



Basic Doctrines: Grace

iFOLLOW

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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Basic Doctrines: Grace

This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Learning Objectives

1. Realize that Christ's sacrifice ensures us eternal life if we accept Him
2. Become secure in your future with Him as your personal Savior
3. Respond to God's grace by following Him

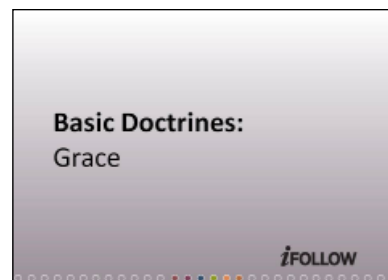
Content Outline

1. Understanding Grace
2. Accepting Grace
3. Changed by Grace

Background Material for the Presenter

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of returns from death. The debate went on for some time until Christian writer C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, 'Oh, that's easy. It's grace.'" (Yancy, p. 45)

In our last session we were confronted with the dreadful phenomenon of sin, the "secret power of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:7, NIV). In the final section we saw that through divine intervention a solution has been provided. What that intervention was, and what it accomplished for us, will be the focus of this unit's study. What are some of the images God uses to teach us the plan of salvation? What



is atonement? How central is the concept of substitution to our understanding of the Cross? These are some of the questions we will explore.

God Provides Salvation

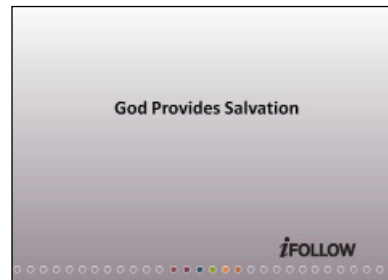
The story of how Abraham's loyalty was tested is well known. God asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Unaware of what God had told his father to do, and thinking that they were simply going to offer a sacrifice somewhere, Isaac asked why they had not taken an animal with them. Abraham then replied with the prophetic words that find their echo throughout the pages of the Old, as well as the New Testament: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering." (Gen. 22:8, NIV) Abraham had no idea of it at the time, but his words had prophetic significance. God has indeed, "provided Himself" (as the KJV has it) the lamb for the burnt offering.

Many people believe that the doctrine of Christ as atonement for the incurable sin of humanity is solely a New Testament teaching. In fact, you often hear about Christianity as a "new" or "young" religion, meaning that various earth and ancestor religions were around longer. The fact is, if it's true that God planned this from before Creation, then there's certainly nothing new about it. And if that's not true, Christianity is not worth following! As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:19, if we only have hope in Christ for this life, and not for eternity, "we are of all men most miserable."

The truth is, there are numerous promises throughout the Old Testament of a coming Redeemer who would take our sins on Himself and rescue us. It began as early as Genesis 3:15, just outside the gate of the lost Garden. God promised His erring children deliverance through a man. In fact, Eve thought her first baby might be the One. She probably thought that every time, at least for awhile. There are messianic prophecies throughout the Psalms and the writings of both major and minor prophets. Probably the most graphic description is found in Isaiah 53.

Some people who have never believed the doctrine of Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world have had their eyes opened quite suddenly on reading this chapter in its entirety. No matter whether you believe this was written before the Babylonian captivity or after, it was certainly written long before Christ's life on earth, and yet, even those who have only been exposed to general ideas about His life easily recognize His sufferings and death as portrayed there. It is hard to know what else that passage might mean, if you don't want to believe it's about Jesus!

Jesus Christ is the center of the Old Testament. Indeed, the whole purpose of the earthly sanctuary service was to point to the coming of the Messiah (see Hebrews 8, 9). Everything prior to His entrance into the world was a mere prelude to the Cross. God waited

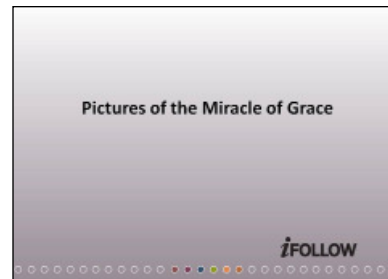


until the right moment. Then, when “the time had fully come” (Gal. 4:4, NIV), Christ came to live among us.

“Through every age, through every hour, the love of God had been exercised toward the fallen race. Notwithstanding the perversity of men, the signals of mercy had been continually exhibited. And when the fullness of the time had come, the Deity was glorified by pouring upon the world a flood of healing grace that was never to be obstructed or withdrawn till the plan of salvation should be fulfilled.” (White, p. 37)

Pictures of the Miracle of Grace

How do you explain to a three-year-old child what electricity is? How do you explain to those deep in the African jungles, who have never traveled more than 25 miles from where they live, what traffic lights are for and how an elevator works? How can a physicist ever hope to explain Einstein’s relativity theory to a person whose education was limited to elementary school?



