must depend on the Holy Spirit to put the finishing touches to us and complete the work. But this is not what the New Testament teaches (see Romans 3:21-28). The salvation our Lord Jesus Christ obtained for all humanity, which He accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit in Him, is a finished work to which nothing can be added or improved. What the Holy Spirit does in the believer is to communicate to him or her this full and complete salvation.

The only way God could totally redeem us from every aspect of sin in Christ was to unite His Son to our sinful humanity that needed redeeming. That is why the humanity of Christ is "everything to us." If we deny Christ's full identification with our sinful humanity—apart from actually sinning—we deny the complete redemption He obtained for us in the gospel.

Keeping this in mind, let's look at what the apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Ephesus, to those who were "faithful in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:1). After pointing out, in chapter 1, all the wonderful blessings that were theirs "in Christ" (see verses 3-10), he goes on to explain, in chapter 2, the full and complete salvation Christ obtained for humanity in His earthly mission.

In the first three verses of chapter 2, the apostle paints a dark and dismal picture of mankind, both Gentiles and Jews. In verses 1 and 2, he reminds his Gentile readers that before their conversion to Christianity they were sinners by nature as well as by performance. We know he is addressing the Gentiles in these first two verses because he speaks of them as "you." In the third verse, he turns to his fellow Jews (using the pronoun "we") and tells them that they, too, are sinners by performance as well as by nature, just like the Gentiles. In other words, there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to the sin problem (see also Romans 3:22, 23).

Having painted this hopeless picture of the human race, Paul then turns his attention, in verses 4 to 6, to the matchless charms of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The first thing he says about the good news of the gospel is that "because of His [God's] great love with which He loved us" (verse 4), those who were once spiritually dead were made (past tense) spiritually alive when the divinity of Christ was united to their sinful humanity that needed redeeming (see verse 5). Are we reading too much into the apostle's words? Are we putting words in his mouth? I believe this must be what Paul intended in these verses. For if Christ assumed a humanity that was not spiritually dead—the humanity of Adam before the Fall—then the human nature He assumed would not need to be made spiritually alive. In addition, when Paul says that God "made us alive together with Christ" (verse 5), he clearly indicates that the humanity to which Christ was joined was our very humanity that was spiritually dead.

Paul adds this tremendous gospel statement at the end of verse 5, "by grace you have been saved." This expresses in a nutshell all that Christ accomplished for fallen humanity in His life and death. All that the law requires of us sinners in order that we may be justified to life is summed up in this one statement, "by grace you have been saved."

By His perfect life, which met the positive requirements of the law, and by His sacrificial death, which met the justice of the law, Christ rewrote humanity's history and changed mankind's status. Our status was transformed from one of condemnation, which we inherited from Adam, to one of justification to life (see Romans 5:18). This is what it means

to be saved by grace alone. This is the "righteousness of God" Christ obtained for all mankind by His holy history and which is made effective by faith alone (Romans 10:3).

The corporate sinful, condemned life of our humanity died forever in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:14). But our corporate human body that Christ assumed at the incarnation (see Hebrews 10:5), was not left in the grave forever. Paul tells us that we were raised "together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). In Christ's resurrection, God gave to the human race *in Christ*, the very life of His Son (see John 3:16; 1 John 5:11, 12). Thus, the good news of the gospel is that by His death and resurrection, Christ "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). This is salvation, full and complete.

But what does this full, complete salvation involve or include? This is the important question we must now answer so that we can appreciate the fullness of the gospel message.

First, we were made spiritually alive in Christ (see Ephesians 2:5). This took place through the incarnation when our sinful humanity, which was spiritually dead, was united to the divinity of the Son of God.

Ellen White says that when Adam fell by turning his back to God, the Holy Spirit left him and he "ceased to be a temple for God" (*The Desire of Ages*, 161). Since Adam could not pass on to his descendants what he did not have, all of us were born uninhabited by God's Spirit. This is what Paul meant when he told the Christians at Ephesus that they were by nature spiritually dead. And this is how we all are born; this is what we inherit from Adam.

But at the Incarnation this spiritually dead humanity was united to the divine life of the Son of God by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and we were made spiritually alive in Christ. Paul says, "When we were dead in trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5). He uses the aorist tense of the verb "made," a past historical tense, indicating that he is not talking about the believer's subjective experience when he or she experiences the new birth, but rather an objective fact that took place in Christ at the Incarnation. This is the foundation "already laid" (1 Corinthians 3:11, NIV), on which the subjective experience of the new birth is based.

Second, by His perfect life which He lived out in our corporate sinful humanity, Christ not only satisfied the positive demands of the law on our behalf, but, much more, He defeated the law of sin—that power or principle of sin that resides in our sinful natures and which makes holy living impossible in and of ourselves (see Romans 7:15-24).

Understood in this context, Christ's perfect life, which he lived in our corporate sinful humanity, could not have been accomplished for us *vicariously*. The reason is simple: It is impossible to defeat a force, the power of sin, *vicariously*, or "in the place of another," in a sinless human nature. Neither, could Christ be tempted *vicariously* in all points, as are we sinful humans. The only way we are tempted, says James, is when we are drawn away by our own desires and enticed (see 1:14). One cannot be drawn away by his own desires and enticed "in the place of another" if one's human nature is sinless.

Christ was tempted by the *self* principle of our sinful flesh, which He assumed at the Incarnation. In His case, the temptation was to depend on His own divine power, independently of the Father. This temptation proceeded from His humanity, however Christ defeated our sinful flesh through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (see Luke 4:14). This was no make-believe victory, but actual reality. This is why Paul could admonish the believers at Rome to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make *no* provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:14, emphasis supplied). The Bible describes this victory over the sinful flesh in Christian living as the fruits of the gospel. It, too, is part of the foundation "already laid" and is an integral part of the good news of the gospel.

If not, if victory over the sinful flesh is something left for the Holy Spirit to accomplish in us apart from the finished work of Christ, then we are admitting that the gospel of Christ is an incomplete work and that God has to send the Holy Spirit to finish it up in us. If this is

true, then the Holy Spirit does indeed become a redeemer. Yet this is not at all what Scripture teaches.

Third, by His death, Christ redeemed humanity from the guilt and condemnation of sin. All Christians accept this truth, but what do we mean by "the guilt and condemnation of sin"? Guilt comes upon us as the result of our personal sins. But in addition, we have also inherited condemnation as a result of the Fall (see Romans 5:18). This condemnation is passed on to us from our father Adam because we are born with Adam's life—a life that is indwelt by sin and which disqualifies us for heaven. In order for Christ to save us completely—not only from the guilt, but also from the condemnation of sin—He had to bear our personal sins *and* He had to bear our sinful nature which condemns us. Both were executed on the cross in Christ.

In fact, since our sins are merely the fruits of our sinful nature, Christ could actually bear our sins on the cross only if He also bore us and our sinful human nature. Christ assumed this sinful humanity at the Incarnation when He was "made flesh" (John 1:14, KJV); He defeated it by His perfect life; and He finally executed that condemned nature on His cross (see 1 Peter 2:24). All this constitutes the good news of the gospel. By bearing us on the cross, Christ struck at the very root of our sin problem. This, too, is part and parcel of the foundation "already laid" on which we build our Christian experience.

Finally, at Christ's resurrection, the redeemed human race was raised *in Christ* with a glorified body, totally cleansed from sin. Christ took this glorified humanity to heaven, there to represent us in His priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. At His second coming, the saints will experience this glorified body (see Philippians 3:20, 21). Thus "by one Man's obedience many will be made [future tense] righteous" (Romans 5:19, NRSV). When this happens, "when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality" we will shout "thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54, 57).

God's salvation in Christ is indeed full and complete. The Holy Spirit adds nothing to it in our lives, and we can do nothing to improve on it. All we can do is to accept God's "inexpressible gift" with a grateful heart and let the Holy Spirit reproduce in our lives the matchless life Christ prepared for us in His holy history. When that happens, Adventism will have fulfilled its God-given mission, the earth will be lightened with His glory, and the world will finally witness that "the kingdom of God is not in word but in power" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

Here is how the apostle Paul sums up the fullness of this glorious gospel: "Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For in our *union with Christ* He has blessed us by giving us *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly world" (Ephesians 1:3, GNB, emphasis supplied). Again he says, "God has brought you *into union with Christ Jesus*, and God has made Christ to be our wisdom. By Him we are put right with God; we became God's holy people and are set free" (1 Corinthians 1:30, GNB, emphasis supplied). And Ellen White reflects this clear teaching of Scripture:

By His obedience to all the commandments of God, Christ wrought out a redemption for men. This was not done by going out of Himself to another, but by taking humanity into Himself. Thus Christ gave to humanity an existence out of Himself. To bring humanity into Christ, to bring *{the fallen race}* into oneness with divinity, is the work of redemption. Christ took human nature that men might be one with Him as He is one with the Father, that God may love man as He loves His only begotten Son, that men may be partakers of the divine nature, and be complete in Him *{Selected Messages, 1:250, 251, emphasis supplied}*.



The purpose of redemption is to reverse the results of the Fall, to break the power of sin, to redeem our sinful nature "sold under sin." This is possible only if the humanity Christ assumed was the corporate, sinful humanity of those whom He came to save, for that which is not assumed could not have been redeemed.

The moment we deny this truth and insist that Christ came in a sinless human nature like Adam's spiritual nature before the Fall, we sever Christ's complete union with the humanity He came to save. In doing this, we preach an unethical gospel. Justification becomes a legal fiction, and the justice of God comes under question. No wonder many within Adventism are beginning to embrace the moral influence theory of the atonement which denies its legal framework.

Let's look at it in this way: Which died on the cross as the wages of sin— sinful humanity or sinless humanity? If we admit that it was sinful humanity, then not only were the law's just and legal demands met, but fallen men and women can honestly identify themselves, through faith, with the death which sets them free from the curse of the law as well as its power (see Romans 6:7—the Greek word translated *freed* in this text means "justified"). This in fact is Paul's point: "So far as the Law is concerned, however, I am dead— killed by the Law itself—in order that I might live for God. I have been put to death with Christ on His cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave His life for me" (Galatians 2:19, 20, GNB).

On the other hand, if we say that it was sinless humanity that died vicariously on the cross, *instead of* 'our corporate condemned nature, we are accusing God of an injustice, since His own Word will not legally accept the death of an innocent person in the place of one who is guilty (see Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 18:20). Such a belief also makes it impossible for fallen human beings, to identify themselves truly and sincerely with the death of Christ, as true faith demands (see 2 Timothy 2:11; Romans 6:3, 8). This, in turn, can easily lead to cheap grace.

On the cross, the human life of Christ, which was in reality our corporate condemned life, died the second or eternal death—the wages of sin. The New Testament clearly teaches that on the cross, sinful humanity died *in* Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:20; 3:3; 1 Peter 2:24). This death fulfilled or met the just demands of the law (see Romans 6:7; 7:1, 4, 6) and gave God the legal right to forgive us of our sins (see Matthew 26:27, 28; Romans 3:24-26).

Then, in exchange for our condemned life that died eternally on the cross, God gave us the immortal life of His Son so that we may live again (see 1 John 5:11, 12; 2 Timothy 1:8-10). This is God's love gift to humanity and the glorious truth of the gospel. God's gift to fallen mankind is the divine, eternal life of His Son (see 1 John 5:11). This gift made it possible for our humanity, united to Christ, to be resurrected to life the third day, and thus give us eternal hope (see 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22). "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things [the old life with its condemnation] are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV; see also 2 Timothy 2:11). With this new life, which we experience through the new birth, we are now able to demonstrate the power of the gospel over the sinful flesh in our own personal lives (see Romans 8:9-11).

This is the message God gave to the Adventist Church in 1888. Ellen White said that it was the beginning of the latter rain and the loud cry, which, had they been fully accepted, would have lightened this earth with Christ's glory. According to this 1888 message, Christ assumed human nature as we know it after the Fall. In spite of this, however, Jesus lived a perfect life through the power of the indwelling Spirit, triumphing over the "law of sin" in the flesh. Finally, the message asserted, this nature was cleansed on the cross, and Jesus rose from the dead with a redeemed or glorified human nature. This nature is now reserved for the believer in heaven until the second coming. This is how God legally justified all

mankind in the doing and dying of Christ and liberated us totally from our sin problem to give us eternal hope now and in the world to come.

This being so, the good news of the gospel not only guarantees legal or forensic justification to all who believe, but it also offers total victory over the clamors of our sinful nature. Righteousness by faith, therefore, includes, on the one hand, peace with God through justification by faith (see Romans 5:1), but at the same time, it also gives hope to the justified believer that he or she can live a life above sinning (see Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16). This was the true understanding of the 1888 message on righteousness by faith *in Christ*.

Having discovered the full significance of Christ as our Redeemer, we are now able to look at Him as our Example. This will be the topic of our next chapter.

### **Key Points in Chapter Thirteen Christ, Our Redeemer**

1. What the Holy Spirit does in the lives of believers does not add one iota to the objective facts of the gospel—the salvation obtained for all humanity through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit is not a coredeemer with Christ, but a communicator to us of Christ's redemption.

2. All our Christian experience must be directly related to what Christ has already accomplished for us in the gospel. Christianity is more than merely believing in Christ; it is participating in Him (see 1 Corinthians 10:16-18, NIV).

3. The only way God could totally redeem us from every aspect of sin was to unite His Son to our sinful humanity that needed redeeming. If we deny Christ's full identification with our sinful humanity—apart from actually sinning—we deny the complete redemption He obtained for us in the gospel.

4. By His perfect life, which met the positive demands of the law, and by His sacrificial death, which met the justice of the law, Christ rewrote humanity's history and changed mankind's status. Our status was transformed from one of condemnation to one of justification to life (see Romans 5:18).

5. This full, complete salvation includes four things:

a. First, we were made spiritually alive in Christ (see Ephesians 2:5). This took place at the incarnation when our sinful humanity, which was spiritually dead, was united to the divinity of the Son of God.

b. Second, by His perfect life which He lived out in our corporate, sinful humanity, Christ not only satisfied the positive demands of the law on our behalf, but much more, He defeated the law of sin—that principle or power of sin that resides in our sinful natures and that makes holy living impossible in and of ourselves (see Romans 7:15-24).

c. Third, by His death, Christ redeemed humanity from the guilt and condemnation of sin. In order for Christ to save us completely—not only from the guilt, but also from the condemnation of sin—He had to bear our personal sins, and He had to also bear our sinful nature which condemns us. Both were executed on the cross in Christ.

d. Finally, at Christ's resurrection, the redeemed human race was raised in Christ with a glorified body, totally cleansed from sin. Christ took this glorified humanity to heaven, there to represent us in His priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. At His second coming, the saints will experience this glorified body (see Philippians 3:20,21).

## Chapter Fourteen

### Christ, the Believers' Example

One of the big questions under discussion presently in the Adventist Church is this: "Is sinless living in sinful flesh possible?" This same question was raised during the 1888 era, and the 1888 messengers answered, "Yes."

Both, Waggoner and Jones taught that Christ conquered our sinful flesh by His perfect life, not only to justify us but also to set us an example. They taught that through the power of the indwelling Spirit, His total victory over our sinful flesh and His life of selfless love may be reproduced in us and that this must be the goal of every born-again Christian. This was the unique teaching of the 1888 message on righteousness by faith.

