

Study for the Month of October, 2011

The True Meaning of Conversion

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“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Cor. 5: 17, K.J.V.

Jesus declared this eternal truth of the gospel plan to Nicodemus that all who hope for eternal salvation must understand and fulfill by the provisions of the same gospel: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.” John 3: 5-7, N.K.J.V. Apostle Paul re-emphasizes the very same salvatory truth: “This I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” 1 Cor. 15:50.

I just got an email forward from a good friend with this message entitled “Happy Fall” in time for Halloween which says: “A non-Christian acquaintance once asked a Christian co-worker, ‘What is it like to be a Christian?’ The co-worker replied, ‘It is like being a pumpkin. God picks you off the pumpkin patch, brings you in, and washes all the dirt off you. Next, He cuts off the top and scoops out all the yucky stuff inside; He removes the seeds of doubt, greed, hate, and pride. Then, H carves out a new smiling face and puts His light inside you to shine for all the world to see.’”

This sounds good but none of this work can be accomplished on any fallen human “pumpkin” unless he understands and participates in the work of restoring the lost image of God in him. He must surrender himself, submit to the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Word and “be born again of water and the Spirit. What this comprehends is clearly presented in the following:

“The old nature, born of blood and the will of the flesh, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The *old ways*, the hereditary tendencies, the *former habits*, must be given up; for grace is not inherited. The new birth consists in having *new motives, new tastes, and new tendencies*. Those who are begotten into a new life by the Holy Spirit, have become partakers of the divine nature [2 Pet. 1: 4], and in all their habits and practices they will give evidence of their relationship to Christ. When men who claim to be Christians retain all their natural defects of character and disposition, in what does their position differ from that of the worldling [wordly-minded]? They do not appreciate the truth as a sanctifier [John 17:17], a refiner. *They have not been born again.*

A genuine conversion changes hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong. The religion of God is a firm fabric, composed of innumerable threads, and woven together with tact and skill. Only the wisdom that comes from God can make this fabric complete. There are a great many kinds of cloth which at first have a fine appearance, but they cannot endure the test. They wash out. The colors are not fast. Under the heat of summer they fade away and are lost. The cloth cannot endure rough handling.

So it is with the religion of many. When the warp and woof [threads] of character will not stand the test of trial, the material of which it is composed is worthless. The efforts to patch the old with a new piece do not better the condition of things; for the old, flimsy material breaks away from the new, leaving the rent [tear] much larger than before. *Patching will not do.* The only way is to discard the old garment altogether, and procure one *entirely new*.

Christ's plan is the only safe one. He declares, 'Behold, I make all things new.' 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.' The patchwork religion is not of the least value with God. *He requires the whole heart.*

Jesus gave His life for us, and shall we not give Him our best affections, our holiest aspirations, our fullest service?" - E. G. White, *Maranatha* (devotional) , p. 237.

What is the Sign of a New Heart?

"A new heart also will I give you, and new spirit will I put within you. And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Eze. 36:26.

"When Jesus speaks of the new heart, He means the mind, the life, the whole being. To have a change of heart is to withdraw the affections from the world, and fasten them upon Christ [1 John 2:15, 16]. To have a new heart is to have a new mind, new purposes, new motives. What is the sign of a new heart? A changed life. There is a daily, hourly, dying to selfishness and pride." - E. G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 100.

He Will Cause us to Walk in His Statutes

"And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them." Eze. 36: 27.

"Walk," says Arnold Valentin Wallenkampf in his book *Salvation Comes from the Lord*, p. 104, "is the favorite Biblical metaphor to describe the whole course of man's life, including his conduct toward God and his treatment of his fellow men," quoting from Raymond E. Stamm, in *the Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 10. p. 506.

"To the heart that has become purified, all is changed. *Transformation of character is the testimony to the world of an indwelling Christ.* The Spirit of God produces a new life in the soul, bringing the thoughts and desires into obedience to the will of Christ; and the inward man is renewed in the image of God. Weak and erring men and women show to the world that the redeeming power of grace can cause the faulty character to develop into symmetry an abundant fruitfulness [see fruits of the Spirit, Gal. 5: 22-25].