God faced a communication gap that went far beyond these examples of human communication barriers. The divine love demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ cannot be captured fully in human words. Yet, God wanted us to have an adequate idea of what is involved in His plan of salvation. God inspired the authors of the Scriptures to use a number of different word-pictures, each of which gives us further insight into the mystery of His grace. None of these images should be used in isolation from the other perspectives. Taken together, however, they will leave us with a sense of wonder and immense gratitude.

Probably one of the most common symbols, particularly suited to an agricultural and herding society, is the “Lamb of God.” This is hinted at in the story of Abraham, mentioned above, laid out unarguably in Isaiah 53, and confirmed in John 1:29 and other gospel portrayals of John the Baptizer saying, “There is the Lamb of God, who has come to take away the sins of the world.”

To the primarily Jewish minds this was spoken to, it was a powerful image. The sanctuary service had dramatically demonstrated for centuries that someone as innocent as a lamb would atone for the sin people knew very well they could never rid themselves of, no matter how they tried.

In fact, the truth of the atonement can be further strengthened just by a cursory look at the number of religions who co-opt it! In nearly every religion in the world, the “gods,” (usually very angry with humanity for one reason or another) can be “appeased” through some kind of substitute sacrifice. The devil knew the plan. He was well able to corrupt it by suggesting that the gods could be made happy by suffering, either your

own, or better yet, your innocent child's. From such twisted ideas come horrors like burning a baby in the outstretched arms of Molech, or cutting out the hearts of living victims on a pyramid in prehistoric Mexico. The truth was twisted nearly out of recognition, but it's buried in there.

Further symbolism used in the Bible includes the concept of "redemption," or "buying back." This custom is shown in action in the book of Ruth, in which Boaz acts as "kinsman-redeemer." In Acts 20:28 and 1 Corinthians 6:20, Jesus is said to have "bought with His blood" His church, or more specifically, "you." This, too, has been twisted and corrupted, so that God is seen as angry and longing for or needing revenge on somebody, so Jesus throws Himself in the way and takes God's anger on Himself instead, thus keeping you and me out of this angry God's way.

Jesus Himself confronted this concept every time He could. "The Father loves you Himself," He assured His disciples in John 16:26, 27. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned and were punished with his blindness. He will be an opportunity for God's glory to be displayed." (John 9:3)

When we combine everything that is said in the Bible about the atonement, we arrive at as full a picture as we finite human beings can absorb. Nevertheless, the image of a ransom, of a high price paid for us, is a powerful one. "Christ redeemed us from sin, that is, He bought us back from sin. ... What the metaphor intends is that (a) the means of our salvation is costly and (b) we have passed from one state to another—from the state of slavery to the state of nearness to God. A redemption means the passing over of ownership at a cost." (Vick 1968, p. 33)

So What Really Happened at Calvary?

God was angry, yes. More furious than we can ever imagine, in fact. Not at Jesus. Not at us. At the deadly hell of sin that was killing His children! He and His Son (and the Holy Spirit) had carefully planned this, the only possible way out, and they went through it, through more pain than we can imagine either, for us.

Romans 6:23 declares that the wages of sin is death, and Hebrews 9:22 tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. The idea that blood carried special significance, that it carried the Life, with a capital L (figuratively speaking), had been introduced early in the history of the world. It is first mentioned immediately after the Flood, when God first gives permission to eat meat. Genesis 9:4-6 has this to say: "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by human beings shall their blood be shed; for in the



image of God has God made humankind.” (Today’s NIV) The King James Version makes it most clear, making two separate phrases of “the blood thereof,” which “is the life thereof.” Throughout the dietary laws in the five books of Moses, most notably in Leviticus, this rule remains strong and constant: blood is life, and eating it is wrong. No doubt there are health reasons for this prohibition, but it is the first hint, as well, that blood is life and the giving of blood and life for another will change the life of the other. Let’s bear this in mind as we continue to explore this concept, and see if it changes some of our reservations.

There is a lot of discussion among theologians about the doctrine of atonement. Two main concepts are promoted. Some opt for an objective view of the atonement while others defend a subjective view. What does this mean? The first school of thought emphasizes that something actually occurred at a historical point in time on a hill just outside of Jerusalem, a concrete, historical event that provided the basis for our salvation. Other theologians underline the fact that our response to the demonstration of Jesus’ love and self-sacrifice on the cross is the crucial point: We are changed when we contemplate a love so great! Both perspectives are true and, understood together, complement each other.