Listen to how Ellen White responded to the many letters she received concerning this matter:

Letters have been coming in to me affirming that Christ could not have the same nature as man, for if He had, He would have fallen under similar temptations. If He was not a partaker of *our* nature, He could not be our example. If He was not a partaker of *our* nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for Him to yield to temptation, He could not be our helper. It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battle as man, in man's behalf. His temptations and victory must tell us that humanity must copy the Pattern; man must become partaker of the divine nature....

He [Christ] laid hold on the throne of God, and there is not a man or woman who may not have access to the same help through faith in God. Man may become a partaker of the divine nature; not a soul lives who may not summon the aid of Heaven in temptation and trial. Christ came to reveal the Source of his power, that man might never rely on his unaided human capabilities (*Review and Herald*, February 18, 1890, emphasis supplied).

In chapter 8, we examined Romans 7:14-24 and saw how Paul identifies the stumbling block to sinless living in the experience of all believers. It is, he says, "the law of sin" dwelling in the flesh of fallen sinful nature (verse 23). According to Scripture, Adam's sin not only brought condemnation to all mankind; it also made us sinners by corrupting human nature (see Romans 5:19). Thus, by the Fall, all humanity was brought under the law of sin (see John 8:32-34; Romans 3:9, 7:14).

If Christ did not have to contend with this "law of sin" in His flesh, then we must conclude that He did not *totally* redeem mankind from sin. As a result, He cannot be set forth as the Saviour from our *state* of sin; He cannot be an example to believers. If this is true, then sinless living in sinful flesh becomes an impossibility this side of eternity.

Yet Scripture clearly declares that we may overcome even as Christ overcame (see Revelation 3:21). It admonishes believers, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal [sinful] bodies, to make you obey their passions" (Romans 6:12, RSV). Peter affirms that those who arm themselves with the mind of Christ will cease from sin (see 1 Peter 4:1). And, Paul told the Galatian Christians that if they walked in the Spirit they would not fulfill the sinful desires of their sinful natures (see Galatians 5:16; cf. Romans 13:14). All these admonitions become meaningful because in Christ's holy history, humanity has been set free from "the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). As a result, "the righteous requirement

of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4).

Having assumed our sinful humanity with all the force of sin dwelling in its nature, Christ conquered and condemned "the law of sin" through "the law of the Spirit of life" (Romans 8:2), and thus became forever not only the Redeemer of the world, but also the perfect Example for believers. This constitutes the full gospel I believe God has commissioned the advent movement to proclaim and demonstrate before the end comes.

We must not, however, confuse Christ as our Example with the "example theory" of the atonement as taught by some theologians. According to this theory, we realize salvation by imitating the example of Christ's holy living. Such teaching makes sanctification meritorious. Sanctification becomes the means of justification and therefore becomes a form of legalism which we must totally reject. The truth of the gospel is that human beings are justified by faith alone in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Nothing else must be added, not even our works of the law (see Galatians 5:4).

The New Testament presents both sanctification and glorification as making real in our experience, what is already true of us who are justified by faith *in Christ*. Our only hope, now and in the judgment, is through justification by faith in the doing and dying of Christ. But justification, or imputed righteousness, wonderful as it may be, is not the end of God's saving plan. Whom God justifies, He also sanctifies as the fruit and evidence of justification by faith. And those whose faith endures to the end, He will eventually glorify as the ultimate reality of that justification (see Romans 8:28-30).

When this imparted righteousness is completed and the earth has been made new, everlasting righteousness will be fully ushered in as a tangible fact. Christ will then have finished His heavenly sanctuary ministry as depicted by the service on the Day of Atonement. He will have accomplished all that He fulfilled for our humanity—that humanity He assumed and redeemed two thousand years ago. This is the meaning of the "final atonement"—reproducing the objective facts of the atonement He finished on the cross, when He tasted death for everyone (see Hebrews 2:9).

Nowhere in Scripture do we find sanctification identified as the believer's righteousness produced through his own efforts plus the help of the Holy Spirit. The formula of the gospel, when applied to either imputed or imparted righteousness, is "not I but Christ" (see Galatians 2:20, KJV; 1 Corinthians 15:9, 10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Ephesians 3:7). Jesus does not send His Spirit to dwell in believers in order to help us to be good so that we can make it to heaven. The work of the Holy Spirit in the plan of salvation is to *communicate* Christ's righteousness in the life of the believer. Faith is a battle and always involves effort and self denial (see Luke 9:23). But genuine sanctification is the work of God's Spirit demonstrating the saving power of the gospel in the life of justified believers. Our cooperation in living the Christian life is to deny self so that the Spirit of Christ may take over and reproduce in us the holy life of our Saviour.

Such is the divine secret of Christian sanctification which distinguishes it profoundly from simple natural morality. The latter says to man, Become what thou wouldest be. The former says to the believer, Become what thou art already in Christ. It puts a positive fact at the foundation of moral effort, to which the believer can return and have recourse anew at every instant. And this is the reason why his labour is not lost in barren aspiration, and does not end in despair (Evan H. Hopkins, *The Law of Liberty in the Spiritual Life*, 15).

When Christian ethics is defined in terms of the believer's good works, even good works that are motivated by our human love for Christ, this ceases to give evidence of effective justification which is by faith. Such good works give evidence only of mankind's

ability to produce self-righteousness, which are "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6, KJV) because it is polluted with self.

What the world desperately needs to see is not man's goodness (the United Nations is already revealing this by its many humanitarian projects); it needs to see Christ manifested in His "body," the church. The church is to be "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). The word "light" in this text is in the singular and refers to Christ and His righteousness (see John 1:4). The world desperately needs to see this light that it may glorify the Father in heaven (see Matthew 5:16). Then there will be no excuse for sin to continue, and God will bring an end to it. This is the true meaning of what is included in the cleansing of the sanctuary, as the 1888 message taught it.

Sinless living must not be confused with sinlessness or perfectionism. This was the heresy of the Holy Flesh movement that once plagued the Adventist Church and which was taught in a modified form by the "Awakening" a few years ago. Sinlessness of nature will not be a reality until the second coming, when "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:54, KJV). Sinless living has to do with reproducing Christ's character of selfless love in *sinful* flesh. This process brings no change to the believer's hereditary nature; that nature remains inherently sinful until death or the coming of Christ.

That is why there will never come a time, this side of eternity, when we can live without the Saviour. But what about Ellen White's statement that believers will have to live "without a mediator" after probation closes (*The Great Controversy*, 425)? In the investigative, or pre-advent, judgment, the verdict will have been settled once and for all concerning all believers (see Revelation 22:11, 12). Therefore, Christ's role as intercessor and advocate will have ended. This is what Ellen White means by saying that we shall live without a mediator following the close of probation. She does not mean that Christ has ceased to be our Saviour. We must not confuse His priestly ministry with His saving ministry. The two are related because His role as our Saviour qualified Him to be our High Priest (see Hebrews 5:1,2,5-10), but these two functions are not identical. Christ is the Saviour of the world, but He is the High Priest only of believers.

Sinless living in the life of the believer is God's work produced in sinful flesh. The Scripture refers to this as "the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). In His humanity, Christ lived a sinless life, and through faith in Him, victory over sin becomes the hope and goal of the justified believer—"Christ in you the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world [i.e., the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—see 1 John 2:15,16]: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4, KJV).

Now if Christ is to be truly our example and surety in holy living, He must have had to contend with and overcome the principle of sin—the love of self—residing in sinful flesh. And this is precisely what Scripture teaches. Having demonstrated the believer's total inability to overcome sin in and of himself, Paul concludes the struggle against indwelling sin with this cry of desperation: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). This cry is immediately followed by the shout of triumph in verse 25: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Then the apostle goes on to show that in Christ's humanity, which was *like* our sinful humanity, He totally conquered and condemned "the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2, 3).

It is important to note that in Romans 8:2 our being *set free* from the "law of sin and death" is expressed in the aorist tense, the past historical tense. In other words, this "law of sin and death," which Paul identifies in Romans 7 as the stumbling block to holy living, has in reality already been dealt with in Christ's humanity by "the law of the Spirit of life." That is why Paul says that there is "now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1) and that the righteous requirements of the law can be fulfilled in us who walk in the Spirit as Christ did (see Romans 8:4).



When the New Testament speaks of holy living, it does so on two levels: *mental and practical*. In His humanity, Christ lived a sinless life on both levels, demonstrating that when fallen men and women totally surrender their wills to God as He did, they are able to overcome sin through God's power (see John 6:57; 8:28; 14:10).

Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart [mind], and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29, 30). Many have thought that Jesus is saying that He will do most of the pulling while we do just a little. But anyone who has seen a farmer working with a plow pulled by oxen knows that the moment a strong ox and a weak one are yoked together, it becomes almost impossible to plow a straight line. When Christ said we should take His yoke and learn of Him, he did not mean to let Him do most of the pulling. He simply meant that we should be totally God-dependent, as He was on this earth. "As the living Father has sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he who feeds on me, will live because of Me" (John 6:57). This is the principle of the cross (see Luke 9:23). Christ's yoke is in complete contradiction to legalism which the apostle Paul describes as a "yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1; see also Acts 15:10, 11).

Sinless living in sinful flesh is possible only when we have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5). As humans, our primary concern with reference to holy living has to do with our actions or performance, but God sees things differently. His primary concern is our minds or hearts. "The Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

This is why the apostle Paul says twice in Romans 7 that when he sinned and did those things he really didn't want to do "it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me" (verses 17,20). By the pronoun "I" Paul meant his converted mind. His mind was already serving the law of God, but without the power of the Holy Spirit, the flesh was taking the converted mind into captivity so that when it came to his actions, he was serving sin (see verses 22-25). This, of course, is the experience of every born-again Christian who has not yet lost confidence in the flesh and who is, therefore, sincerely trying to live the Christian life in his or her own strength.

So the first step in holy living is for the mind, the will, to surrender the sinful flesh to the cross of Christ where it belongs (see Galatians 5:24). This means we have chosen by faith to depend entirely on the Spirit of Christ to reproduce His holy life in us. This is what the Bible calls the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22,23), and it is possible only when we have put away sin in the mind through repentance—a turning around of the mind. This is putting into practice our baptismal vows—"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:11).

According to Scripture, every born-again Christian, who has truly understood and obeyed the gospel from the heart, has said "good-bye" to sin in his or her converted mind from the moment of conversion. This is because New Testament faith is more than merely a mental assent to the gospel; it also includes a heart obedience to the truth as it is in Christ (see Romans 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; Galatians 5: 7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8; Hebrews 5:9). This is Paul's whole argument in Romans 6, where he counteracts cheap grace. In verses 3-14, He endeavors to show that every believer "baptized into Christ" must consider himself or herself (in the mind), "dead unto sin," and "alive unto God." Ellen White has this to say, commenting on these verses:

The new birth is a rare experience in this age of the world. This is the reason why there are so many perplexities in the churches. Many, so many, who assume the name of Christ are unsanctified and unholy. They have been baptized, but they were buried alive. Self did not die, and therefore they did not rise to newness of life in Christ (*Seventh-day Adventist Commentary*, 6:1075).

When it comes to living sinless lives in the mind, as Paul expounds it in Romans 6, this is how one scholar accurately explains it:

The believer does not get disentangled from sin gradually; he breaks with it in Christ once for all. He is placed *by a decisive act of the will* in the sphere of perfect holiness, and it is within it that the gradual renewing of the personal life goes forward" (Even H. Hopkins, *The Law of Liberty in the Spiritual Life*, 15, emphasis supplied).

In the second half of Romans 6, Paul continues the argument that sinning must be unthinkable in the mind of the converted believer, but he approaches it from another standpoint: The believer, he says, has been set free from sin in Christ, and by his own heart choice he has become a slave of God, the author of righteousness (see verses 17, 18). On the basis of this dual reality—"dead to sin" and "slaves of God"—the truly converted person does not cherish or cling to even a single sin *in his or her mind*. Freedom from sin's ruling power and dominion is the immediate privilege of every one who takes hold of it by faith. This does not mean that Christians have necessarily begun to live a sinless life *in performance* from the moment of conversion. On the contrary, Ellen White tells us, in *Steps to Christ*, that we will have to come many times to the foot of the cross because of our shortcomings. But this does not mean Jesus has forsaken us or that we become unjustified every time we fall (see page 64).

Day by day, we are to grow in Him and gain victories by the renewing of our minds (see Ephesians 4:17-24; Romans 12:1, 2). But because of our sinful natures, the closer we come to Christ the more sinful we will actually feel. And because these sinful natures of ours will not change until the second advent, we are never to *feel* that we have attained perfection (see Philippians 3:12-15).

The other side of the coin is that even though we are in a constant battle with indwelling sin, we must never *condone* sinning (see Romans 6:2,15). To excuse sin is a denial of our faith obedience to the gospel.

Is sinless living in sinful flesh really possible, at least on the actual, or performance, level? The answer of Scripture is a definite Yes! But sinless living in performance is a possibility only when it is preceded by sinless living—or obeying the law—in the mind (see Romans 7:25), only when the believer has first put on the yoke of Christ and lives in total dependence upon God. As Paul expressed it: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Genuine righteousness by faith means that we have fully identified ourselves with the holy history of Christ—His perfect life and His death to sin. When we realize and believe this, then the way is open for God's Spirit to take over and demonstrate to the world the power of the gospel in us. This is when the church will experience a second Pentecost. At the heart of every failure to live up to God's ideal is unbelief.

True New Testament faith is taking God at His word, even though it disagrees with our human reason, the scientific method, or even human experience. Abraham believed God against all hope and therefore became the father, or prototype, of all true believers (see Romans 4:16-18).

What the Christian fails to accomplish through his or her own strength in Romans 7 is made possible by faith through the power of the indwelling Spirit in Romans 8. "If the Spirit of Him that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you," says Paul "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (verse 11). "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of

glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17, 18, RSV).

In these last days, the Holy Spirit is preparing a faithful and willing people who by the grace of Christ will mature to the point that they will fully overcome even as Christ overcame. This is the practical result of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, a unique message of Adventism.

In Ephesians 2:8,9, Paul makes a clear gospel statement that we are saved by grace alone through faith and not by our works. But in verse 10 he adds, "We are His [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (see also Colossians 2:6). Again, in Titus 2:14, Paul reminds us that Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

In view of this gospel truth, let us, therefore, remove all unbelief and have "the mind of Christ" (Philippians 2:5)—a mind, or attitude, that is fully emptied of self and surrendered to the cross of Christ (see Luke 9:23) so that God may take over and enlighten the earth with the glory of His Son.

But as long as we deny the true humanity of Christ, as long as we do not believe that God was manifested in our corporate, sinful flesh, we will never be able to truly enter by faith into the present work of our High Priest in heaven—a work which includes the cleansing of the soul temple (see *The Great Controversy*, 488).

It is impossible for us to appreciate forgiveness of sins unless we see Christ bearing the wages of our sins on the cross. Likewise, we cannot experience victory over sin's power unless we see Christ conquering and condemning the law of sin in our sinful flesh which He assumed at the Incarnation and overcame by His life and executed on the cross.

We are told that Christ is waiting with longing desire to reproduce His character in His church (see *Christ's Object Lessons*, 69). How long are we going to keep Him waiting? "When the Lord rebuilds Zion [the church], He will reveal His greatness" (Psalm 102:16, GNB; see also Ephesians 2:19-22; 5:25-27).

