

Complete in Christ

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"To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

"And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'" (Matt. 3:17).

Introduction

The Bible tells us to expect the gift of prophecy in the last days (see Joel 2:28-31). It says that God's people at the end of time will "keep the commandments of God" and will "have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17). It defines "the testimony of Jesus" as "the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). The Spirit of prophecy is the Holy Spirit in His work of bringing the prophetic gift to God's people, just as He is called "the Spirit of truth" when He acts to "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). The messages that God's prophets give are a result of the working of the Spirit of prophecy, as He brings Christ's message, or testimony, to God's people.

Is this an addition to the Bible, or perhaps even a replacement for it? No. Though God has promised to send prophets in the last days, the Bible is already complete. It gives God's essential message to all of mankind. But in His mercy God is able to give prophetic messages to His people at the end of time to help them understand and apply His Word to the situations they face. Ellen G. White put it this way: "I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the '*last days*'; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth" (*Early Writings*, p. 78).

Today we will explore one topic as an illustration of this function of the prophetic writings. It is an area where God's conscientious people sometimes need comfort, and where they may be in danger of erring from Bible truth. It has to do with how we may be right with God, and how we may know whether we are right with God. We are imperfect human beings. Does God accept us? What is His attitude toward us? How may we walk with Him? The Bible gives us answers to these questions, but sometimes we miss them or don't understand them. The writings of God's servant Ellen G. White help us to see more clearly the Bible's teaching on this matter. They bring us much-needed comfort on this challenging point. So today I invite you to go on a journey with me in Scripture and in the writings of Ellen G. White, to see how we sinful human beings may be "Complete in Christ." We begin by noting our predicament:

I. None Is Righteous

No one, no matter how righteous he may become, can be righteous enough to be saved into God's kingdom. The Bible says about human beings, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). Even the spiritual giants of the Bible, such as Moses, Daniel, Paul, or John, could never be saved based on their abundant righteousness. They could not then—and we cannot now—be righteous enough to be saved. Only Christ is righteous enough; and we are righteous only in *His* righteousness. This is what I confidently describe as a theology of hope; any other type of theology must always lead to despair. Perfect righteousness is required, and total perfection is needed. The best we can offer in this regard, even with God's help, is not good enough. Therefore our great hope is in *His* righteousness as we submit ourselves to Christ and walk with Him: The Bible tells us clearly that God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God's goodness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4), and in mercy He grants us repentance (Acts 5:31, 11:18). He assures us that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We can say with confidence then that we are righteous in His righteousness, worthy in His worthiness, and perfect in His perfection. But this brings us to the next part of our study: can God ever really be pleased with *us*?

II. He Is Well Pleased

Ellen G. White was balanced and seasoned in this crucial area of righteousness and perfection. She certainly taught a theology of hope. This is evident in her tremendously encouraging comments about the Father's being well pleased with His Son at His baptism, and how this relates to each one of us. Matthew 3:17 says that when Jesus was baptized, "Suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" In the past, whenever I read these reassuring words, I felt somewhat excluded. After all, this wonderful declaration was addressed to the perfect Jesus, not to the poor imperfect me—or was it? Oh, how much I wanted to please My heavenly Father! But it seemed that the harder I tried to please Him, the harder it was for me to make such an experience real in my life. I wondered, what would it take to hear His reassuring words said about me? Dare I even imagine such a glorious prospect? Who am I even to think that God would ever be pleased with me as He is well pleased with Jesus?

Then I found this reassuring statement from the book *The Desire of Ages*, p. 113, which clearly tells me that my ardent desire for divine affirmation can become a reality. Notice how it applies Scripture to our specific situation. Here is the statement reflecting Ellen White's theology of hope:

"And the word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' *embraces humanity*. God spoke to Jesus as *our representative*. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. 'He hath made us *accepted in the Beloved*.' Ephesians 1:6. The glory that rested upon Christ is a pledge of the love of God for us. . . . By sin, earth was cut off from heaven, and alienated from its communion; but Jesus has connected it again with the sphere of glory. His love has encircled man, and reached the highest heaven. The light which fell from the open portals upon the head of our Saviour will fall upon us as we pray

for help to resist temptation. *The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.*"