The idea that Jesus Christ died in our place, so that we will not suffer eternal death but become partakers of the life that He offers, is usually referred to as the concept of substitution. To some this is an abhorrent idea, possibly in part because of the twisted versions of it (Christian and non-Christian) with which many of us have grown up. Legalistic language is often used, or divine wrath against sin is turned to divine wrath against us.

The amazing, astonishing, blinding truth is that God has dealt with the sin problem in the only way He could. Sin had literally ripped a hole in the universe of love. Sinners would, left to themselves, fall through that hole, too. God could not abandon those beloved children of His, even though they were the ones who helped to rip the hole, and every day ripped it bigger. Only God had Life internal and eternal that He could put down and take up again. Only God could close the hole. It cost Him His previous existence, in ways we likely have only faint inklings about.

Jesus volunteered to take our place! That’s what happened at the cross. This actual event, that of His substitution in our stead, became the basis for our redemption.

Then, as a result of what Christ has done for us, as a response to His substitution in our place, we are drawn to Him, we respond to Him, we change our attitude toward Him and other human beings, as well. This is the complementary, subjective side to the plan of salvation. And on a personal level, this is the part that counts. When the historical Jesus, the Christ, the unique Son of God, chose to shed His lifeblood for us, to give up His life so that we might live even though we don’t deserve it, He made it possible on a very literal and internal level for us to have a new life, previously unimaginable and impossible. We may have, if you will, His blood now. We are flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bones. Who could turn that down?

Yet people do. The fact is, Jesus accomplished redemption for every human being. But it

will do no one any good who does not choose for him- or herself to accept it and live that new life. He won't force it on anyone. It is impossible. It would no longer be His life of love.

Theologians propose various theories of the atonement. But when everything is said and done, there is no one theory or combination of theories that will do justice to the marvel of God's grace (see 1 Cor. 1:20–25). It is good to talk together about the passages of Scripture that reveal different aspects of Jesus' sacrifice. But what Jesus did for us should be not only a topic of debate but prayerfully contemplated and experienced. Though there's much we can't understand, we have been given enough so that we can marvel at what God has done for us in Christ.

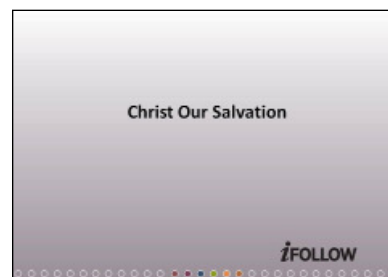
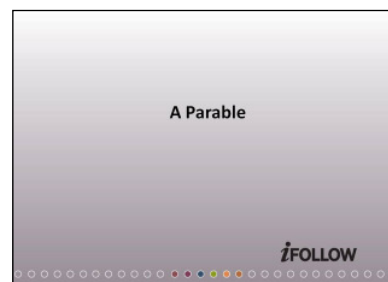
A Parable

A man falls over the side of a boat at night. When his head shoots above the water, the boat is gone. The water and the sky are a disorienting black. He can see nothing. He calls out, but no one answers. The man is a good swimmer, but after several hours of treading water, his arms are too tired to keep paddling, and his body is numb with cold.

Exhausted, he shuts his eyes, floating on his back. A sudden wave pulls him under. He claws his way back up to the surface, taking a desperate breath, before the water plunges him under again. This time his head does not reappear. But a lifeboat reaches him before he drowns. The crew pulls his unconscious body from the water. Another boat appears and takes the crew away, but they leave the man alone, half-conscious, in the lifeboat on the open sea with a bottle of water and enough food for three days.

Most rescue stories do not end this way. How crazy (not to mention cruel!) is it to rescue someone from death only to abandon that person to certain starvation? Had God merely stopped at not eliminating the human race when they sinned, then the outcome for us would have been no different than the all-too-certain fate of the man in the lifeboat: he was temporarily saved from drowning, but he was not given enough food or water to save his life.

Typically, during a successful rescue, the hapless victim is pulled or carried to shore and given immediate medical attention until restored. God did nothing less for us. Instead of leaving us stranded, He bodily sent Jesus to answer our distress call. Jesus came not only to save us from drowning in our sins but to row us all the way to the shores of eternal life.



Christ Our Salvation

It's easy for Christians to get sidetracked. For some, the focus of their faith is either on the Bible, or on the church, or on the traditions or doctrines of their church. While all these have their role, they can be very problematic if they turn us away from Jesus, who alone is the Source of our salvation.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often refer to “the truth” as the focus of our faith. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as we do not reduce our concept of truth to a list of doctrines to which we intellectually ascribe. If our faith does not find its center in the truth as we find it in Jesus, it is not true faith. We believe in a Person who has revealed our God to us, who has come to redeem us, who presently is our heavenly Mediator, and who will return to take us home. Nothing else matters as much as this.