### **Key Points in Chapter Fourteen Christ, the Believers' Example**

1. Having assumed our sinful humanity with all the force of sin dwelling in its nature, Christ conquered and condemned "the law of sin" through "the law of the Spirit of life" (Romans 8:2), and thus became forever not only the Redeemer of the world, but also the perfect Example for believers.

2. Sinless living must not be confused with sinlessness or perfectionism. Sinlessness of nature will not be a reality until the second coming, when "this corruptible has put on incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:54).

3. There will never be a time, this side of eternity, when we can live without a Saviour.

4. The first step in holy living is for the mind, the will, to surrender the sinful flesh to the cross of Christ where it belongs (see Galatians 5:24). This means we have chosen by faith to depend entirely on the Spirit of Christ to reproduce His holy life in us.

5. Because of our sinful natures, the closer we come to Christ the more sinful we will actually feel. And because these sinful natures of ours will not change until the second coming, we are never to feel that we have attained perfection (see Philippians 3:12-15).

## Chapter Fifteen

# Objections Considered—1

Those who teach that Christ took a sinless spiritual human nature at His incarnation—the spiritual nature of Adam before the Fall—do so out of a sincere concern to preserve the perfect sinlessness of our Saviour. That is why they object to the truth that Christ assumed our sinful nature, the post-Fall nature of Adam with its bent to sin. Their main arguments are four in number:

1. If Christ took our sinful nature, as we know it, He would have been tainted with sin, and therefore could not be the spotless Lamb of God; He would Himself be a sinner in need of redemption.

2. Although Christ did assume humanity and was like us physically, the Scripture refers to Him as "that Holy One" (Luke 1:35), "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15), "separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). Therefore His spiritual nature was like Adam's before the Fall.

3. Christ could not have resisted temptation had His human nature been sinful in all respects as is ours.

4. Christ is the second Adam; therefore He took the sinless spiritual nature of the first Adam.

Since a correct view of Christ's humanity is essential to a true understanding of the salvation He obtained for all mankind, both in terms of justification as well as sanctification and glorification, we cannot ignore these objections which come from sincere men of God. Let's consider them, then, in the spirit of truth, unity, and the clarity of the full gospel so that the divine purpose of enlightening this dark world with God's glory may soon become a living reality.

*1. If Christ took our sinful nature, as we know it, He would have been tainted with sin, and therefore could not be the spotless Lamb of God.* This argument comes from the doctrine of original sin. This doctrine, as we saw earlier, teaches that because of the Fall sinful human nature stands condemned because of indwelling sin (see Romans 5:18,19; 7:20,23). Hence, it is thought, if Christ assumed such a sinful nature, He would automatically become a condemned sinner as all men and women are from their birth.

It is true that Paul refers to our sinful humanity as "the body of sin" (Romans 6:6) because it is indwelt by "the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). But the problem of original sin cannot be applied to Christ. At the Incarnation, Christ's divinity was mysteriously united to our corporate humanity that needed redeeming, so that Christ was both God and man at the same time. However, it is most important that we keep these two natures distinct—a distinction the sixteenth-century Reformers unfortunately failed to preserve.

In the Incarnation, Christ took upon His *own* sinless divine nature *our* sinful human nature. For this reason, wherever the Bible refers to Christ's humanity, it uses the qualifying word "made." He was "made flesh" (John 1:14, KJV); "made ... to be sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21); "made of a woman" (Galatians 4:4); "made a curse" (Galatians 3:13, KJV); "made of the seed of David" (Romans 1:3, KJV). The word "made," as we saw in chapter 12, means that Christ was made to be, or became, what He was not by nature.

So, while Christ did really and truly assume our sinful nature which is under the curse of the law and therefore condemned to death, this did not make Christ Himself to be a sinner or a blemished sacrifice. That human nature which He assumed was not His by native right; He took it in order to redeem fallen mankind. Had Christ, even by a thought, yielded to the sinful desires of the flesh, He would have become a guilty sinner like us. But

as long as He did not unite his will or mind to our sinful nature which He assumed, He cannot be considered a sinner.

Yes, Scripture tells us that He was tempted in all points like as we are (that is, through the flesh, see James 1:14), but He never sinned (see Hebrews 4:15). Yes, at the Incarnation He took upon Himself our sinful nature as we know it, in order that He might be the Saviour of the world. But instead of that human nature contaminating Him, He cleansed it on the cross. This truth is beautifully illustrated in His miracles of healing for lepers. To the Jews, leprosy was a symbol for sin. According to Old Testament laws, anyone who touched a leper would become unclean. But in Christ's case, it was the very opposite; He did touch lepers, but instead of becoming unclean, He cleansed them! This is the glorious power of the gospel.

Because Christ was "made flesh," and took on Himself something that was not intrinsically His own, Paul is very careful to use the word "likeness" when he says that God sent His Son in "the likeness of sinful flesh" to condemn "sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3). On the one hand, Scripture identifies Christ with our total sinful situation, apart from actually sinning, in order that He might truly redeem us from every aspect of sin (see Hebrews 2:14-18). But on the other hand, it also makes it very clear that He was not altogether like us. He was not a sinner; this can never be.

*The International Critical Commentary*, (Romans, vol. 1), says Paul used the word "likeness" in Romans 8:3 to emphasize the fact that "the Son of God was not, in being sent by His Father, changed into a man, but rather assumed human nature while still remaining Himself." Therefore, this commentary concludes, "Paul's thought seems to be that the Son of God assumed the selfsame fallen human nature that is ours, but that in His case that fallen human nature was never the whole of Him—He never ceased to be the eternal Son of God."

We may explain it this way: Every born-again Christian has become a "partaker of the divine nature" through the experience of the new birth (2 Peter 1:4). This divine nature is sinless, but in no way does this make the believer himself innately sinless, even though Scripture considers him to be a righteous person and declares him to be a child of God (see Romans 8:16; 1 John 3:1, 2). This is because the divine nature does not belong to the believer by native right. In the same way, partaking of our sinful nature did not make Christ a sinner because that human nature was not His by native right. He *assumed* it in order to redeem it. Therefore, as long as Christ Himself did not consent to sin, or yield in any way to temptation, He remained spotless.

Those who insist that by taking our sinful nature, Christ would have disqualified Himself from being the spotless Lamb of God have failed to see the true significance of the sanctuary symbolism with reference to Christ's redeeming work. Because of the Fall, all humanity stands condemned and under the curse of the law (see Romans 5:18; Galatians 3:10). God's law demands two requirements if fallen men and women are to be redeemed from this condemnation and curse and have their status changed to justification unto life.

First, the law requires perfect obedience in order to qualify for life. Christ accomplished this by His thirty-three years of active, positive obedience to God's law in our human nature which He assumed. However, this obedience, even though it was absolutely perfect, could not cleanse our humanity from the curse and condemnation of the law.

Second, the law requires death—eternal death—as the wages of sin. Only death could set us legally free from sin (see Romans 6:7). So until Christ took this condemned humanity to the cross and surrendered it to the full wages of sin, He could not qualify to be our righteousness and justify the ungodly (see Romans 4:5, 25). Christ satisfied this further demand of the law, its justice, by dying for us on the cross. Thus, by both His doing which satisfied the positive demands of the law, and by His dying which met the justice of the law, Christ obtained eternal redemption for mankind (see Hebrews 9:12) and forever became the Saviour of the world (see John 5:24).



Only in the light of this truth can we understand the Old Testament sanctuary symbolism. By His perfect active obedience to the law, Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the spotless lamb; it was this that qualified Him to meet the justice of the law on our behalf. Nowhere in Scripture do we find it hinted that the spotless lamb represented the sinless human nature of Christ. This is only an assumption that cannot be proven explicitly from the Word of God. What that spotless lamb represented had to do with our salvation; it represented the perfect obedience of Christ which the law demands of us in order to qualify us for life. When the spotless lamb was slain, it represented the blood or death of Christ which cleanses us from sin (see Hebrews 9:22-28).

This twofold symbolism of the Old Testament was replaced by the symbolism of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. The bread we eat represents Christ's body in which the perfect will of God—the law—was fulfilled (see Hebrews 10:5-9). The grape juice we drink represents the sacrificial death of Christ which met the justice of the law (see Matthew 26:27).

Had Christ taken Adam's sinless nature as our representative and substitute, the law would have required of Him only positive obedience, as it did from Adam. But since Christ came to redeem *fallen* man—not sinless man—our sins which proceed from the flesh had to be condemned at their very source, the flesh. This is what Christ did by assuming that same sinful flesh and submitting it to death on His cross. Thus He "condemned sin [singular] in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

Some argue that if Christ assumed our sinful nature as we know it, His perfect obedience would have been polluted because of the "corrupt channel" through which it was performed. (They derive this term "corrupt channel" from a mistaken reading of *Selected Messages*, 1:344.) But this cannot be substantiated by Scripture.

It is true that, in itself, Christ's perfect obedience could not justify the fallen race, because of the "corrupt channel," the sinful human nature, that stood condemned. Hence both the dying as well as the doing of Christ was necessary in order to justify sinful man. But in no way was our Saviour's perfect performance marred by the sinful human nature He assumed. According to Scripture, Christ "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). His obedience was perfect. Never for a moment did Christ consent to temptation; not even by a thought did sin rest in His mind. According to the Greek New Testament scholar K. Wuest, "The words 'without sin' (Hebrews 4:15) mean that in our Lord's case temptation never resulted in sin" (*Hebrews in the Greek New Testament*, 95). Thus Christ produced a perfectly sinless character in our corporate sinful nature that He assumed. In doing so, He fully satisfied the positive requirements of the law as our substitute. This qualified Him to be the spotless Lamb of God.

Yet on the cross this same Christ, as the Lamb of God, took away the sin of the world (see John 1:29). How could Christ *take away* "the sin" of the world if it was not there in the flesh which He assumed? How could Christ condemn "sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3) in a sinless flesh?

But Christ did *take away* our sin by condemning it on the cross. He could do this because He assumed our flesh which has sin dwelling in it (see Romans 7:17, 20). "He [Christ] appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26). According to Wuest, the putting away of sin denotes both the sinful nature as well as sinful acts: "The verb (*thetos*) means 'to do away with something laid down, prescribed, established.' Sin had established itself in the human race through the disobedience of Adam, a *sinful nature* and sinful acts" (ibid., 40, emphasis supplied).

Because Christ partook of and overcame our sinful human nature, He is able today, as our High Priest, to both understand "the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15, KJV), as well as "aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18, KJV). The word "infirmities" must not be limited to physical weaknesses such as fatigue or aging, as some teach. Again, according

to Wuest: "The word 'infirmities' is *astheneia*, 'moral weakness which makes men capable of sinning,' in other words, the totally depraved nature." Interpreting the expression "He Himself [Christ] also is compassed with infirmity," Wuest continues: "The high priest has infirmity, sinful tendencies, lying around him. That is, he is completely encircled by sin since he has a sinful nature which if unrepressed, will control his entire being" (ibid., 98).

In this connection it is interesting to note Karl Barth's observation:

Those who believe that it was fallen human nature which was assumed have even more cause than had the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism to see the whole of Christ's life on earth as having redemptive significance; for, on this view, Christ's life before His actual ministry and death was not just a standing where unfallen Adam had stood without yielding to the temptation to which Adam succumbed, but a matter of starting from where we start, subjected to all the evil pressures which we inherit, and using the altogether unpromising and unsuitable material of our corrupt nature to work out a perfect, sinless obedience (quoted in *The International Critical Commentary*, Romans 8:3).

Thus we may be assured that our redemption in Christ's holy history was both perfect and complete. Not only do we believers have in Christ's righteousness "justification of life" (Romans 5:18), but in Him we can likewise claim liberation from our bondage to sin, so that we may now live unto God (see Romans 6:7-13). This is the basis of true justification as well as sanctification, both of which are to be received by faith alone.

2. *Although Christ did assume humanity and was like us physically, the Scripture refers to Him as "that Holy One" (Luke 1:35), "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15), "separate from sinners" (Hebrews 1:26).* This is the second objection raised to the idea that Christ assumed fallen, sinful human nature. But do such statements of Scripture suggest that Christ's human nature itself was sinless?

In order to understand these statements correctly, we must take into account other Bible texts which identify Christ with our sinful human condition. There must be no contradiction in Scripture. Note, then, such statements as: God "hath made Him to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21, KJV); God sent Him "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3); "in all things He had to be made like unto His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17); Christ "Himself took our infirmities" (Matthew 8:17).

Some try to reconcile these two apparently opposite views by teaching that Christ took our sinful nature only as far as our physical makeup is concerned. Thus He was prone to fatigue, aging, etc., but, they insist, morally or spiritually, He took the sinless nature of Adam before the Fall. Such a view goes far beyond what can be supported by an honest interpretation of these Scriptures. Furthermore, in Scripture, our physical and spiritual natures are related, so that if the one is sinful, so is the other. Hence "this corruptible" is identified with "mortal," and "incorruption" with "immortality" (see 1 Corinthians 15:53). Similarly, "the body of sin" (Romans 6:6) is identified with "the body of this death" (Romans 7:24).

As I see it, a true harmony of these two groups of texts—which on the surface seem to contradict each other—is possible only when we take into consideration two important facts:

First, Christ was both God and man, so that He had two distinct natures united in one person—His own divine nature, which was sinless, and our corporate sinful human nature, which He assumed. Thus Christ was a paradox. On the one hand, He could be called "that holy thing," and on the other hand, He was "made to be sin."

Second, although Christ took upon Himself our sinful nature, this must not be identified with our *sinning* nature. Our sinful nature has sinned and continues to sin, but His human

nature did no sin, so that in performance His humanity can be called sinless. According to Scripture, Christ understands our weakness since He took our sinful nature that is dominated by the "law of sin." Nevertheless, His mind never for a moment consented to sin, so that His flesh was totally deprived of sin (see 1 Peter 4:1).

Once we come to grips with these two important facts—the sinlessness of Christ's divinity and the perfect sinlessness of the character He produced in His humanity—the problem of reconciling these two sets of apparently contradictory texts ceases. Clearly, the texts referring to Christ's sinlessness are dealing either with His sinless divine nature or His sinless performance or character. And the texts that identify Christ with our sinful condition are referring to His equipment, our sinful human nature which He assumed, and which is "sold under sin" (Romans 7:14). Incidentally, a similar group of apparently contradictory statements can also found in the writings of Ellen White, and the same principle applies to her writings too.

With this in mind, let's examine the key texts that refer to Christ's sinlessness and see if this conclusion is valid. Do they, indeed, refer either to His divine, sinless nature or to His sinless performance that He produced in our sinful flesh—rather than to the human nature He assumed at the Incarnation?

1. *Luke 1:35*. In this verse, the angel announces to Mary her conception of the Lord Jesus Christ. He calls Him "that Holy One." Notice that the angel uses this phrase in connection with Christ being called "the Son of God," a term applying to His divinity. It was Jesus' divinity, the fact that the human child to be born was also the divine Son of God, that the angel was referring to when he called Jesus "that Holy One." He was not speaking of Christ's human nature.

2. *John 8:46*. "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" Jesus challenged the Jewish leaders who were incapable of discerning His divine nature or appreciating His perfect character. He was referring to His performance which was without sin—not to His human nature, which incidentally, was made in all points like His brethren (see Hebrews 2:17).