The heart that receives the Word of God is not as a pool that evaporates, not like the broken cistern that loses its treasure. [Rather[, it is like the mountain stream, fed by unfailing springs, whose cool, sparkling waters leap from rock to rock, refreshing the weary, the thirsty, the heavy-laden. It is like a river constantly flowing, and as it advances, becoming deeper and wider, until its life-giving waters are spread over all earth. The stream that goes singing on its way, leaves behind its gift of verdure and fruitfulness When the earth lies bare and brown under the summer's scorching heat, a line of verdure marks the river's course.

So it is with the true child of God. The religion of Christ reveals itself as a vitalizing, pervading principle, a living, heavenly influence of truth and love, these principles will

flow forth again like streams in the desert, causing fruitfulness to the appear where now are barrenness and dearth.”- Patriarchs & Prophets, pp. 233-4/ With God at Dawn, p. 70.

CONVERSION, SANCTIFICATION, HOLINESS

I. Conversion

The Hebrew word for conversion means “to revert; return,” “repentance,” and is derived from another word which means “to turn back,” “to turn quite around or reverse.” The Greek word means “a change of mind.” Both indicate a radical change by which a man turns from his past sinful life, and starts in the opposite direction for the kingdom of God. It is a mind and heart work—both by the action of the Holy Spirit in the Word implanted in the mind, and willingly accepted in the heart. The heart is the seat of all affections. It is also from the heart from which “proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Matt. 15: 19.

Mind means several things in the Bible:

- In Phil. 2: 5 “Let this *mind* be in you”. . . is the Greek *phroneo* which means “to exercise the mind, i.e., entertain or have a sentiment or opinion; by implication, to be mentally disposed (more or less earnestly in a certain direction); to interest oneself (with concern or obedience); set the affection on; be careful; be like; be one of; be of the same; regard; savor; think.”
- In 2 Tim. 1: 7 “God has not given is the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a *sound mind*” are both the Greek *sophronismos*, meaning “discipline, self-control.”
- In Titus 1: 15 “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their *mind and conscience* is defiled.”. . . is the Greek *nous* which means, “The intellect; i.e., the mind (divine or human, in thought, feelings, or will); by implication, meaning, understanding.”
- In Heb. 8:10 (the New Covenant) “I will put My laws into their *mind*. . .” is the Greek *dianoia*, meaning, “Deep thought, the faculty (mind or disposition); by implication, its exercise: imagination, understanding.”
- Rev. 17: 13 “These shall have *one mind* and shall give their power and strength to the beast.” Is the Greek *gnome*, meaning, “cognition, i.e., (subj) opinion, or (object) resolve, counsel, consent, etc.; advice plus agreement, judgment, purpose, will.”

We should be careful, therefore, in defining conversion as merely a change of mind. Yes, it is a change of mind, but it is a change that affects the *whole life*, and is not merely a change of opinion or a change from one kind of theology beliefs for another; nor is it merely a transfer of church membership from one religion to another.

Apostle Paul describes it this way: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 2: 5. This means that the Christian *no longer thinks or talks or acts* as he did before his conversion. His motives have changed. Upon conversion he faces another totally opposite direction; his tastes, habits, choices, and source of pleasures

are changed. He is, as Paul says, “is a new creature in Christ Jesus.” Old things are passed away; all things have become new,” i.e., in the way he now sees, perceives, and views things.

True conversion means a complete turnabout. In its Biblical totality it includes **seven steps**, namely:

- Conviction of sin
- Sorrow for sin
- Confession
- An honest effort at restitution where there has been any misappropriation, and a decided effort at reconciliation where there has been alienation and strife.
- Acceptance by faith of the glorious promise and its provisions for forgiveness or justification.
- A public acknowledgement of our new standing with God, including the Biblical ordinance of baptism and union with the true believers in church fellowship
- A solemn decision and covenant by the grace of God to be done with sin forever and to follow Christ’s counsel to “Go and sin no more lest a worst thing lest a worst thing come upon you.” John 5: 14; cf. 8: 11.