Ephesians 2:4–10 is an extraordinarily rich passage. It underlines several times that we are saved by grace. This grace is described as “incomparable riches” (vs. 6, NIV), which issue from God’s “great love for us” (vs. 4, NIV). This grace is gratis, free. It cannot be earned. Our works cannot bring us eternal life. They cannot mend that rip in the universe of love. If they did, we would have reason to boast about our own goodness, and Jesus would never have had to come. It is God’s grace that will bring visible changes in our daily lives and that will enable us to do “good” works (vs. 10). But even these good deeds are, essentially, God’s work in us.

Let’s take another look at the opening story, of the discussion of world religions and what is unique about Christianity. If one accepts the story given in the Bible for the origin of evil, in the mind of a powerful being known as Lucifer who became the devil, then those similarities in world religions become quite understandable. In an effort to gain or keep the minds of those he would very much like to make his subjects, the devil must create counterfeit religions, and what better way to do that than to twist the truths around and make fake ones? Of course he has different versions of gods appearing in human form. Of course he has accounts of returns from death. Of course one must propitiate his false gods by sacrifices of various kinds. That way, he can manipulate a situation in which even liberal Christian theologians can say that the story of Jesus’ resurrection is just a remake of a much older story. But he can’t possibly fake grace. He can say it isn’t so and you have to work hard in a desperate attempt to appease the angry god. He can say it isn’t necessary, God loves everybody and everything’s going to be fine. But he can’t have any real grace. It’s completely foreign to him.

In the end, theologians can develop as many theories about the atonement as they please. The ones which still contain at least some portion of the truth may be compared with pictures taken from different sides of the Himalayas. They all show the mountains but do not provide a complete picture. The miracle of grace cannot be reduced to a formula to which we give intellectual assent. It is the ground of our faith. Christ died for us so that we can have eternal life. Without Him, we are lost. With Him as our Savior, our future is secure.

Handouts in this Package

1. Participant Notes
2. Dynamics of Salvation



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Additional Resources

The book *Seventh-day Adventists* will almost automatically refer to when asked about the atoning work of Christ is Ellen G. White's *The Desire of Ages*. Chapters 78 and 79 (pp. 741–768) are particularly relevant in the context of this unit. Note the statement on page 751: “As Jesus, crucified with the thieves, was placed ‘in the midst,’ so His cross was placed in the midst of a world lying in sin. And the words of pardon spoken to the penitent thief kindled a light that will shine to the earth’s remotest bounds.”

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Discussion Questions

1. Is it hard to comprehend the idea of free grace? Which of the illustrations of grace in the Bible help you to understand it? How do you best relate to grace?
2. How does the idea of grace make you feel? Do you feel guilty accepting such an undeserved gift? Do you feel a security in the promise of eternal life? Are you thankful for God's love? Explain.
3. Has grace changed you? How?
4. When we behold Jesus and what He has done for us, what changes does it bring to our lives?
5. How does grace help us to rise above sin in our lives? Give specific examples.
7. In what areas does God's grace need to be more manifested in the church? How can we allow grace to work its transforming power in us as individuals?
8. What could be holding you back from a deeper experience with God?

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Discussion
Questions

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Group Activities

Activity 1

Purpose: To consider more deeply the pervasive grace of God.

Preparation: If possible, bring a few before-and-after digital images to share with the group to illustrate the transforming power of digital imagery. It would be especially good if you have a participant who is knowledgeable about digital techniques and could demonstrate. In that case, a computer would be necessary. Or possibly a digital camera with which someone could take pictures of participants and then “doctor” them.

Assignment: Depending on what is available, either discuss the pictures you have brought, or make a whole activity of taking pictures and changing them.

Debrief: List some of the ways digitization can “perfect” a person’s appearance. Do these change the way the person really is? Do they change the way others see them, for instance making celebrities seem more perfect and giving celebrity-watchers impossible standards to compare themselves to? Compare and contrast the changes made in this way to the changes God brings to us. Are these changes just appearances, or are they real? How deep do they go? How can you know for sure?

Time: This will vary greatly depending on whether you are only sharing pictures (perhaps 20 minutes) or actually doing some digitizing (up to 60 minutes).

Activity 2

Purpose: To consider more deeply the pervasive grace of God.