3. *John 14:30*. Jesus says, "the ruler of this world [Satan] is coming, and he has nothing in Me." It was ever Satan's purpose to thwart the plan of salvation by enticing Christ to sin. The temptations in the wilderness are a good example. But all his attempts failed, as Hebrews 4:15 confirms. Again, Christ was referring to this victory over temptation, His sinless performance. Jesus Himself explains this passage in the next verse: "As the Father gave Me commandment, so I do" (verse 31). Thus this text refers to His perfect obedience, not His human nature.

4. *Hebrews 1:26*. This verse says of Christ that He was "separate from sinners," "holy, harmless, undefiled," all of which suggest Christ's perfect performance, His righteousness. Christ was unlike, or separate from, the sinful human race He came to redeem in His sinless living—not in the nature which He took. Otherwise, Hebrews 2:17 makes no sense when it says of Him that "in all things He had to be made like His brethren." I believe Hebrews 1:9 explains in what sense Christ was separate from us: "You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions." The perfect character Christ produced in our sinful humanity separated Him from the rest of us.

5. *2 Corinthians 5:21*. This text says of Christ that He "knew no sin." The context of this statement is Christ as our sin-bearer. In fact, the entire text says, "He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin *to be sin for us*" (emphasis supplied). Christ knew no sin with reference both to His divine nature as well as to His character or performance. Yet the Bible is clear that He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). He did this by bearing our sinful humanity on the cross, the humanity He assumed at the Incarnation. That is why Peter adds in this very same text, "that *we*, having died to sins, might live" (emphasis mine). The only way *we* could have died to sin by Christ's death is if His humanity was really

our corporate sinful humanity that stood condemned (see 2 Corinthians 5:14). This is why Paul tells us, God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is the only way we could have died to the law "through the body of Christ" (Romans 7:4).

6.1 *John 3:5*. John says, "In Him [Christ] there is no sin." The context of John's statement indicates that "sin" here means sinning—not the human nature Christ "took." The preceding sentence in this verse reads: "And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins [plural, referring to our acts of sin]." Christ did not commit even one single sin, but He came to take away our many sins. He did this, of course, by taking our sinful, corporate humanity to Himself and executing that humanity on the cross.

7. *Hebrews 9:14*. This text says Christ "offered Himself without spot." This expression, as well as the one which follows—to "purge your conscience from dead works"—suggests performance rather than nature. Christ was "without spot" in performance, although tempted as we are (see 1 Peter 1:19; Hebrews 5:8, 9).

To the above text, we must add John 1:14. Some Adventist pastors interpret the statement, "the only begotten of the father," to mean that Christ's humanity was unlike ours. Their argument is that the word "begotten" in Greek means "one of a kind." They insist, therefore, that since Christ was "one of a kind," His spiritual human nature must have been different than ours—that is, spotless or sinless. The problem with such an interpretation is that John does not say that it was Christ's human nature, or His humanity, that made Him "one of a kind." He says that what made Christ, the God-man, "one of a kind" was the fact that "the Word [Christ as the divine Son of God] was made flesh [human]."

Further, if the word "begotten" is referring to Christ's sinless human nature which was *unlike* ours and therefore "one of a kind," then we must admit that Isaac, the son of Abraham, also had a sinless human nature since the writer of Hebrews uses the same Greek word translated "begotten" when referring to Isaac: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises offered up his only *begotten* son" (Hebrews 11:17, emphasis supplied). What made Isaac "one of a kind" was not his human nature, but the fact that he was a miracle child born after Sarah had passed the age of childbearing (see Romans 4:19). In the same way, what made Christ "one of a kind" was His unipersonality—the fact that He was both God and man at the same time. The "Word became flesh" making Him unique or one of a kind (John 1:14).

Thus, it seems clear that none of these texts refers to Christ's human nature itself; they cannot be used to prove that His spiritual human nature was sinless like that of Adam before the Fall. When correctly harmonized, Scripture teaches that Christ's sinlessness was in character or performance, produced in a human nature exactly like the one He came to save. He "condemned sin" in the human nature which is dominated by the principle of sin, or love of self.

Hence, God's righteousness manifested in sinful flesh can be truly called "the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). The word Greek word translated *mystery* means "something that can be seen and known, but that cannot be explained." How Christ produced a sinless life in a sinful human nature is indeed a mystery, but it is a biblical fact. Had Christ lived a sinless life in a human nature that was spiritually sinless, His holy living would not be a mystery.

This brings us to the third and fourth objections raised against the idea that Jesus assumed our sinful, fallen human nature at the Incarnation—which we will deal with in the next chapter.

## Key Points in Chapter Fifteen Objections Considered—1

1. Those who object to the truth that Christ assumed our sinful human nature, the post-Fall nature of Adam with its bent to sin, do so out of sincere desire to preserve the perfect sinlessness of our Saviour.

2. One objection this group raises is: If Christ took our sinful human nature as we know it, He would have been tainted with sin; He would Himself be a sinner in need of a Saviour.

a. However, in the Incarnation, Christ took upon His own sinless divine nature our sinful human nature. That is why the Bible uses the qualifying word "made" when it refers to Christ's humanity—"He was "made flesh" (John 1:14). This means that Christ was made to be, or became, what He was not by nature.

b. While Christ truly did assume our sinful nature which is under the curse of the law and therefore condemned to death, this did not make Christ Himself to be a sinner. That human nature which He assumed was not His by native right; He took it in order to redeem fallen mankind.

c. Had Christ, even by a thought, yielded to the sinful desires of the flesh, He would have become a guilty sinner like us. But as long as He did not unite His will to our sinful nature which He assumed, He cannot be considered a sinner.

3. Had Christ taken Adam's sinless nature as our representative and substitute, the law would have required of Him only positive obedience, as it did from Adam. But since Christ came to redeem fallen man—not sinless man—our sins which proceed from the flesh had to be condemned at their very source, the flesh. This is what Christ did by assuming that same sinful flesh and submitting it to death on His cross (see Romans 8:3).

4. A second objection raised against the idea that Christ assumed our sinful human nature is this: Although Christ did assume humanity and was like us physically, the Scripture refers to Him as "that Holy One" (Luke 1:35); "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15); "separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). Do not such statements suggest that Christ's human nature was sinless?

a. The Scripture also contains other statements which identify Christ with our sinful condition (see 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:17; Matthew 8:17). Some try to reconcile these two apparently opposite biblical views by teaching that Christ took our sinful nature only as far as our physical makeup is concerned. Thus He was subject to fatigue, aging, etc., but His moral nature was the sinless nature of Adam before the Fall. However, in Scripture, our physical and spiritual natures are related; if one is sinful, so is the other.

b. A true harmony of these two groups of texts is possible only when we take into consideration two facts: First, Christ was both God and man. He had two distinct natures united in one Person—His own sinless, divine nature and our corporate, sinful nature which He assumed. Second, although Christ took upon Himself our sinful nature, this must not be identified with our *sinning* nature. Our sinful nature has sinned and continues to sin, but His human nature did no sin. In performance, His humanity can be called sinless.

5. A close examination of the texts used to support the idea that Christ's human nature was sinless shows that they do not refer to Christ's human nature itself. When correctly harmonized, Scripture teaches that Christ's sinlessness was in character or performance, produced in a human nature exactly like the one He came to save.



## Chapter Sixteen

### Objections Considered—2

In this chapter we will continue looking at the objections raised by sincere Christians against the idea that Christ assumed our fallen human nature when He became a man. As outlined in the previous chapter, the third of these objections is:

3. *Christ could not have resisted temptation had His human nature been sinful in all respects as is ours.*

As mentioned in chapter 14, this was the very objection raised against the 1888 message. Note again how Ellen G. White responded to it in the *Review and Herald of February 18, 1890*:

Letters have been coming in to me affirming that Christ could not have the *same* nature as man, for, if He had, He would have fallen under similar temptations. If He was not a partaker of *our* nature, He could not be our example. If He was not a partaker of *our* nature He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it was not possible for Him to yield to temptation, He could not be our helper. It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battle as man, in man's behalf. His temptation and victory tell us that humanity must copy the Pattern (emphasis supplied).

In Romans chapters 2 and 3, Paul demonstrates that both Jews and Gentiles "are all under sin" so that "there is none righteous, no, not one" (3:9, 10). Therefore, so far as sinful human nature is concerned, "There is none who does good, no, not one" (verse 12).

Yet the same apostle also informs us that the very thing that sinful human beings, in and of themselves, cannot do, God did through Christ! (See Romans 7:14-25.) The very thing that the law could not do because of weakened human nature, God did! (See Romans 8:3.) God did it in Christ's humanity which was "in the likeness of sinful flesh." And he did this so that the "righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us [believers] who [like Christ] do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:3, 4).

Christ's sinless living did not prove that sinful human beings, in and of themselves, can resist temptation and live above sin. Instead, His sinless living demonstrated that sinful human beings, *indwelt and controlled by God's Spirit*, can overcome all the powers of the devil that he musters through the sinful flesh. This is what the New Testament teaches. Speaking of Himself as a man, Christ made it clear that He could do nothing of Himself (see John 5:19, 30) and that He lived "because of the Father" (John 6:57). Even His works all proceeded from the Father (see John 14:10, 11). Luke, after relating the temptations of Christ in the wilderness, concludes: "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). Speaking of Christ's death, the writer of Hebrews says: "By the grace of God" Christ tasted "death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9).

It is only in this context that Christ could resist all temptations and thus make it possible for the born-again believer to live above sin. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises [in Christ]: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4, KJV).

Paul makes it clear that humans, in and of themselves, cannot resist temptation, but he makes it equally clear that what is impossible with man is possible with God: "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts" (Romans 13:14).

Thus in the light of these texts, if any dare to say that sinful humanity cannot resist temptation or live above sin as long as they walk in the Spirit, they are elevating the power of the devil and sinful flesh above the power of God. Paul declares, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). And he adds, "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

This is the glorious truth of the gospel which gives all believers everlasting hope in this world of sin. The ultimate power of sin is the grave. So anyone who can conquer the grave proves they can conquer sin. God allowed the sins of the whole world to put Christ in the grave, but they could not keep Him there. Christ's resurrection is the greatest proof that all our sins were conquered in Him.

4. *Christ is the second Adam; therefore He took the sinless spiritual nature of the first Adam.* This is the fourth objection raised against the idea that Jesus assumed our fallen, sinful human nature at the incarnation.

It's true that Christ is the "last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45), but the New Testament clearly qualifies in what sense Christ is like Adam. To go beyond this qualification is to take liberties not warranted by God's Word.

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul compares and contrasts Adam and Christ. This passage makes it clear in what sense Christ resembles Adam. It is not in nature, but in representation. All mankind was present in the first Adam when he ruined his posterity by his representative sin. In the same way, God united all men to Christ, qualifying Him to be the second or "last" Adam (see 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:3). By Christ's representative obedience, all men were legally justified unto life *in* Him, just as by Adam's sin, all mankind were made sinners (see Romans 5:19). It is only in this sense that Scripture makes a comparison between Adam and Christ. What Adam did affected the whole human race, and what Christ did, likewise, affected all mankind (see Romans 5:15,18). To go beyond this comparison and identify Christ's human nature with Adam's sinless nature before his fall, is to add to Scripture an idea that is not present in the texts.

Nowhere in the Bible do we find Christ in anyway compared with Adam in terms of nature. On the contrary, Christ, is called the Son of David and of Abraham (see Matthew 1:1; Romans 1:3), both of whom had sinful flesh. He is referred to as being made "in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). Scripture says of Him that "in all things He had to be made like His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17). Clearly then, we cannot say that Christ took Adam's sinless nature in the incarnation simply on the basis that He was called the second Adam.

Any attempt to preserve Christ's perfect sinlessness at the expense of the full significance and power of the gospel is to undermine the truth of the gospel. Those who teach that Christ assumed only the pre-Fall nature of Adam must of necessity teach that He did not have to contend with the power of sin dwelling in sinful flesh. But such a teaching destroys a vital truth of the gospel. The gospel offers sinful man not only legal justification, but also God's power unto salvation from sin itself (see Matthew 1:21; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:17, 18, 24).

To appreciate this salvation, we must understand sin in the light of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. At the heart of this controversy lies the issue of God's law, founded on the principle of selfless love (*agape*), a love which "does not seek its own" (1 Corinthians 13:5; cf. Matthew 22:36-40) versus the law of sin, founded on the principle of the love of self (see Isaiah 53:6; Philippians 2:21). These two opposite principles met and fought each other in the humanity of Christ. On the one hand, Satan, working through Christ's flesh, desperately tried to entice Christ's mind to consent to self-will. But on the other hand, the Holy Spirit working through Christ's mind, never yielded.

Thus every attempt on Satan's part failed, for Christ's response was always, "Not as I [self] will, but as You will" (John 4:34; 5:30; Matthew 26:39).

This battle began the moment Christ was old enough to choose for Himself, and it ended at the cross when Satan, using the full driving force of temptations arising from sinful flesh, tempted Christ to come down from the cross and save Himself (see Luke 23:35-37). But Christ refused to yield and was obedient "even unto death" (Philippians 2:8, KJV). Thus Satan's kingdom, along with his principle of self-love, was totally defeated forever (see John 12:31; Romans 8:2, 3). This victory is a vital part of the good news of the gospel. "Be of good cheer," Jesus says, "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33; see also 1 John 2:16; 5:4 for John's definition of the "world").

Some who hold to the idea of Christ having a sinless human nature may object that Christ did not need to take our sinful nature in order to be tempted. This is true, of course. Adam has already proven that sinless human nature can be tempted and sin. But this is not the issue involved in Christ's temptations. It is a mistake to identify and equate Adam's temptation and fall with our own temptations and failures. When Adam sinned in Eden, he committed an unnatural act, for his sin was a contradiction to his sinless nature. His act of disobedience was inexcusable and therefore unexplainable.

On the contrary, when fallen, sinful man yields to temptation, he is doing something perfectly natural to his sinful nature. Those who teach that a person need not have a sinful nature in order to be tempted, and who therefore argue that Christ could be tempted and subject to the possibility of falling even though His human nature was sinless, may be making a correct statement *per se*. But the fact is Scripture clearly states that Christ was "in all points tempted *as we are*" (Hebrews 4:15, emphasis supplied). This means that Christ had to be tempted through His flesh even as we are, because for us, temptation is defined as being "drawn away of... [our] own desires and enticed" (James 1:14).

The real issue in Christ's earthly life was not that He could be tempted or that He was subject to the possibility of falling as did Adam. The issue was: Could Christ, in sinful human nature, resist Satan and defeat temptation—the principle of self-seeking? For, you see, our real problem is not only that we are born with certain sinful tendencies, but that we are in slavery to sin and the devil (see John 8:34; Romans 3:9; 6:16; 7:14; Acts 8:23; 2 Peter 2:19; 1 John 3:6-8). This was not true of Adam or his nature before the Fall. Hence Adam's temptation and fall in Eden must never be identified with our temptations and failures. The sinless Adam had no "self that needed constantly to be denied or crucified. But Christ had to deny Himself all His life; His self-will had to be crucified daily (see Luke 9:23).