So we have seen, first, that none of us is righteous enough to be saved, but that Jesus has provided the righteousness we need, and second, that in Christ God can say of us as He said of Jesus, "This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased." This brings us to the third part of our study, the struggle we have in receiving, believing, and experiencing this relationship with God. Fundamentally, it is a—

III. Struggle Over Trust and Submission

This wonderful promise of hearing God express His delighted approval of us is real, yet—like all of God's promises—it is conditional. To please the Father as His children, we must trust Jesus, submit ourselves to Him, and walk with Him daily. And the challenge is to persist in this vital relationship. Satan is constantly working to undermine this trust relationship between our heavenly Father and us as His beloved children. That is what he tried to do with Jesus in the wilderness after His baptism. Notice that at the end of the story of Jesus' baptism in Luke 3, Jesus heard His Father's voice reaffirming His trust relationship with Him, but then as chapter 4 begins, He heard Satan's voice, casting doubt on this Father-Son relationship. "If you are the Son of God, . . ." (v. 3). Satan applies the same strategy to us. The arch-deceiver well knows that if he succeeds in shaking our confidence and assurance in this trust relationship, he will have won. And he tries again and again, waiting for just the opportune time.

Satan is so deceptively subtle that even while we are in our heavenly Father's loving embrace, he comes knocking at the door of our heart, insinuating doubt and planting discouragement and distrust. He wages this war over our hearts and minds, because for "thousands of years Satan has been experimenting upon the properties of the human mind, and he has learned to know it well" (*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 352, 353). He plays subtle psychological games with our minds, especially now that he knows his time is short. His weapons of choice are worry, anxiety, regret, and discouragement—all to dislodge us from Christ. Ellen White cautions us that "when brought into trial, we are not to fret and worry. We should not rebel, or worry ourselves out of the hand of Christ" (*Signs of the Times*, Feb. 5, 1902). It is so amazing but so true in real life that we may move out of the arms of Christ into the waiting arms of Satan, simply by fretting and worrying.

Then what is the solution to this problem? Citing Hebrews 12:2, Ellen White wrote: "Look unto Jesus, who is the Author and Finisher of your faith. Turn your attention from subjects which make you gloomy and sad, for you become an agent in the hands of the enemy to multiply gloom and darkness. . . . Although severe afflictions may come upon you, it is your business to look up, and to see light in Jesus" (*This Day With God*, p. 233). Beyond that, remember that Satan plays the role of the arch-accuser or prosecutor in the court of the great controversy. But the Bible tells us that "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Christ is our able Advocate and skilled Defense, and He never loses a case if we continue to cling to Him and rely totally on Him. And the price for our defense has already been paid—His precious blood shed on Calvary (see verse 2)! We play the role of defendants in this court of destiny. And just as in an earthly court defendants do not listen or talk to their

prosecutors, so we must not listen or talk to Satan our prosecutor, except to say, "Satan, talk to my Lawyer! Christ's precious blood is the price of my defense."

When we look to Jesus in this way, trusting Him, submitting to Him, walking with Him, we will find to our joy that—

IV. Satan Trembles and Flees

Even when we feel that we are weak, if we rely on Christ and remain submitted to Him, our weakness becomes strength in His strength. John wrote about our family relationship with our heavenly Father and its impact on our victory over Satan. "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). We are certainly no match for Satan, and if we try to resist him by ourselves, he will always defeat us. But in this spiritual warfare we are not to resist him by ourselves, but with Christ. The apostle James gives us three progressive stages in gaining victory over Satan. Two of these involve things we are called upon to do: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Following this counsel assures us of defeating Satan.

First, we **submit** ourselves to God, and He will cover us with His righteousness and shield us in His armor. United with Him, we present a formidable front. Isaiah 59:19 says, "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him." It is a mighty standard, a powerful banner, that He raises in our behalf against the enemy. It represents His might, not ours.

Second, together with Christ (never alone), we **resist** Satan. He calls on us like He called on King Jehoshaphat: "Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's. . . . Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you" (2 Chronicles 20:15, 17). And because Christ is far more able than we are, we can be confident of victory. All He wants is our availability to His ability. Ellen White wrote: "He who is imbued with the Spirit of Christ abides in Christ. The blow that is aimed at him falls upon the Saviour, who surrounds him with His presence" (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 71).