Preparation: Make or have someone make two batches of bread dough, one with yeast and one without. Don’t make unleavened bread, but regular bread that should raise, except some of it is missing an important ingredient. Refrigerate them until you are ready to use them. You will need tables, small bowls and towels for each person, and the wherewithal to clean up.

Assignment: Part 1: (To be done near the beginning of the session.) Divide up the balls of dough and let each person who wishes have a small ball to knead. Don’t reveal that some dough has yeast and some doesn’t. Have them place their kneaded dough in a bowl and cover it with a towel, leaving it to raise during the rest of the session.

Part 2: (To be done near the end of the session.) Have people check their dough.

Some will have raised and some will not. Now is the time to let them know some of the dough did not contain yeast and to discuss the results.

Debrief: In the Bible, yeast is often used as a metaphor for sin, but in this case, we are using yeast as a metaphor for grace. Some questions: Where is the yeast now? Which part of the dough is affected by it? What happened to the dough that didn't have any? (You could even bake the dough if you wish, and see what happens to bread that is baked with no yeast.) How is the yeast like grace in your life?

Time: Part one will only take about five minutes. Part Two needs at least 15 minutes for sharing.

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Group
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Handout 1

Key Concept: Grace

Participant Notes

Scripture Focus: Exodus 25:8; Isaiah 53; Romans 5:8, 18; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18; Ephesians 2:4-10; Titus 2:11-14

Concept: In Ephesians 2:5 what Paul says is clear, “it is by grace you have been saved.” This text alone could convince us that salvation comes from Jesus alone. But there are other texts to explore.

Connecting with Scripture

A. Find a copy of the hymn “Amazing Grace.” There were, originally, many more stanzas; you can find them online. Study as many stanzas as you like. Which stanza or stanzas appeal most to you? Make a list of things this song tells you about God’s grace.

B. This is an old hymn that many grew up singing. Do you have memories of this song? What are they? What did it mean to you?

Sharing and the Receiving Scripture

A. It’s often hard for us to view God’s grace as a gift. But that’s exactly what it is. It can’t be bought or earned. Can the study of Scripture convince us that God really is that good? Or does it take more than that? If so, what else does it take?

B. Read Genesis 22:6-8. This story of assurance occurs very early in the Bible. What does it tell us about God and grace?

1. God remembered the promise made to Adam and Eve
2. Jesus’ sacrifice was the focus of the Old Testament
3. God used a father and son example to prepare us to understand God the Father/Jesus plan
4. This story has always troubled me; a real father who came close to sacrificing his son
5. Can you imagine the anguish Abraham must have gone through in following this plan?
6. Other....

C. Read Exodus 25:8. What does this text have to do with God’s grace and our future home in Heaven?

HANDOUT

Basic Doctrines: Grace

1. Not sure why God asked for a sanctuary instead of just meeting them out in the open desert
2. God desired a sanctuary in order to dwell with them, because God loved them
3. God wanted an earthly sanctuary to show people what the Heavenly one would look like later
4. In reality, we are too sinful to even associate with God, so the sanctuary covered God up
5. God wants to dwell with us even when we've done wrong
6. Other....

D. Read Ephesians 2:4-9. Why is it sometimes so hard to accept the fact that we've been saved by grace, and that grace is a gift from Jesus?

1. We grew up in a home where we never felt loved, accepted and forgiven
2. We live in a culture where you have to earn everything; there's nothing that's really free
3. We can't be vulnerable; we can't get over the fact that we cannot work for our salvation too
4. We don't freely give grace to others, so we can't fathom receiving it, not even from God
5. People have made promises to us before that they didn't keep; will God's promises be kept?
6. Other....

E. Read Titus 2:11-14. How does the knowledge and acceptance of God's grace change our lives?

1. It helps us say "no" to temptation because we realize the price Jesus paid
2. We want a self-controlled life because we admire Jesus' example of a sinless life
3. More than the present victory to look forward to, we anticipate Jesus' second coming
4. Because we're saved Jesus hopes we respond with an eagerness to do what is good
5. When we consider how unworthy we are, we see it is truly by grace that we are saved
6. Other....

Applying the Message of Scripture

Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. If the opportunity arises, share your solution with someone else.

Option 1: Write a few verses of your own "Amazing Grace" song, based on your own

experience. It doesn't need to sound professional. Share it as your own personal testimony of God's grace to you.

Option 2: Read Isaiah 53:4-6. Close your eyes and imagine the physical and emotional pain Jesus went through to save you. Write out your gratitude in a "thank you" note and share it.

Option 3: Is there someone you know who isn't coming to church because they don't feel "good enough?" Share some of these texts with that person. Help her to understand that Jesus died in order to forgive and save her. Show him the true meaning of amazing grace by first accepting him as a friend, and then pointing him to God's love.