It is true that the fundamental issue in every temptation is the same, for temptation is simply being enticed to say No to God and live independently of Him, to follow self-will instead of God's will of love. In that sense, no fundamental difference may exist between Adam's temptation and ours, but a world of difference exists in the actual struggle against the temptation itself. For if sin is saying No to God or living independently of Him, then our basic definition of a sinful nature must be one in which there is a bent toward self-love and independence from God.

Paul brings this out clearly when he describes mankind's sin problem in Romans 1:18-23. By very nature, sinful men and women are self-seeking and self-dependent; sinful tendencies are simply different manifestations of this principle of self-love. This, in fact, is the primary meaning of the Hebrew word translated "iniquity" (see Psalm 51:5; Isaiah 53:6). The mind controlled by the flesh, what the Bible calls the "carnal" mind, is "enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7).

But this was not true of Adam as God created him. Adam was tempted to sin in a nature controlled by selfless love, and hence his failure is inexcusable. Satan tempts us in a nature that is controlled by "the law of sin"—the love of self—a nature that naturally seeks its own way (see Isaiah 53:6; Philippians 2:21). Adam's sinless flesh was subject to the law of God,

and in fact, he delighted in God's law. But our carnal nature is not subject to God's law. It is at war with God's law. There was perfect harmony and agreement between Adam's sinless nature and the Spirit of God who dwelt in Him. But in the case of the born-again believer, the Spirit and the flesh are at war with each other (see Galatians 5:17).

Sinning was unnatural for Adam; it was an extremely hard thing for him to do. But for us, sin is enjoyable to our sinful nature; it is the most natural thing our nature feels like doing (see Romans 7:14-23). Adam could be justified by keeping the law; but in our case, "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20, KJV; Galatians 2:16). Adam's sin cannot be explained for it is the "mystery of iniquity," revealing the power of the devil. With us, it is the opposite. There is no mystery involved in why we sin. But when the righteousness of God is manifested in our sinful flesh, it reveals God's power over sin and the devil and is called "the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16). This mystery of godliness was first manifested in Christ, and through Him, it was made available to us by faith (see Colossians 1:27).

The great error of those who claim that Christ did not need to come in our fallen nature in order to be tempted as we are, is this: They identify Adam's situation with ours. Much more was involved in Christ's victorious life over temptation and sin than would have been required for Adam's success had he not fallen. This is a point we need to consider carefully if we are to fully appreciate Christ as our righteousness. When we discover the real difference between Adam's temptation in his sinless nature and our temptations in our sinful nature, we cannot but conclude that if Christ had assumed the sinless spiritual nature of Adam before the Fall, He could not possibly be tempted as we are. This, in turn, will open our eyes to appreciate how great a salvation Christ has accomplished for us.

Let's consider, then, the temptations of Christ in relation to that of Adam. Christ was both God and man, and therefore possessed inherent divine power. Therefore, it would seem that the temptation would be very great to use that divine power independently of His Father. Thus we could conclude that His temptations were far different from, and greater than, either Adam's or ours, since we do not have this divine power at our disposal. But while this may sound convincing, we have to realize that this can be true only in the context of a sinful nature. In the context of a sinless human nature, such a conclusion makes no sense.

You see, if in a *sinless* human nature, Christ's temptations were greater than ours because of the inherent divine power available to him, then would we not have to admit, as well, that Adam's temptation was also greater than ours, since his natural ability to do righteousness, inherent in his sinless nature, was greater than ours? If so, if Adam experienced greater temptations than we face, would it not also be much more understandable that he should give in to temptation than that we should do so? Would not this make his sin more excusable than ours? But such reasoning flies in the face of the facts and also undermines God's perfect creation.

Further, if it was extremely hard for Christ to be God-dependent because of His own inherent divine power, should not the very opposite be true of us because of our inherent weaknesses? Should it not be very easy for us to be God-dependent? Yet we must all confess that to live by faith, that is, to be God-dependent, involves a constant struggle (see 1 Timothy 6:12), as well as continual self-denial and acceptance of the principle of the cross (see Luke 9:23).

It is true that in tempting Christ, Satan tried to persuade Him to take matters into His own hands and act independently of His Father. But we must keep in mind this distinction: If Christ had assumed a sinless human nature, Satan would be tempting Him to do an unnatural thing, because His human nature would have been naturally unselfish. In order to resist temptation, He would not have needed to deny His own will as He told us He had to do (see John 5:30; 6:38).

On the other hand, if Christ took our sinful nature upon Himself, a nature naturally bent toward yielding to self-will, then Satan would be tempting Him to do a perfectly desirable thing, something extremely desirable to self, when he tempted Him to act independently of His Father. There is a world of difference between being tempted in a sinless nature as Adam was and being tempted in a sinful nature as we are.

The principle of self-love is foreign to God's nature, or for that matter, to sinless human nature which He created. The devil originated the law of self-love (see Isaiah 14:12-14), and he infected the human race with it at the Fall. If Christ had assumed a sinless spiritual human nature, without the inclination to sin, He obviously would not have had to contend with self-love as a part of His human nature; Satan could not have tempted Him through the flesh as he does us.

Jesus declared that He came not to do His own will, that is the self-will of His human nature, but the will of the Father (see John 5:30, 6:38; Luke 22:42). The fact that Christ, as a man, could speak of His own will, in potential contradiction to His Father's will, clearly indicates that He identified Himself in His humanity with the temptations to self-will of those sinful human beings He came to save. And He could do so only by assuming our sinful nature. The Gospels show that the great battle in Christ's life was against this principle of self-will—the stumbling block to holy living that exists in the lives of all sinful men and women.

If Christ's flesh was exempt from the law of sin, the law of self-love, then His flesh need not have suffered each time He refused to yield to temptation. But we read that "He Himself has suffered, being tempted" (Hebrews 2:18), that He was made "perfect through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:10), and that He learned "obedience by the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Christ's victory was attained in His mind, because it was surrendered to the control of the Spirit. But this involved suffering in the flesh, since His flesh was deprived of its own way, that is, of sin. This is how Peter expressed the conflict: "Therefore since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1).

What is true of Christ must be true of us, because the flesh He assumed was the likeness of our sinful flesh. Had Adam successfully resisted the devil's temptation, this would not have involved crucifying the flesh or human nature. But for Christ, as it must be with the believer, victory over sin involves the principle of the cross (see Galatians 5:24).

Our Lord's holy life, if produced in a sinless nature like that of Adam before the Fall, can bring no hope or encouragement to believers struggling with temptation. Satan has used this lie—that Christ came in sinless flesh—to destroy in the hearts of millions of Christians all belief that sinless living in sinful flesh is possible. Thus he has opened the door to antinomianism and makes the power of the gospel null and void in their lives.

If Christ assumed Adam's sinless spiritual nature, He becomes Adam's example, but not an example for fallen humanity. In which case, our only hope of holy living would be either through the eradication of our sinful nature (the heresy of "holy flesh" or perfectionism), or by waiting until the second coming when this corruptible puts on incorruption. If this is true, all admonition in the Bible to holy living becomes futile.

But if the gospel is to be vindicated before the end comes, the last generation of believers must restore the truth as it is in Christ so that the world may be enlightened with His glory (see Revelation 18:1; Colossians 1:27). This was God's purpose in the 1888 message.

Our Saviour accomplished far more than merely what Adam failed to do in Eden. Christ produced the perfect righteousness of God in the likeness of sinful flesh. Herein lies the true sinlessness of Christ and the fullness and power of His gospel. God did the "impossible" by producing perfect righteousness in our sinful flesh in Christ Jesus. And if we by faith will obey this truth and allow the Holy Spirit to indwell and dominate us (see 2 Corinthians



2:16), then He will also reveal His power in the "body" of Christ, the church. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4, KJV). This, too, is righteousness by faith.

It is the knowledge of Christ's righteousness produced in our sinful flesh that gives every believer the hope of glory. Let us, therefore, abide in Him, and thus make ourselves totally available to Him so that we may walk "even as He walked" (1 John 2:6, KJV).

### **Key Points in Chapter 16 Objections Considered—2**

1. A third objection raised against the idea that Christ assumed our fallen human nature is this: Christ could not have resisted temptation had his human nature been sinful in all respects as is ours.

a. Ellen White responded to this objection in this way: "If He was not a partaker of our nature, He could not be our example. If He was not a partaker of our nature He could not have been tempted as man has been" (*Review and Herald*, February 18, 1890).

b. Paul declares that the very thing sinful human beings, in and of themselves, cannot do—keep from sinning—that very thing God did in Christ's humanity which was "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3).

2. The real issue in Christ's earthly life was not that He could be tempted or that He was subject to the possibility of falling as was Adam. The real issue was: Could Christ, in sinful human nature, resist Satan and defeat temptation—the principle of self-seeking?

3. Christ's sinless living did not prove that sinful human beings, in and of themselves, can resist temptation and live above sin. Instead, His sinless living demonstrated that sinful human beings, *indwelt and controlled by God's Spirit*, can overcome all the powers the devil musters through the sinful flesh. This is how Christ lived a sinless life in His humanity (see John 5:19, 30; 6:57; 14:10, 11; Luke 4:14).

4. Our Lord's holy life, if produced in a sinless nature like that of Adam before the Fall, can bring no hope or encouragement to believers struggling with temptation. If Christ overcame in sinless flesh, what assurance does that give us that we can overcome in sinful flesh? Christ produced the perfect righteousness of God in the likeness of sinful flesh. Herein lies the true sinlessness of Christ and the fullness and power of His gospel.

5. A fourth objection raised against the idea that Christ assumed our fallen human nature is this: Christ is the second Adam; therefore He took the sinless spiritual nature of the first Adam.

a. Nowhere in the Bible do we find Christ in any way compared with Adam in terms of nature. Romans 5:12-21 makes it clear that Christ is the second Adam not in nature, but in representation. Paul's comparison between Adam and Christ is that what Adam did affected the whole human race, and that likewise, what Christ did as the second Adam also affected all mankind. To go beyond this comparison and identify Christ's human nature with Adam's sinless nature before the Fall is to add to Scripture an idea that is not present in the text.

b. We cannot say that Christ took Adam's sinless nature in the incarnation simply on the basis that He is called the second Adam.

## Chapter Seventeen

# Jesus Christ, the God-Man Saviour

We have already demonstrated that Christ's divinity had to be united to our corporate fallen humanity that needed redeeming in order for Him to legally qualify to be mankind's substitute and representative. At the incarnation these two distinct, opposite natures were united together in one person, and Christ became the second Adam. This is the *in Christ* motif which is the central theme of Paul's theology (see 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31; Ephesians 1:3-6).

According to W. W. Prescott, one of the pioneer theologians of the Adventist Church, this truth constitutes the very heart of the Christian message—and it is a truth that Ellen White endorsed. Note what he said, in one of the six sermons on the topic of the "Divine-Human Family" he presented at the 1895 General Conference session:

Now what does it mean to us that Jesus Christ became the second head of this human family? It means this: Just as, when Adam was created, all the members of the human family were created in him, so also when the second man was created "according to God in righteousness and true holiness," all the members of that family were created in him.

It means that, as God saw in Adam all the members of the human family, so he saw in Christ, the second father of the family, all the members of the divine-human family; so he saw in him all his sons, all his daughters, all his descendants; all that belong to the family.

That is to say that Jesus Christ was the representative of humanity, and all humanity centered in him, and when he took flesh, he took humanity. He took humanity and he became the father of this divine-human family, and he became the father by joining himself in this way to humanity, and the flesh which he took and in which he dwelt was our flesh, and we were there in him, he in us, just as what Abraham did, Levi did in Abraham, so what Jesus Christ in the flesh did, we did in him.

And this is the most glorious truth in Christianity. It is Christianity itself, it is the very core and life and heart of Christianity. He took our flesh, and our humanity was found in him, and what he did, humanity did in him (*The Divine-Human Family*, 1895 General Conference Bulletin, 8, 9).

Because Christ was both God and Man, He was not only unique (the meaning of "begotten") but also a paradox. What He was as God contradicted what He assumed as man. This is the great mystery of the Incarnation, a mystery which our finite human minds cannot fathom, but which we accept by faith because the Word of God declares it so.

One of the great errors that the early leaders of the Christian church made was to try to reconcile Christ's divinity with His humanity. Many of them could not accept the fact that a holy God could dwell in sinful flesh, or the fact that one person could be both fully God and fully man at the same time. Thus began the great Christological controversies that lasted almost four centuries. In this battle over the twofold nature of Christ, some denied His real divinity, while others His real humanity.

Another error made by many of the church Fathers, including the great Reformers of the sixteenth century, was their failure to keep Christ's divine nature distinct from the human nature He assumed at the Incarnation. Thanks to the insights God gave Ellen White,

the Adventist Church has correctly taken the position that the two natures of Christ, His divine nature and His human nature, were distinct yet united in one person. "In Christ, divinity and humanity were combined. Divinity was not degraded to humanity; divinity held its place, but humanity by being united to divinity withstood the fiercest test of temptation in the wilderness" (*Selected Messages*, 1:408).

It is extremely important that we keep the two natures of Christ distinct if we are to truly comprehend what kind of human nature He assumed, and also if we are to appreciate the paradox that existed between His two natures. When we do keep the two natures distinct, many of the problems created by the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity disappear. Much of the difficulty the church Fathers had in the Christological controversies over Christ's human nature would have been eliminated if they had kept the two natures of Christ distinct.

One of Ellen White's favorite ways of expressing the dual natures of Christ was to point out how He reaches to heaven by His divine nature, while by His human nature, He reaches down to the human race He came to redeem. Here are two typical statements:

In assuming humanity Christ took the part of every human being. He was the Head of humanity. A Being divine and human, with His long human arm He could encircle humanity, while with His divine arm He could lay hold of the throne of the Infinite (*Selected Messages*, 1:252).

But it is only through a correct understanding of Christ's mission and work that the possibility of being complete in him, accepted in the Beloved, is brought within our reach. His long human arm embraces the human family; his divine arm grasps the throne of the infinite, that man may have the benefit of the infinite sacrifice made in his behalf. And to as many as receive him, he gives the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name (*Review and Herald*, 18 July 1899).

The truths she expresses in these statements require us to believe and teach that there was no gap between our human nature which needs redeeming and the human nature Christ assumed in order for Him to be the Saviour of the world. Apart from the fact that Jesus never actually sinned, any distinction we make between the human nature He assumed and our sinful nature, that separates us from God, destroys the ladder that links the fallen human race to God's throne.

That is why I must emphasize the paradox between Christ as the Son of God and Christ as the Son of Man. That is the only way we can understand how Christ could fully identify with the fallen human race He came to save and yet be sinless. As God, He was sinless and one with the Father; as Man, He was made sin and became one with us in every way, assuming our sinful nature. And because He chose not to participate in sin, even by a thought, but condemned our sin in His flesh on the cross, this Elder Brother of ours can not only sympathize with us and aid us with our struggles against the flesh, but above all, He can represent us and intercede on our behalf before the throne of God.

In examining Scripture, especially the New Testament, we will discover many paradoxes between Christ's divine nature, which was His by native right, and His human nature, which was our corporate sinful nature that He assumed at the Incarnation in order to be the Saviour of the world. Let's look at some of these paradoxes.