To many, however, due to erroneous teachings of this topic, conversion is merely a highly emotional experience of “accepting Christ” but does not effect a thorough reformation of the life style thereafter. It is important therefore to carefully consider the seven steps given, all of which are necessary to complete conversion, although the steps do not need to come in the exact order in which they are here presented.

I. Conviction of sin

It is the work of the Holy Spirit alone, working through the Word, to convict the sinner of sin. John 16: 7-13; cf. 14: 26, 27. The human agent’s work is merely to give the message. His effectiveness, however, depends on his consecration, conviction, and commitment to glorifying God and saving souls. In order to abstain, and eventually gain the victory over sin, it is vital to know what sin is, according to God’s own definition.

This does not mean that a person must know sin by *experience* in order to recognize it. But it does mean that that it is necessary to *discern* what it is and its appearance, so as to be able to *avoid* it. Many sins and sinful things appear to be nothing but “innocent fun” and deceive many—unless he has an *unerring standard* by which to recognize sin, as God calls it. This standard is found in the Bible, and is exemplified in Christ’s life and teachings. *It is summed up in the Ten Commandments*. The apostle says, “Sin is the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3: 4. However, it must be constantly remembered that the law is spiritual, and that spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned, and that the carnal mind is at enmity against God’s law. 1 Cor. 2: 10-16; Rom. 8: 5-8. Therefore, much more is included and comprehended in the law than appears by a first casual reading of it. The law not only deals with the outward acts but reaches down to the deepest, most secret motives and intents of the heart. Heb. 4: 12, 13; cf. 8:10; 12:16.

II. Sorrow for sin

See Matthew chapters 7-7. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus magnified on the practical applications of the Ten Commandments In chapter 5:7 He says, “Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.

“The mourning here brought to view is true *sorrow for sin*. Jesus says, ‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.’ John 12: 32. And as one is drawn to behold Jesus uplifted on the cross, he discerns the *sinfulness of humanity*. He sees that it is *sin* which scourged and crucified the Lord of glory. He sees that, while he has been loved with unspeakable tenderness, his life has been a continual scene of ingratitude and rebellion. He has forsaken his best Friend, and abused heaven’s most precious gift. He has crucified to himself the Son of God afresh [Heb.6:4-6], and pierced anew the bleeding and stricken heart. He is separated from God by a gulf that is broad and black and deep, and he mourns in brokenness of heart. *Such mourning will be comforted*. God reveals to us our guilt that we may flee to Christ, and through Him be set free from the bondage of sin, and rejoice in the liberty of the sons of God. In true contrition we may come to the foot of the cross and there leave our burdens.” Mount of Blessing, pp. 22, 23.

This simply means personal sorrow for the *sins* we have committed and are committing from the bottom of our hearts. We can be sorry for the sin that is *in* the world, and the sins *of* the world and of sins of *others*--- without feeling sorry for our *own* sins! The conviction must come home to each person’s soul with the same force as it did to David when the prophet Nathan pointed to him and said, “You are the man.” (2 Sam. 12: 7). Such mourning for his sins as David experienced will be expressed in the same manner of contrition and plea for mercy as is recorded in Psalms 51. 1-19.

III. Confession of sin

A sorrow for sin that does not lead to confession is not real sorrow. It is merely *fear* for its painful, humiliating, and terrible consequences rather than for *sin* or the transgression of God’s law and His expressed divine will itself. Confession should be made to God first, for it is *His law* of righteousness that has been transgressed; it is He that has been crucified afresh. 1 John 1:9; Heb. 6:6. Secret sins are to be confessed to God alone, *never* to any human being, particularly in a confessional box to a fellow-creature and mortal or any of his counterparts in other religions. Open sins are to be confessed openly to the one we have committed trespasses to. The nature of the confession measures the depth and the sincerity of the confession. If it is of the Holy Spirit, and comes from an honest, penitent heart softened by God’s grace, it will be heartfelt, done willingly and freely. Failing in any of these, it fails to measure up to God’s standard of confession. It is not a confession that is based on a “godly sort” but that of the “worldly sort” which needs to be repented of.