Can you think of anyone who has wronged you? Ask God to help you show His grace by offering that person forgiveness. Ask God to help you forgive this person in your thoughts and in your actions.

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The dynamics of salvation

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

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

Yet the good news is for all. Although its depths tax the sharpest intellect, it is simple enough for even a child to understand. God has made it plain that every member of the human family

might hear and wonder, and wondering be won by the story of divine love. He would have every one of us come to realize that in Jesus Christ we are accepted, redeemed, and adopted into God's family on earth and in heaven. This assurance turns despair into hope, and desolation to joy; for the transforming power of God's love makes us new men and women in Christ.

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

We also see a cosmic dimension in



the story of our salvation. The divine plan reconciles all things in heaven and earth through the cross of Christ (Col. 1:20). The agelong conflict between good and evil originated in heaven in the rebellion of Lucifer against God. It

* The Revised Standard Version is used throughout this document unless otherwise noted.

Background on the statement "The dynamics of salvation"

In "An Open Letter to the Church" (*ADVENTIST REVIEW*, May 24, 1979), the president of the General Conference, Neal C. Wilson, announced the intention of the denomination to convene a representative group "to survey and study difficult theological issues" and share the results with the church. This group, the Righteousness by Faith Consultation, consisting of 145 members, was appointed and met in Washington, D.C., October 3-4, 1979.

The consultation appointed an editorial committee of 24 members to prepare for publication the materials growing out of the meeting. The editorial committee met February 4-7, 1980, and the paper "The Dynamics of Salvation" was prepared for eventual publication in the *ADVENTIST REVIEW*. However, it was first distributed to the full membership of the consultation for critique and then revised in harmony with the responses. The result is the statement "The Dynamics of Salvation" printed in this issue of the *ADVENTIST REVIEW*. While this article is the product of the Righteousness by Faith Consultation, it also reflects discussions at previous meetings devoted to a study of righteousness by faith.

"The Dynamics of Salvation" is a study document, not a creedal statement. It attempts to set forth what Seventh-day Adventists believe about salvation through Jesus Christ. It seeks to combine theological accuracy with clarity and practicality, so that the reader may experience the benefits of salvation and not merely grasp its theory.

Certain aspects of this inexhaustible theme, such as the nature of Christ, perfection, and original sin, are not dealt with in detail in this paper. They may be taken up later as subjects of the church's ongoing discussions. "The Dynamics of Salvation" should be considered as a whole, in order that the balance of the various parts may be discerned.

Responses from readers will be welcome, but cannot be acknowledged or replied to personally. Such responses will be useful in evaluation of the document and in possible further refinement of it. Send responses to: Biblical Research Institute, 6840 Eastern Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. 20012.

W. R. LESHNER
Director
Biblical Research Institute

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spread to this earth, as our first parents yielded to the tempter; thus sin became part of us, and our world became the arena in which Christ battles with Satan for our allegiance.

The law of God, which is an expression of His character, plays a central role in this controversy. Lucifer denied the justice and goodness of the law, rejected its authority, and claimed that it could not be obeyed; he and his subjects continue to oppose it. In saving men and women from rebellion and sin, therefore, God remains true to His own character and His law; His gracious activity which saves us at the same time vindicates His character and law, and reconciles the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 68, 69).

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

Section 1. Humanity's desperate need

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

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

Nor can we change our standing before God. No sacrifice, no gift, no act of devotion—no work of any sort—can

restore the broken relationship. Our first parents were created in God's image, but that image became defaced (Gen. 1:27; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 294); after their fall they fled from the presence of God. "Sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595), and we are still running from Him.

2. *We are alienated from our true selves*. We are torn by doubts and conflicts; we are frightened by the depths of sin which we see in others, and we feel within ourselves the surge of the same evil. We are burdened by guilt, for we



fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We proclaim our freedom, but are subject to the yoke of bondage (Gal. 5:1) and are slaves of corruption (2 Peter 2:19).

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

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

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

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

Section 2. The divine initiative

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

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

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

This saving activity of God is expressed by the word *righteousness*. The Bible shows God's righteousness by what He does: it is not merely a state; rather, it manifests itself uniquely in saving activity. And in that activity Israel finds hope. So the psalmist exclaims, "Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness" (Ps. 5:8) and "In thy righteousness deliver me" (chaps. 31:1; 71:2), while God announces, "'I bring near My righteousness, it is not far off; and My salvation will not delay'" (Isa. 46:13; cf. 51:5; 56:1; etc., N.A.S.B.). So we can say that God's righteousness brings salvation; therefore God is called "the Lord our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6, K.J.V.).