As God, Christ is called the "Son of God" (Luke 1:35); as Man, He is referred to as the "Son of Man" (Luke 19:10) by the same Bible writer. These Hebrew expressions "Son of God" and "Son of Man" simply mean Christ was both God and man at the same time. Likewise the apostle Paul tells us that it was not robbery for Christ to equate Himself with

the Father (see Philippians 2:6). Yet, in the very next verse, he tells us that in order to save the fallen race, Christ emptied Himself of all His divine prerogatives and was made in the likeness of man, totally subject to God (see verse 7). He was equal with God the Father as the Son of God, and at the same time He became subservient to Him as the Son of man.

As God, Christ was self-existing; He had life in Himself (see John 1:4). This was something some of the pioneers of our church had difficulty understanding. But Ellen White solved the problem when she declared by inspiration: "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived" (*The Desire of Ages*, 530). Yet as man, He had a beginning; He "was born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4); His human life was mortal, subject to death (see Hebrews 2:14, 15). It was this human life—our corporate condemned life—that died forever on the cross as the wages of sin. In exchange, God gave us the eternal life of His Son (see 1 John 5:11,12). This is the great exchange that took place in the death and resurrection of our Saviour and which we experience by faith in Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). All this was possible because Christ, the God-Man, was a paradox.

Again, as God, Christ was Spirit (John 4:24), but in becoming a man He "became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory ... full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Here, again, is a paradox—two opposite natures united in one Person. Because of this union, Christ has limited Himself so that He cannot be in two places at the same time. He accepted this limitation in order to be our Redeemer. Out of infinite love He not only united Himself to the fallen race while He was on this earth, but He will be one with the redeemed human race throughout eternity.

As God, Christ was equal with the Father, but by becoming one with us He not only gave up His divine prerogatives, but became a "slave" of God, totally dependent on the Father (see Philippians 2:6, 7; John 5:19, 30). It is hard for us sinful human beings to understand such condescension, but God's ways are not like ours (see Isaiah 55:8, 9). Unlike us, He is pure, unselfish *agape* love (see 1 John 4:8, 16). This love not only led Him to give up His equality with the Father, but it caused Him to be clothed with the same nature we untouchable lepers are born with—this filthy humanity He came to redeem. Such a paradox we can never fully understand.

Thus, Christ, who was by native right self-dependent (see John 10:18), became totally God-dependent (see John 5:19, 30). He who was immortal (see 1 Timothy 1:17), became mortal (see Hebrews 2:14,15). He who was a lawgiver (see James 4:12), was made under the law (see Galatians 4:4). These are the great paradoxes of our God-Man Saviour. But the greatest and most glorious paradox is that the sinless Son of God was willing to be made sin for us so that we who are sinners may be made the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Unfortunately, some limit this glorious truth only to what happened to Christ on the cross. Thus they limit, as well, God's glory, His true self-sacrificing love, only to what took place at the cross. On the contrary, however, Christ manifested the self-emptying love of God from the moment He united Himself to our filthy flesh. Yes, the cross was the supreme manifestation of this love, but don't limit His glory only to the experience of the cross He hung on. After all, He was on the cross only for about six hours! But He manifested the self-emptying love of God from birth to death and carried the cross of self-denial all His earthly life. Otherwise, His admonition to His disciples, to follow Him and carry the cross daily by denying self, becomes meaningless (see Luke 9:23).

We must ever keep in mind why Christ was willing to become one with us in spite of the fact that He was one with the Father and enjoyed all the privileges of the Deity. The reason lies in God's great love. God so loved the world that He gave us His only begotten Son that all who receive Him as our God-Man Saviour may not perish but live and reign in eternity with Him (see John 3:16). That is why God has exalted the name of Christ above every other name (see Philippians 2:9-11).

When Jesus died on the cross, our condemned corporate life forever came to an end. The race of Adam, which stood under the curse of the law, was executed in that one Man, Jesus Christ (see John 12:31; Galatians 3:13). But God did not leave us to remain in the grave in Christ. The good news is that by giving us His eternal life, the life He had submitted to His Father at the Incarnation and the cross, we were raised up with Christ. And when He ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, so did we *in Him* (see Ephesians 2:6).

Thus by His death and resurrection, Christ abolished death—the second death—and replaced it with immortality (see 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Revelation 20:6). All that we are, as a result of the Fall, Christ was made at the Incarnation, and the result is that through His life, death, and resurrection, we are made, *in Him*, all that He is. This is what makes up the incredible, fantastic good news of the gospel. I believe this is the good news God raised up the Adventist Church to lighten the world with before the end comes.

Thus, we who were spiritually dead were made spiritually alive in Christ (see Ephesians 2:5). This renewal of the Spirit makes it possible for all who receive Christ to experience the new birth and become once again the temple of God (see 1 Corinthians 3:16). But this new birth is only "the firstfruits" of the blessed hope we have in Christ (Romans 8:23). Only when Christ comes to take us believers to heaven will we fully realize the exceeding riches of His grace towards us sinners (see Ephesians 2:7).

Note how Peter expressed this wonderful hope that comes to all believers because Christ was willing to fully identify with our corporate humanity that needed redeeming:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials (1 Peter 1:3-6).

When Jesus did away with our sinful life on His cross and replaced it with His eternal and righteous life in the resurrection, He created a new humanity out of the old. This is what Paul meant when he declared to the believers at Corinth: "If anyone is in Christ [that is, accept by faith their new history in Christ], he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

By birth we are born sinners, children of wrath (see Ephesians 2:3), but in Christ we were made righteous (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). By nature we are indwelt by sin; our bodies are bodies of sin (see Romans 7:17,20,24). But in Christ we were made holy and blameless (see Ephesians 1:4). In and of ourselves, we stand under sin and condemned to death (see Romans 3:9, 19), but in Christ we were justified to life (see Romans 5:18). By nature we are the sons and daughters of men, but in Christ we were made the sons and daughters of God (see 1 John 3:1).

Left to our own, we are hellhound, cursed by the law of God (see Galatians 3:10). But in Christ we are citizens of God's kingdom, sitting in heavenly places (see Philippians 3:20, 21; Ephesians 2:6). Because of the Fall, we are born with a mortal life that is doomed to death, but in Christ we have eternal life and will live forever (see 2 Timothy 1:8-10; 1 John 5:11, 12). Of ourselves, we are spiritually bankrupt, but in Christ we have been made spiritually rich (see 2 Corinthians 8:9). When we were created in Adam, we were created a little lower than the angels (see Psalm 8:5), but by putting us in Christ and rewriting our history, God has made us joint heirs with Christ, the King of kings (see Romans 8:16, 17; Hebrews 2:6-12).



This complete reversal of our history and status was made possible because Christ, the Son of God, was willing to become the Son of Man. Everything that we are by nature He was made through the incarnation, when His sinless divinity was united to our sinful humanity. Thus He took this ruined humanity of ours, fit only for the lake of fire, and refashioned us so that we may be elevated to the status of sons and daughters of God. This is what Christ, our High Priest, will say to Satan, the accuser of the brethren, in the investigative judgment of the saints: "The Lord rebuke you, Satan!... Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" (Zechariah 3:2).

The only way this was possible was for Christ to take us unto Himself and remake us into what He originally meant us to be—and much more. That is why His humanity is "everything to us" (Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, 1:244). Surely, every believer who realizes this truth will join Paul in exclaiming, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15, KJV).

### **Key Points in Chapter Seventeen Jesus Christ, the God-Man Saviour**

1. Thanks to the insights God gave Ellen White, the Adventist Church has correctly taken the position that the two natures of Christ—His divine nature and His human nature—were distinct yet united in one Person. When we keep the two natures distinct, many of the problems created by the post-Fall view of His humanity disappear.

2. There is a paradox between Christ as the Son of God and Christ as the Son of Man. As God, Christ was sinless and one with the Father. As man, He was made sin and became one with us in every way, assuming our sinful nature.

3. As God, Christ was self-existing; as man, He had a beginning, "made of a woman" (Galatians 4:4).

4. As God, Christ was Spirit (see John 4:24), but in becoming a man He "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

5. As God, Christ was equal with the Father; as man, He not only gave up His divine prerogatives, but became a "slave" (see Philippians 2:6,7). Christ, who was by native right self-dependent, became totally God-dependent. He who was immortal, became mortal.

6. The greatest paradox of all is that the sinless Son of God was willing to be made sin for us so that we who are sinners may be made the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

7. When Jesus died on the cross, our condemned corporate life forever came to an end. Thus by His death and resurrection, Christ abolished death—the second death—and replaced it with immortality (see 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Revelation 20:6). All that we are, as a result of the Fall, Christ was made at the Incarnation, and the result is that through His life, death, and resurrection, we are made, *in Him*, all that He is. This is the incredible good news of the gospel.

## Chapter Eighteen

# The Fall and Restoration of Man

In this chapter, we will examine the threefold aspect of salvation realized in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. Only in this context—the full and complete salvation Christ accomplished for the sinful human race in His earthly mission—can we appreciate the true meaning of His humanity and the redemptive work He wrought out in our corporate, sinful human nature.

In Adam the foundation was laid for everything we experience in the realm of sin, the realm which culminates in eternal death. Likewise, in Christ the foundation was laid for all that God intends us to experience in the realm of redemption, the realm which culminates in eternal life (see 1 Corinthians 3:11). As the apostle Paul so clearly summed it up: "For since by man [singular] came death, by Man [singular] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21,22).

Christ came to reverse the damage brought about by the fall of Adam. Everything necessary for the restoration of fallen humanity has already been prepared in the holy history of Christ so that there is *nothing* the believer receives or experiences in this life or in the world to come that has not been accomplished *in Christ*. For this reason, our faith must be built on the foundation already laid, namely Christ Jesus and Him crucified.

As the result of Adam's sin, the human race has become a ruined species. The effects of Adam's sin are passed on from generation to generation, so that all mankind is hopelessly lost apart from God's redemptive act in Christ. Adam's sin has alienated us from God, and thus we are all born into a realm over which sin and death rule. This is how Ellen White describes it:

Through the medium of influence, taking advantage of the action of mind on mind, he [Satan] prevailed on Adam to sin. Thus at its very source human nature was corrupted. And ever since then sin has continued its hateful work, reaching from mind to mind. Every sin committed awakens the echoes of the original sin {*Review and Herald*, 16 April 1901}.

In order to fulfill the plan of salvation, as planned by God from the foundation of the world, Christ assumed this sinful condemned humanity at the Incarnation in order to save fallen humanity.

To benefit fully from such a great salvation, we must first understand the effects of the Fall. Scripture tells us that Adam's sin affected mankind in three ways: (1) spiritually, (2) morally, and (3) physically. Let's briefly examine each of these as the basis of appreciating the fullness of Christ's redemptive work:

*1. Spiritually.* Unlike the animal kingdom, man was created a spiritual being. Modern studies in anthropology have demonstrated that even among the most primitive societies, human beings seek to worship some form of a god. It was God's original purpose to dwell in man, and to reveal His glory through him. "From eternal ages it was God's purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for the indwelling of the Creator." (*The Desire of Ages*, 161).

But when Adam turned his back on God, this purpose was brought to nought. The Holy Spirit immediately left him, and Adam's life was plunged into darkness. Thus was fulfilled the warning God gave our first parents: "If you do [eat of the tree of good and evil] you will die the same day" (Genesis 2:17, GNB). The immediate result of the Fall therefore was

spiritual death. And this death was passed on to all men and women; all of us are born in this world spiritually dead (see Ephesians 2:1,5, GNB) and alienated from God (see Isaiah 59:2).

Ellen White goes on to say in the quotation given above: "Because of sin, humanity ceased to be a temple of God. Darkened and defiled by evil, the heart of man no longer revealed the glory of the Divine One" (ibid., 161).

2. *Morally*. In sinless Eden, God created Adam in His image. This meant that Adam's nature was controlled by selfless *agape* love. There was perfect harmony between God's holy law and Adam's moral nature, so that, for Adam, keeping the law was spontaneous and natural. Our first parents were not given the moral law in writing, for the simple reason that it was very much part of their nature. In other words, the law was written in every fiber of their being so that obeying it was spontaneous.

However, at the Fall, that sinless nature became sinful. Adam's nature was now dominated by the law of sin, the love of self. "Through disobedience," says Ellen White, "his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil" (*Steps to Christ*, 17).

Before the Fall, Adam loved God supremely, and he loved Eve unconditionally. But when Eve sinned, she separated herself from God and entered Satan's camp. Once this happened the enemy of souls could use Eve as his agent to secure Adam's fall. When this happened, he got the whole world because God "made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). This was how the Fall affected all humanity.

Eve was deceived, but what made Adam deliberately sin? When Eve brought the forbidden fruit to Adam, the choice he had to make was not between himself and God, but between God and Eve, since she had now moved to Satan's side. Adam knew the fruit his wife brought to him was the forbidden fruit, for "Adam was not deceived" says Paul (1 Timothy 2:14). He knew that eating the forbidden fruit could not save Eve whom he loved dearly. And he also knew that eating the fruit would mean death to himself.

So what caused Adam to eat that forbidden fruit, knowing it could not save Eve and would bring eternal death to himself? Obviously Adam loved Eve more than himself and therefore chose to die with his beloved wife. His sin was not putting self first, but putting Eve first before God. When he said good-bye to God he naturally said good-bye to life, since God is the source of life.

The moment Adam sinned, not only did the Holy Spirit leave him, not only did he become spiritually dead, but his very nature made a U-turn toward self. No longer was it controlled by *agape* love "which seeketh not its own" (1 Corinthians 13:5, KJV). Hence, when God visited him that evening, after the Fall, and asked him why he had eaten from the forbidden fruit, Adam blamed God for giving him a defective wife! Ever since then, we, too, have followed Adam in blaming everybody else for our problems except self. Surely, as Ellen White says, "every sin we commit is an echo of the original sin" (*Review and Herald*, 16 April 1901). This is what Isaiah meant when he said, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). It is this bent to self-love that the Bible calls "iniquity." The literal meaning of the Hebrew word *iniquity* means "crooked" (see Psalm 51:5). It makes all our good works polluted with self and therefore condemned as "filthy rags" in God's eyes (Isaiah 64:6). In this sense, mankind's moral nature, since the Fall, is totally depraved.

Although the natural person is capable of doing a lot of good, all our good works, apart from what we do by grace, are motivated by self even though this self is often hidden from our consciousness. "The heart" says the prophet Jeremiah, "is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). That is why, without a clear under-

standing of the gospel and the truth of justification by faith, Christian living will *always* be motivated by either fear of punishment or desire for reward— which is no different from the motivations of any pagan religion.

3. *Physically*. As long as our first parents had access to the tree of life, their physical nature knew no degeneration. But after being expelled from the Garden of Eden, humanity became prone to sickness, fatigue, and aging, culminating in death. All men and women have become, "all their lifetime subject to bondage" to the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). This is the wages of sin we inherited from Adam. "In Adam all die" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Christ came to this world as Saviour to redeem us from each of these three consequences of the Fall. But in order to do this, "in all things" He had to be "made like unto His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17, KJV). With this in view, let us observe how fallen humanity was redeemed from this threefold effect of sin in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

1. *Spiritually*. At the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit mysteriously united Christ's divinity to our corporate humanity in the womb of Mary. This humanity, which Christ assumed through Mary, was in and of itself spiritually dead like that of all mankind. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is an attempt to avoid this conclusion, but that doctrine is unbiblical and a heresy.