Third, the result is that Satan will **flee** from us. It is often the case that God's people flee before Satan; therefore it is about time that he starts fleeing, for a change. For when he sees Jesus in us and all around us, he resigns himself to the fact that in fighting us he has to fight Jesus.

Contemplate these encouraging words from *The Desire of Ages*, p. 131: "We cannot save ourselves from the tempter's power; . . . and when we try to stand in our own strength, we shall become a prey to his devices; but 'the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.' Proverbs 18:10. Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name."

Do you sense that you are spiritually weak, that you are even "the weakest soul"? Then place your trust in the formidable name of Jesus. Let Him enfold you now like an impenetrable shield, and let Him protect you like a strong tower. So we come to the last part of this process—

V. Doing Our Best

Christ does His utmost to make us complete in Him; but what is our part in this process? Our part is to cooperate with Him, making ourselves totally available to Him. The important role that we play, by His grace and in His strength, is to do our part, what we can—to do our best. This is not a matter of "supplemental righteousness," in which we provide some righteousness and God adds what we lack. No, it is Jesus' righteousness from start to finish. "Without Me," He says, "you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The Bible says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12, 13). We can only work *out* what He works *in*, whether in willing or doing. He is at work in us to produce any good that we do, and it is His righteousness that makes up for our lack when we fall short. In His mercy and grace He reaches us where we are, changing our lives for the better and compensating for our shortcomings.

Don't we want to do our best for such a gracious Lord? Isn't that the heart's response to grace? Jesus knows those desires of our hearts. How grateful we ought to be that the Lord looks at the heart and fully understands our deepest motives! Other people may misunderstand us and impugn our motives, but we can rest assured that our all-loving and all-knowing God understands us completely. And He reaches us in mercy to cover us with His Son's righteousness, accepting us as complete in His Beloved. "When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man's best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit" (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 382).

So, what does it mean to be clothed with Christ's robe of righteousness? Ellen White gives us a very clear answer in this regard. "Christ looks at the spirit, and when He sees us carrying our burden with faith, His perfect holiness atones for our shortcomings. When we do our best, *He becomes our righteousness*" (Ibid., p. 368, emphasis added). Christ has done His best, His utmost, for us. Why not do our best for Him?

The apostle Paul assured the Colossians about such glorious completeness in Christ: "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:9, 10). This assurance applies to us today when we submit our lives wholeheartedly to Him and walk with Him as Enoch walked with Him. This is the only way we will walk with Him in heaven—by walking with Him in this world, so that when He comes again we may continue this walk in glory. But throughout our earthly walk, if we are walking with our Savior, we will never feel self-sufficient or that we have reached our goal. We will always sense our incompleteness and our desperate need for His completeness. Sanctification is not a goal as such, but it is a way of life. Now listen attentively, for "a voice speaks to him from the oracles of God's Word. In amazement he hears the message, 'Ye are complete in him' (Colossians 2:10). Now all is at rest in his soul. No longer must he strive to find some worthiness in himself, some meritorious deed by which to gain the favor of God" (*Reflecting Christ*, p. 76).

Therefore, our worthiness is only His worthiness, our righteousness is only His righteousness. This is not hard work; rather, it is heart work. It is not overwork; rather, it is the overflowing of God's redeeming love and empowering righteousness that propel us to go forward and upward with Jesus. What do we think of when we hear about the need to be clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness? How does this experience work in real life? This is it in a nutshell, according to Ellen White. Notice how balanced this succinct statement is, and notice the cooperative effort of the human with the divine. It is the submission of our heart, our will, our mind, our thoughts, and our whole life. "When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. *This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness*" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312, emphasis added).

Will you submit yourself to Christ, your will to His will, uniting your mind with His? You will be "accepted in the Beloved," God will look upon you as His beloved child, in whom He is well pleased, your life will be transformed, and through His grace and power, you will be complete in Christ! Will you say Yes to Him today, and each day, so that this wonderful experience of walking with Jesus may be yours?