The saving righteousness of God is not in conflict with His eternal law. At Sinai the law was given in written form as part of God's saving act, to define the terms of the covenant relationship between God and His earthly children, but not as a means of salvation. The law warns that God "will not justify the wicked" (Ex. 23:7, K.J.V.); yet before Him "no man living is righteous" (Ps. 143:2, N.A.S.B.). And since God as "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25) cannot act unjustly, every person must expect a sentence of condemnation on the basis of his performance. Realizing this, the psalmist pleads, "Do not enter into judgment with Thy servant" (Ps. 143:2, N.A.S.B.). For the law, given by God's initiative, tells men and women what to do, but not how to gain salvation; only God can create a clean

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heart (chap. 51:10), and the prophet announces that God's Chosen One "will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. . . . He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:11, 12, N.A.S.B.).

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

Over and over the life and teachings of Jesus reveal God's character (chap. 1:18). Instead of shrinking in terror or running in rebellion from Him, we are to call Him "our Father" (Matt. 6:9). All that we see of goodness, care, and loving provision in human fatherhood is at best a faint reflection of the heavenly Father. He is the divine Provider, who cares even for the birds and lilies (verses 25-34); He is the divine Lover, who counts everyone on earth as His child, even though His fatherhood is not acknowledged (chap. 5:43-48); He is the divine Giver, who delights to pour His blessings upon His children (chap. 7:7-12).

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

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

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

And this mission exemplifies libera-

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

Jesus' mission of liberation led inevitably to the cross. He foresaw it, shrank from it, but accepted it in conformity with the divine will. His whole



life had pointed to it; as important as it was for Him to live among us and for us, it was only by His death that God could save us (Rom. 3:21-26; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 382).

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

Jesus died for every person at every place and in every time. This was the event toward which the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed. It reconciled the world to God (2 Cor. 5:19); it delivered humanity from the power of Satan; it opened the door to a life in union with God. As Christians we are therefore not ashamed of the cross; it is the guarantee

of our forgiveness, the ground of our assurance, and the pledge of our eternal life in God. "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 161, 162).

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

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

Section 3. The human response to grace

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

The human response to grace centers in faith, and the essence of faith is trust, taking God at His word (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:1). In the Bible, a great example of faith is Abraham, of whom Paul quotes from the Old Testament that he "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3; cf. Gen. 15:6). Here, in the context of a covenant made by God, Abraham's faith is not simply an intellectual assent but a total response of trust in the promising word of God. It is a readiness to submit himself entirely to God and to accept His word. In this act of faith, Abraham is in a right relationship with God, and obedience is the result (Heb. 11:8). Thus he obeys God and is circumcised (Gen. 17:22-27). Faith in the Biblical sense is never merely a mental act but always a relationship of "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6, N.A.S.B.; cf. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 6, p. 1111; *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 398).

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

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

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

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

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

Section 4. The new status in Christ

The new status in Christ is too rich to be encompassed by any one term. Among the many expressions used in

the Bible to describe this reality, the principal ones are justification, reconciliation, forgiveness, adoption, and sanctification. Each of these terms, while commonly employed by Christians, has a distinctive Biblical usage and meaning.

1. *Justification*. This word comes from the setting of a law court. We are regarded as criminals, arraigned at the bar of God's justice. As the law is read out to us, we know that we are guilty. Even if we could plead innocent in terms of external compliance, the law probes our motives and desires, and shatters our defenses: "The law is spir-



itual; but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). But now there is a stir in the court. Our Advocate rises to speak in our behalf. Instead of agreeing to our death, He presents His own death; while acknowledging our disobedience, He points to His own obedience. Instead of claiming our righteousness, He covers us with His own righteousness (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 311). Thus He stands for us as our Representative (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 357; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 925) and Substitute (*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 256, 258). Because of Him, the verdict is pronounced, "Acquitted!" We go forth free from the accusations of the law that previously had condemned us. This is the meaning of justification by grace through faith (Rom. 3:21-26).

2. *Reconciliation*. The picture here is drawn from human relations. Friends have fallen out; bitter feelings of estrangement have taken hold. One party, however, has already acted to restore the relationship; He has gone to the full extent, and beyond human expectation, thought, or activity, to make matters right. God has once again taken the initiative; He has "reconciled us to Himself through Christ" (2 Cor. 5:18, N.A.S.B.). So far as He is concerned, all cause of ill will has been removed. But the second party remains alienated. He harbors feelings of guilt for the activities which led to the disruption of

relationships; he feeds upon his hostilities. One day, however, the hopelessness of the situation and the magnanimity of the first party touch his heart. He turns around and is reconciled (2 Cor. 5:20; cf. Rom. 5:10; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 115, 116).