The moment our humanity was united to Christ's divinity, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, it became spiritually alive. As a result, Christ's humanity was spiritually alive from His very conception. And since His humanity is our corporate humanity, what is true of Christ also became true of us *in Him*. When Paul told the Ephesians that they were made spiritually alive together with Christ, while they themselves were still dead in trespasses and sin (see Ephesians 2:5), he used the aorist tense, a past historic tense, to indicate an objective truth realized *in Christ* at the Incarnation— not the Ephesians' subjective experience which took place at their conversion.

Thus, we must never equate Christ's humanity with that of unbelievers who are still spiritually dead. Although no distinction exists between the flesh—the sinful human nature—of the believer and the unbeliever, there are two major differences that do exist between believers and unbelievers:

1. A true believer has repented with all that the Greek word for *repentance* implies—a change of mind so that the will is in harmony with God and His law (see Romans 7:22, 25). Paul refers to this converted mind as the *inner* or *new* man (see Ephesians 3:16; 4:24). This is not true of the unbeliever whose mind is still unconverted and in harmony with the self-principle of the flesh (see Ephesians 2:3; Romans 8:7).

2. Unlike the unbeliever, the believer who has been baptized *into* the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12:13), has become spiritually alive through the new birth experience (see Romans 8:9-11). This experience is based on the objective truth that our humanity was first made spiritually alive *in Christ* when divinity was united to our corporate sinful humanity at the Incarnation.

Hence the new birth, the believer's first experience of salvation that comes at conversion through justification by faith, is the result of a reality already prepared for all men *in Christ*. It is this new birth, referred to as "regeneration" (Titus 3:5) that changes the believer's whole situation, so that he or she not only has peace with God through justification by faith, but is also standing under grace (see Romans 5:1,2). This means that now holy living and law-keeping are brought within the believer's reach. For grace also means that the power of God is available to those who are justified by faith so that they may fulfill God's purpose in their lives (see 1 Corinthians 15:9, 10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Fallen humanity is totally depraved so that, in and of ourselves, none of us can be subject to the law of God (see Romans 8:7). But all those who are made spiritually alive through justification by faith in Christ, and who have God's Spirit now dwelling in them, find

victory over the sinful flesh and holy living a possibility (Romans 8:9, 10; Galatians 5:16, 22, 23). To such converted persons, Christ's holy life becomes their example and their goal in Christian living (see Philippians 3: 12-14; Romans 13:14; 2 Corinthians 3:17,18).

2. *Morally.* To be made spiritually alive does not mean that the moral nature has been changed in any way. Thus when Christ took upon Himself our humanity, even though that humanity was made spiritually alive, its nature was still bent toward self, still under the pressure of the law of sin. Christ's holy living, therefore, always involved the cross of self-denial (see Luke 9:23).

The incarnation did not cleanse humanity of its sinfulness; the cross did that (see Romans 8:3). Otherwise, the new birth would cleanse believers of their sinfulness. But we all must confess that although we Christians may have the mind of Christ, no change has taken place in our sinful natures; they remain sinful until death or the second coming of Christ. This sinful flesh, as we all know, is the believer's greatest hindrance to holy living.

The *mind* of Jesus was fully surrendered to God's will so that no propensity, or even an inclination, to sin rested there. But *His flesh* was dominated by the principle that affects all mankind—the principle of self. Consequently, to Him, holy living was not simply a matter of following the natural inclinations of His human nature, as was the case of sinless Adam. Holy living for Jesus in His humanity involved a constant battle against "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). When He declared to His disciples, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33), He included in that statement His victory over the sinful flesh, for the apostle John defines the world as the evil desires and self love that draw us away from God (see 1 John 2:15, 16; James 4:4).

Such an understanding of Christ's holy living gives a deeper, more complete meaning to His redemptive mission. *The International Critical Commentary* makes an interesting observation referring to Paul's statement that in the likeness of sinful flesh, Christ "condemned sin in the flesh: (Romans 8:3). It says, "But if we recognize that Paul believed it was fallen human nature which the Son of God assumed, we shall probably be inclined to see here also a reference to the unintermittent warfare of His whole earthly life by which He forced our rebellious nature to render a perfect obedience to God."

According to Peter, all the sufferings of Christ that resulted in His perfect character took place in His flesh (see 1 Peter 4:1). This could be possible only because His flesh was the likeness of our sinful flesh and was denied its sinful desires. As the writer of Hebrews states "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

We must not limit this suffering to the agony He experienced on the cross. The same writer states: "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). And when we turn to Hebrews 4:15, we discover Christ "was in all points tempted as we are." But because Christ never sinned, His flesh was deprived of its selfish desires and therefore suffered (see 1 Peter 4:1). This, too, is an essential part of the good news of the gospel that must fill us with deep heartfelt appreciation, and make us willing, in turn, to suffer in the flesh that He may be glorified (see Romans 8:16-18).

Having produced perfect obedience by completely and totally overcoming the flesh for thirty-three years, Christ then took this condemned flesh and surrendered it to the wages of sin on the cross. Thus He "condemned sin in the flesh" both by His active and by His passive obedience and forever became the author and finisher of salvation to all who believe. In this knowledge of full and complete salvation rests the hope of fallen mankind. And this hope is twofold: "Justification of life" (Romans 5:18), as well as "sanctification of the Spirit" (2 Thessalonians 2:13; cf. 1 Peter 1:2). Both become effective by faith alone.



5. *Physically*. When Christ assumed our sinful humanity, not only did He identify Himself with our moral weaknesses, but He also took our physical infirmities. Thus He became subject to fatigue, aging, and death. But having redeemed and cleansed our sinful humanity at the cross, Jesus rose from the dead with a glorified body, physically as well as morally. At His ascension, He took this redeemed body to heaven where it is reserved for us at the second coming. This is the "blessed hope" of all born-again believers (see Romans 8:23-25; Philippians 3:20,21).

In the light of this full and wonderful good news of the everlasting gospel, the humanity of Christ is indeed "everything to us" (*Selected Messages*, 1:244). This perfect, complete message of salvation *in Christ*, which was once preached by the apostles, must again be restored to our doomed world before the end comes (see Matthew 24:14). "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him" (Hebrews 2:3).

When the earth will be lightened with the glory of Christ as the three angels' messages are accompanied with power from the fourth angel (see Revelation 18:1), then, and only then, will the advent movement accomplish its divine mission. Only then can Christ come to take us home. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

### **Key Points in Chapter Eighteen The Fall and Restoration of Man**

1. Adam's sin affected mankind spiritually, morally, and physically. Since Christ came to reverse the damage brought about by the fall of Adam, everything necessary for the restoration of fallen humanity in each of these three areas has already been prepared in the holy history of Christ. There is nothing the believer experiences or receives in this life or in the world to come that has not been accomplished in Christ.

2. *Spiritually*. As a result of the Fall, death was passed on to all men and women; all of us are born in this world spiritually dead (see Ephesians 2:1,5, GNB). At the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit mysteriously united Christ's divinity to our corporate, spiritually dead humanity in the womb of Mary. The moment our humanity was united to Christ's divinity, it became spiritually alive. And since His humanity is our corporate humanity, what is true of Christ also became true of us *in Him*.

a. We must never equate Christ's humanity with that of unbelievers who are still spiritually dead.

b. Believers have repented and have converted minds; unbelievers have minds still in harmony with the flesh. Believers have experienced the new birth; unbelievers are still spiritually dead.

3. *Morally*. As a result of the Fall, Adam's nature was changed from one controlled by selfless *agape* love to a nature controlled by love of self. This is the moral nature all of us are born with. Apart from God's grace, everything we do, no matter how good it may appear is motivated by self-love.

4. When Christ took on Himself our humanity, even though that humanity was made spiritually alive, its nature was still bent toward self. The incarnation did not cleanse humanity of its sinfulness. Jesus' mind was fully surrendered to God's will so that no propensity to sin rested there. But His flesh was still dominated by the principle that affects us all—the principle of self-love.

5. Having produced perfect obedience by completely overcoming the flesh, Christ then took this condemned flesh and surrendered it to the wages of sin on the cross. Thus He condemned sin in the flesh and became the author and finisher of salvation to all who believe.

6. *Physically*. As a result of the Fall, humanity became subject to sickness, fatigue, and aging, culminating in death. When Christ assumed our sinful humanity, He also took our physical infirmities. But having redeemed and cleansed our sinful humanity at the cross, Jesus rose from the dead with a glorified body, physically as well as morally. At His ascension, He took this redeemed body to heaven where it is reserved for us at the second coming.

## Chapter Nineteen

# The Three Angels' Messages

Let's conclude this most important study on the human nature of Christ by considering how it effects the truth of the three angels' messages— that proclamation of righteousness by faith which God raised up the Advent movement to give to the whole world before the end comes.

In 1888, when Waggoner and Jones equated the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 with justification by faith, many questioned this assumption and wrote to Ellen White for her reaction. Her response was: "Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, 'It is the third angel's message in verity' " {*The Review and Herald*, 1 April 1890}.

The three angels' messages are a unique Adventist doctrine. They are the restoration and proclamation of the everlasting gospel in all its fullness and beauty. They are the fulfillment of one of the major predictions Christ made in Matthew 24 concerning end-time events, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (verse 14, KJV).

When the everlasting gospel of the three angels' messages has been proclaimed "to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (Revelation 14:6), there will be no excuse for any to be lost. Every human being who has reached the age of accountability will have made his or her final and ultimate decision—either for or against Christ. Probation will then close, and the end will come.

But what does the everlasting gospel of the three angels' messages encompass and how does it differ from what the Christian church as a whole is proclaiming today? Here, in a nutshell, is what the 1888 message perceived this most precious truth to be.

The first angel has the everlasting gospel to proclaim to every corner of this inhabited world. It is the truth of the gospel fully restored and proclaimed as God's final message of love and hope to a world lost in sin. It is a message that warns the world that the hour of God's end-time judgment has come and that mankind's only hope in the judgment is in Christ's righteousness. God raised up the advent movement to proclaim this message as its "global mission."

The second angel joins the first in proclaiming that Babylon has fallen because she has apostatized from the everlasting gospel. The word *Babylon* comes from the root word "Babel." *Bab* meaning "gate," while *el* is the Semitic word for "God." Put together the word *Bab-el* signifies human beings trying to reach the gate of heaven, or God, through their own efforts. The tower of Babel is a good example of how humans try to reach heaven by their own effort.

This is how Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's great king, summed up the principle on which Babylon was based—the principle of self: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30). According to the prophet Daniel, the reason the literal kingdom of Babylon fell was because Belshazzar, the king following Nebuchadnezzar, deliberately refused to recognize the God of heaven or give Him glory (see Daniel 5:17-28).

The second angel of Revelation 14 does not add to the message of the everlasting gospel; he simply informs the world that spiritual Babylon has fallen because she has made all nations accept her perverted gospel. This gospel is polluted by man's self-righteousness, a righteousness that is "filthy rags" in God's eyes; it will not stand the scrutiny of the judgment because it is polluted with self (see Isaiah 64:6).

The third angel joins the first two angels in proclaiming the everlasting gospel, but adds a solemn warning that if anyone deliberately and ultimately rejects Christ's righteousness, signified by receiving the mark of the beast, he or she will have to suffer the verdict of God's judgment by joining the devil and his angels in the lake of fire (see Revelation 14:9-12; Matthew 25:41).

The mark of the beast becomes the outward sign of self-righteousness. In the last days it will be manifested by accepting Sunday as a counterfeit day of rest in contrast to the Sabbath which symbolizes God's rest, or finished work. To receive the mark of the beast is to rest in our own righteousness for salvation in contrast to resting in Christ's finished work for us. The seal of God is placed on those who are faithful to Him and who observe the seventh day Sabbath as His day of rest, as the outward sign of justification by faith in Christ's perfect righteousness. Hence the third angel's message is justification by faith alone in verity.

But how does this message differ from the message of justification by faith preached by the popular churches of today?

The 1888 message of righteousness by faith went beyond the popular view of this doctrine preached by the Christian churches of that time, as well as today. According to the popular view, righteousness by faith means God *declaring* righteous the sinner who believes in Christ. It limits justification to only a forensic or legal declaration imputed to the believer and which involves no subjective experience.

In contrast, the most precious message of 1888 claimed that the truth of righteousness by faith goes beyond a legal declaration; it does in reality bring about a change of heart which makes the believing sinner obedient to all the commandments of God. This message was part and parcel of the Day of Atonement "cleansing of the sanctuary" ministry of Christ, which began in 1844 and will continue until probation closes.

One reason the 1888 message has become controversial is this unique definition of righteousness by faith. Many of those who hold strongly to the evangelical definition of justification by faith condemn anyone who adds a subjective experience to that doctrine. The Adventist Church tried to solve this controversy at the Palmdale conference in 1976, when Adventist leaders and scholars met to discuss the issues. Unfortunately, this conference failed to solve the problem, and the controversy is still being debated today: Should righteousness by faith be limited only to justification, or should it include sanctification as well?

Scripture, especially the writings of the apostle Paul, often presents the truth of righteousness by faith in contrast to righteousness by works (see, for example, Acts 13:39; Romans 3:28; 9:30-33; Galatians 2:16). All through Scripture, righteousness by faith is presented as God's way of saving sinners in contrast to man's way of saving himself. It is referred to as the new or everlasting covenant, in contrast to the old covenant. Because our works have no merit and, therefore, contribute absolutely nothing toward the justification

by faith that entitles us to heaven, many insist that sanctification, important as it may be, must not be included in the doctrine of righteousness by faith.

Such an unfortunate conclusion is the result of an incomplete understanding of the gospel. It is based on a misunderstanding of what Christ saved us from in His earthly mission. By limiting the salvation Christ obtained on the cross for all mankind to only salvation from the guilt and punishment of sin, we limit the doctrine of righteousness by faith to only a forensic or legal declaration that does not include the experience of sanctification. All this is the fruit of an incorrect view of the human nature Christ assumed at the Incarnation in order to be the Saviour of the world.

Only in the light of the true and full gospel can we come to a correct understanding of the doctrine of righteousness by faith. After all, righteousness by faith simply means appropriating to oneself, or receiving by faith, what God has already accomplished for fallen humanity in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ came to save fallen humanity from *every* aspect of sin—its guilt and punishment, its power and slavery, as well as its nature and presence. Righteousness by faith must include all this.

According to the clear teaching of Scripture, the faith that justifies is also the faith that sanctifies, and it will also one day glorify the believer whose faith endures to the end. In his introduction to the book of Romans, this is how Paul describes receiving the righteousness of Christ: "In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'the righteous will live by faith' " (Romans 1:17 NIV). Please notice, "from first to last" it is only by faith that we experience the righteousness of Christ.

When the Bible declares "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17), the living that results from accepting the truth of righteousness by faith does not begin when we go to heaven. It begins the moment we step under the umbrella of justification by faith. That is why Paul always ended his letters to the churches with counsel on how Christians who are justified by faith should live. Righteousness by faith in practical reality means "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20, NIV). Since Christ is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8), the life that He lived some 2,000 years ago in our corporate sinful humanity, He will again live in the believer today through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. This, too, is righteousness by faith, the power of God unto salvation (see Romans 8:11-14).