3. *Forgiveness*. This word is related to the world of financial transactions. According to Jesus' parable of the two debtors, we are confronted with a debt that we can never repay. It is so immense that we can never hope to cope with it (Matt. 18:25-35). This debt represents our sin. In the midst of this hopeless condition, however, God freely cancels the debt through Jesus Christ. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). All of our accounts are fully paid up; we enjoy the status of those who have no more debts of sin, and who therefore forgive their debtors (Matt. 18:32, 33).

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

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

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long to the prince of evil. They are stamped with God's own identifying stamp; they are His own property, which He holds dear amid the turmoil of this world (Phil. 2:15; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 49, 50).

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

These terms also suggest responsibility. Because we are sons and daughters of the King of heaven, we are to live in a manner that befits our royal status. Having been acquitted in court because Jesus has taken our place, we will show our gratitude by the way we live. Since we have become aware of the divine measures, even Christ's death on the cross, which led to our reconciliation, we can no longer take lightly a knowledge of God. With the crushing burden of our guilt rolled away, we will beware of coming under the bondage of debt again. Now that we are no longer alone and estranged, we will rejoice in our new family and seek to honor its name. Because God has called us apart from the world, we cannot maintain its life style and pursue its goals and ambitions (2 Cor. 6:16-18).

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

As long as we stand in the faith relationship with God, we retain our new status as His sons and daughters. Though at times we are overcome by temptation, we are not cast off, because we still have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1), who is faithful and just to forgive

us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (chap. 1:9). We remain members of the divine family. It is not the occasional good deed or misdeed but the general trend of the life that indicates the direction in which we are moving—whether we have become rebels at heart again or are still standing in the relationship of faith (*Steps to Christ*, pp. 57, 58; *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 249).

The new status involves the new relationship. One cannot be divorced from the other. Having received God's gift of salvation, we now live by faith. We need to reach out to God day by day in



loving trust, turning from pride in ourselves and relying entirely upon Him. The relationship will grow and strengthen; if not, it will wither and die. God would have the former, but He will not prevent the latter. He will not violate the element of human freedom in faith. If we allow the new relationship to die, we can no longer claim the benefits of the new status of salvation (Heb. 6:4-8; John 15:4-8; *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 366).

Section 5. The new life in Christ

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

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

2. *Restoration.* Under the power of the Spirit, the nearly obliterated image

of God in us is in the process of continual restoration.

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

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

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

3. *Growth.* The new life is one of growth in Christ. The divine image in us is progressively restored as we, by beholding our Lord, are transformed by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). This process is commonly termed *sanctification*, although the Bible refers to it in various ways. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1, K.J.V.). We thus may "grow up into him in all things" (Eph. 4:15, K.J.V.; cf. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 233; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 350; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, pp. 1146, 1147).

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

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

The path of obedience leads us into

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

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

The life of obedience is properly measured by the degree to which we have completely entrusted ourselves to Christ. We have laid aside trust in ourselves. The more Christlike we become, the less we will trust ourselves and the more we will realize how far short of the divine pattern we still are. But by faith we are clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ, which has met all the requirements of the law. "Our dependence is not in what man can do; it is in what God can do for man through Christ. When we surrender ourselves wholly to God, and fully believe, the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. The conscience can be freed from condemnation. Through faith in His blood, all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus. Thank God that we are not dealing with impossibilities. We may claim sanctification."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 32.

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

White Comments, vol. 6, p. 1071).

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

5. *Assurance.* The new life involves assurance (Heb. 10:19-22). Our salvation was secured by the most decisive



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

6. *Praise.* So we rejoice in the Lord (Ps. 20:5; Phil. 4:4). In every experience of life, in the darkness as well as the light, He is with us (Heb. 13:5). His yoke is easy; He gives us rest (Matt. 11:28-30). "Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith," we abound in thanksgiving (Col. 2:7). In everything He is working for our good; "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:28, 37). The

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

Section 6. The consummation

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

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

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

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

Thus the dynamics of salvation forever center in the righteousness of God and His Son. God's righteousness encompasses the sweep of our needs: it leads us from guilt to justification, from sinfulness to sanctification, from alienation to restoration and on to glorification. It brings about the decisive change from slavery to sin to new life in Christ, from bondage in fear to joy in the Spirit. Salvation is from the Lord; the Lord is our righteousness! (Jonah 2:9; Jer. 23:6). □