God's remnant people will realize all this when two things take place. First, as a church, we need to correctly understand and accept a true understanding of the human nature Christ assumed and redeemed in His earthly mission. We need to understand that in the Incarnation, He assumed our sinful human nature dominated by the law of sin in order to fully redeem mankind from every aspect of the sin predicament. This is truly the everlasting gospel, the three angels' messages.

Second, God's remnant needs to fully understand the New Testament definition of faith. Too often, faith is defined today as simply "trusting in God." Faith does definitely include trust in God, but nowhere does the New Testament use the *for A faith* as a synonym for the word *trust*; nowhere does it limit faith to merely trusting in God. Faith involves far more.

According to the clear teaching of the New Testament, genuine faith involves three elements, all of which must be present in the believer if he or she is to experience the full truth of being justified by faith.

1. *A knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ.* Jesus told the Jews, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). By the word *truth*, Jesus was referring to Himself. He went on to say, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (verse 36, KJV). Incidentally, this statement was made in the context to our slavery to sin. "Whoever commits sin is a slave to sin" (verse 34). Paul brings out the same thought

when he declares, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17, NIV).

2. *Believing the truth as it is in Christ.* The fact that a person hears the message of the gospel is not enough to save. A knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ must be accompanied by a belief in what has been heard. To believe means a mental assent to the truth as it is in Christ.

Keep in mind that much of the truth of the gospel may contradict our human reason or even the scientific method. For example, when the disciples informed Thomas that Jesus had risen from the dead and that they had actually seen Him personally, doubting Thomas refused to believe this information until He could verify it himself. As a result, Jesus said to him when He confronted his unbelief: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29, NIV).

Faith is taking God at His word, even though it may disagree with our rational or human experience. When God informed Noah that the earth would be destroyed by a flood, Noah believed God even though it had never rained before. Similarly, when God told Abraham that his wife would have the promised son after she had passed the age of childbearing, he believed even though what God told him contradicted medical science and human experience (see Romans 4:16-18).

But genuine faith does not stop at a mental assent to truth; there is a third requirement that is vital to one's experience of salvation in Christ.

3. *Obedying the truth as it is in Christ.* It is here where most Christians come short of understanding the full meaning of New Testament faith. By limiting faith to only a mental assent to truth many have fallen into the trap of cheap grace. This is the result of an incorrect view of the doctrine of substitution, the idea that Christ saved us by bearing our sins only vicariously on the cross. Such a view, as we have already seen, leaves a big gulf between Christ and the human race He came to save. Besides, this vicarious view of substitution limits salvation to a salvation from only sin's guilt and punishment. In my opinion, a correct view of the humanity of Christ, is the only way to understand the true view of substitution and prevent the idea of cheap grace.

The apostle Peter put it like this: "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness— by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). Please note how Peter links Christ bearing our sins in His own body with our having died to sins. This is because the death of Christ was a corporate death; all men died in that one man, and faith involves understanding and obeying this truth (see 2 Corinthians 5:14).

Paul brings out the same thought when he states that we were delivered from the jurisdiction of the law as well as its condemnation, by our death in the body of Christ (see Romans 7:4). The purpose of this death is not only that we may be saved from the condemnation of the law, but also that we may bear fruit unto God and serve Him in newness of the Spirit (see verses 4, 6). All this becomes meaningful when we recognize that Christ's humanity was our corporate humanity that needed redeeming.

True Christianity is more than a mental assent to the gospel; it is a participation in Christ and Him crucified. Faith, therefore, involves obedience to the truth as it is in Christ. The Bible, and especially the apostle Paul, makes it crystal clear that faith is obeying the truth as it is in Christ. Read the following texts and note the positive as well as the negative statements regarding the obedience of faith: Romans 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; 16:26; Galatians 5:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 5:8, 9; 1 Peter 4:17.

What does it actually mean to obey the gospel, and is this obedience synonymous with obeying the law?

To the second part of this question, the answer is No! Obeying the gospel is not the same as obeying the law. However, obeying the gospel does lead to obeying the law. To put



it another way, the *fruit* of obeying the gospel is obeying the law. Obeying the gospel is what saves or justifies us from sin subjectively, but such salvation also includes salvation from the power of sin and slavery to sin, and this, in turn, produces the fruit of the Spirit—*agape* love, the byproduct of which is joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Such fruit is in perfect harmony with the law of God (see Galatians 5:22-24).

But what does it actually mean to obey the gospel?

The first thing we must realize is that obeying the gospel does not mean *doing* something. Rather, it means surrendering the will to an already accomplished truth—the truth as it is in Christ and Him crucified. Such obedience means we acknowledge and accept the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as our own life, death, and resurrection. The holy history of Christ, realized in His humanity, implicated the whole human race. He is the second Adam or mankind. So faith is saying Yes to what God did to us in Christ. A Christian, in other words, is one who is faithful to the truth as it is in Christ (see Ephesians 1:1).

Such obedience means that all aspects of our subjective salvation are based on an objective salvation already accomplished and realized in Christ and Him crucified. Righteousness by faith is therefore the righteousness of Christ made effective in the believer through the operation of the indwelling Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 3:17,18). And since Christ redeemed us from every aspect of sin, righteousness by faith encompasses salvation from every aspect of sin—not just its guilt and condemnation.

With this in mind, let's turn now to consider what righteousness by faith involves and includes in terms of the three aspects of salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification.

**1. Justification.** The moment one hears and obeys by faith the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, such a person immediately experiences what the Bible calls justification by faith (see Romans 3:28). He or she subjectively passes from condemnation to justification, or as Jesus put it, from death to life (see John 5:24).

As a result, the believer now experiences peace with God, since there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (see Romans 5:1; 8:1). This is because God considers the believer perfect in Christ—perfect in performance, perfect in justice, and even perfect in nature since in His humanity Christ accomplished all three for us. He did this by His birth, life, death, and resurrection. This is the good news of the gospel.

Such is the beginning of the Christian experience. The believer has been delivered from the fear of the second death (see Hebrews 2:14, 15); he or she can join Paul in declaring "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). This peace with God and the hope of eternal life is the foundation of Christian living. Unfortunately, many Adventists do not have this assurance of salvation. As a result, they are unable to experience genuine sanctification that is motivated by love, and not by fear of punishment or desire for reward. Even their confession of present sins is motivated by egocentric concerns which in itself is a sin in God's eyes because it is polluted with self.

It is crucial, then, that as a people we clearly understand what justification by faith is all about. For without this understanding, our sanctification experience will be full of frustrations and hopelessness. By limiting justification to only the forgiveness of past sins, most Adventists have been robbed of the joy and peace of salvation in Christ.

Forgiveness, wonderful as it may be, is still a negative thing and does not give us title to heaven. For the law demands perfect obedience, as well as a perfect nature (see 1 Corinthians 15:50). But this the believer *already* has in Christ; Jesus produced for us a perfect righteousness in our corporate sinful humanity and fully redeemed it in the resurrection. In Him we stand absolutely perfect and are fully qualified for heaven, both now and in the judgment (see Romans 10:4).

2. *Sanctification*. The moment the believer is justified by faith, God sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in that person. Not only does the Spirit convince our spirit that we are now the children of God and joint heirs with Christ (see Romans 8:16, 17), but He also bestows on us His most excellent gift, the gift of *agape* love (see 1 Corinthians 13). Empowered by the gift of agape love that "does not seek its own" (verse 5), the believer is able to follow Jesus' command to "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those that hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Such love is the most powerful witness to a selfish and sinful world. It proves that the gospel is not merely words, but the power of God unto salvation (see 1 Corinthians 4:20). Jesus Himself declared: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). It is this fact, above every other, that will lighten the earth with Christ's glory. It is this that will make it possible for God to declare "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

When the fourth angel of Revelation 18 joins the three angels of Revelation 14 to give power to their messages, this witness will become a reality, and the earth will be lightened with God's glory. Then the end can come, and believers can experience glorification, the final stage of their salvation experience in Christ.

All this is part and parcel of the glorious truth of Christ our righteousness and of the experience of righteousness by faith. This is the truth that will one day swallow up every other truth. We must keep in mind that while the everlasting gospel is what Christ has already accomplished for fallen humanity in His earthly mission, the object of this gospel is more than just saving sinners from the guilt and punishment of sin, wonderful as this may be. God's purpose in saving us in Christ is also to restore His image in us—the image that sin has robbed us of.

Sin not only deprived humanity of life, it also robbed mankind of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23). Consequently, the gospel not only gives us eternal life, but it also restores the glory of God in the believer (see 2 Corinthians 3:17,18). This restoration begins the moment we are justified by faith, becomes more and more a reality during the process of sanctification, and will be fully realized at the second coming of Christ when glorification takes place.

As we grow in grace and the knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ, as we see more and more the glory of God shining in the face of Christ's humanity, as we walk in the Spirit of Christ, we become "transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). This is what Paul meant when he declared to the Christians at Rome that they were justified by faith, had peace with God, and were now standing in, or under, grace (see Romans 5:1, 2). To Paul, standing in, or under, grace meant more than a ticket to heaven; it also meant that God's grace or power was now available to the justified believers so that they might arrive at the glory of God (see verse 3).

The primary meaning of grace in the New Testament is undeserved favor—God's loving disposition towards the sinful human race which led Him to send His Son to save us (see Ephesians 1:7; 2:8, 9). However, the word *grace* is also used to mean the power or strength of God, made available to the justified believer in order that he or she might live the Christian life and fulfill the divine purpose. The apostle Paul often used the *-word grace* in this sense when applying it to his own life and mission (see 1 Corinthians 15:9, 10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; Ephesians 3:1-12).

In the process of sanctification, no change takes place to our flesh or sinful nature; it remains innately sinful until the second advent. Sanctification brings about a change only to our characters as they reflect more and more the loving disposition and behavior Christ revealed in His humanity and especially at the cross (Romans 5:8).

It is the experience of glorification toward which we Christians look forward when it comes to the redemption of our vile bodies (see Philippians 3:20, 21). This is the blessed hope, when we will be totally delivered from the sin problem. Until then, our own sinful natures will be our worst enemies in our battle against sin. But thank God, in our struggles with the principle of self that dwells in our members there is no condemnation, because we are in Christ Jesus (see Romans 8:1). In Him we stand perfect.

3. *Glorification.* This is the ultimate reality of salvation obtained for sinful humanity in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the blessed hope of justification by faith to which all believers longingly look forward. While justification gives us Christians our title to heaven, and sanctification makes us fit for heaven, glorification is when heaven will become a living reality.

Remember that during the process of sanctification no change takes place to our sinful nature. It continues to remain dominated by the law of sin, the principle of self. Because of this, the flesh becomes our greatest hindrance to living the Christian life. Paul told the Christians at Rome, that believers will be groaning within themselves, anxiously and patiently waiting for the redemption of their bodies (see Romans 8: 22, 23).

Justification by faith gives us peace with God, since Christ becomes "the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). Sanctification by faith manifests or witnesses to the saving power of the gospel (see 2 Corinthians 3:17,18). But glorification eradicates sin from our natures and ushers in eternal life as a tangible reality (see Philippians 3:20, 21).

But all three of these experiences are the result of God's redeeming grace obtained for fallen mankind in Christ when He assumed our sinful humanity in the incarnation and redeemed it by His life, death, and resurrection. No wonder Ellen White could write "the humanity of Christ is everything to us" (*Selected Messages*, 1:244).

This is the full and complete gospel I believe God has raised up the advent movement to restore, proclaim, and witness to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people before probation can close and this sin-cursed world of ours can be brought to an end. A true understanding of the humanity of our Saviour, in the light of this full and complete gospel, will therefore play a vital part in finishing this God-given commission. This is why I feel it is so important that God's people stop throwing mud at each other and be willing to sit down with their Bibles and let the Holy Spirit guide them into all the truth on this important subject. May that day come soon. Amen.

### **Key Points in Chapter Nineteen The Three Angels' Messages**

1. The gospel—justification by faith—is the essence of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14, as Ellen White confirmed (*Review and Herald*, 1 April 1890).

2. The first angel has the everlasting gospel to proclaim to the whole world. The second angel announces that Babylon has fallen because she has apostatized from the everlasting gospel. And the third angel adds a solemn warning that anyone who deliberately and ultimately rejects Christ's righteousness will suffer the verdict of God's judgment.

3. The 1888 message of righteousness by faith went beyond the popular view of the gospel being preached at that time—and today. According to the popular view, righteousness by faith means God's *declaring* righteous the sinner who believes in Christ. The 1888 message taught that righteousness by faith goes beyond a legal declaration; it does in reality bring about a change of heart which makes the believing sinner obedient to all the commandments of God.

4. According to Scripture, the faith that justifies is also the faith that sanctifies, and it will also one day glorify the believer whose faith endures to the end. Righteousness by faith, then, includes justification, sanctification, and glorification.

- a. *Justification*. The moment one hears and obeys the gospel by faith, he or she immediately experiences justification by faith. He or she subjectively passes from condemnation to justification—from death to life.
  - b. *Sanctification*. The moment a believer is justified by faith, God sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in that person. Empowered by the gift of love, the believer is able to live a holy life and grow in the grace and knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ.
  - c. *Glorification*. This is the ultimate reality of salvation—the blessed hope to which all believers longingly look forward.
5. Genuine faith involves more than simply trusting in God. It involves:
- a. A knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.
  - b. Believing the truth as it is in Jesus.
  - c. Obeying the truth as it is in Jesus.

## *Epilogue*

This book is a plea for understanding of a truth that the devil has distorted in order to prevent that most precious message that God intended to lighten the world with His glory over a hundred years ago. All spiritual decline starts with a false or perverted understanding of the gospel. It is my sincere prayer that the reader, upon completing this book, will first and foremost be willing to surrender to the conviction of the Holy Spirit no matter what the cost may be.

Today, many are going into Christless graves because we as a people have failed to manifest the matchless charms of our Lord and Saviour in word and action. I have written this book, not to add to the controversy that is now raging in regard to what kind of human nature Christ assumed at the incarnation, nor to present arguments to win a debate. I have written to men and women who sincerely desire to know the truth as it is in Christ so that their Christian experience may be one of peace, joy, hope, and victory, thus glorifying their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Further, I have written this book for those who are seeking answers, facts, and explanations, concerning the most important subject that should occupy the mind of every Seventh-day Adventist. What is the everlasting gospel God raised up the advent movement to proclaim to humanity in its global mission? Are we just another denomination that God has added to the many denominations already existing? Or are we a prophetic people with a prophetic mission?

The facts concerning the post-Fall view of the human nature of Christ are before you. Whatever position you decide to take, I pray that your deepest desire will be to believe and uphold only what is true—that you will be willing to stand up for truth even if it means losing friends or being considered as belonging to a "lunatic fringe." Truth, in church history, has never been popular or embraced by the majority. But it has been cherished by men and women who have been willing to put their lives on the line though the heavens fall.

Finally, as I said at the beginning of this book, my desire is for unity in the faith on this important subject that was part and parcel of that most precious message God brought to this church in 1888.<sup>1</sup> I pray that as you have read this book, you have done so with a willingness to listen, to think, and to consider honestly. As *Adventist Review* editor, William G. Johnsson, correctly expressed it in his second article on the topic of the human nature of Christ: "We see, then, that the stakes in this debate are high. This isn't some abstract theological discussion—it's about our salvation; it's about the very gospel God calls us to proclaim" (*Adventist Review*, 22 July 1993).