“The Pharisee and the publican represent two great classes into which those who come to *worship* God are divided. The first two representatives are found in the first two children that were born into the world. Cain thought himself righteous, and he came to God with a *thank-offering* only. *He made no confession of sin*, and acknowledged no need of mercy. But Abel came with the blood that pointed to the Lamb of God. He came as a sinner, confessing himself lost; his only hope was the unmerited love of God. The Lord had respect for his offering, but to Cain and his offering He had not respect. The sense of need, the recognition of our poverty and sin, is the very first condition of acceptance with God. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ Matt. 5: 3.” – Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 152.

4. Faith in God

Without faith it is impossible to please Him. Heb. 11:6. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." verse 1. This is not so much a definition of faith as it is a declaration of what faith can do. It is a strange thing indeed that after God has forgiven us of the sins we have confessed and repented of, that we are still often tempted to *doubt* God! Satan would like us to believe that our sins are so great and dark that God has not forgiven and cannot forgive or justify us fully through Christ's merits. But God requires that we believe in Him and His power in heaven and earth to forgive (Matt. 28:18). However dark or red the stain of our sins are, God is able to forgive and cleanse. (Isa. 1:18; 1 John 1: 9). This God asks us to believe. This is called "the faith which works by love" (Gal. 5:6).

5. Restitution and Reconciliation

This may be the most difficult part of true conversion for most. It means having the Holy Spirit bring to remembrance some things we would rather forget. To confess to God the theft of anything is a soul-searching experience. To return these stolen items to the person concerned is a very humiliating experience. We may even lose our jobs or friends. But we would have secured our salvation. To confess to God the lies we told and the gossip we circulated regarding our family members, in-laws, brethren, friends, and the politically-motivated mudslinging of one candidate against the others in any given election year, is unpleasant; to go to the person we wronged and confess our faults is even more difficult. Yet the Word of God specifies it. But though it may be humiliating, it is also a most blessed experience because it humbles the soul before man and exalts the character of God before man and angels. Such was the experience and testimony of the conversion of Zacchaeus. Luke 19: 1-10.

6. Public Acknowledgement

To hide the fact of our conversion, to attempt to keep it a secret, is not part of God's plan. God expects public acknowledgement of our changed attitude towards Him. To the man freed from devil possession Jesus said, "Go home to your friends and tell them how great the things the Lord has done for you." Mark 5: 19. There has to be a personal testimony by the soul redeemed from sin and Satan's clutches. This is part of the plan of salvation. Public acknowledgement includes *public baptism* by immersion and union with the believers. Acts 2: 38, 41, 47.

7. Go and Sin No More

First, this involves faith that God "who has begun the good work in us will finish it," and "cut it short in righteousness." Phil. 1:6; Rom. 9:28. To the truly converted sinner, God says, as to the woman caught in adultery, "Go, and sin no more." John 8: 11. To the life-long paralytic He healed at the Pool of Bethesda, Jesus said, "Behold, you have been made whole, *sin no more lest a worse thing come on you.*" John 5: 14. There is no use of having our sins forgiven unless we accept and appropriate the divine *provision* for complete *future* triumph and victory over every sin that "doth easily beset us." Heb. 12:1. God, in Christ, has provided this victory for every soul that asks for it. By living faith he must claim the power of God not only to *grant* forgiveness but to *impart* holiness of life. Justification is imputed righteousness; sanctification is imparted righteousness. The former is our "title" to heaven, the latter our "fitness" for heaven.

II. SANCTIFICATION & HOLINESS

Sanctification is the culminating experience in the life of the Christian here on earth. The gospel, which is “the power of God to salvation” (Rom. 1: 16) and results in “receiving grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations” (v. 5). God is never exhausted in forgiving the *sins of the past* (not futures, as in Indulgence) that have been repented of and confessed (Rom. 3:25). This alone is amazing, but God has an even greater power in reserve, an “*infinite fund of obedience accruing from His obedience*” perfected in His human nature (Heb. 5: 8, 9) that can actually “keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).

Christ sanctified Himself for us (John 17: 18, 19), meaning,

“He took upon Himself our nature, and became a faultless Pattern for men. He made no mistake, that we also might become victors, and enter into His kingdom as overcomers. He prayed that might be sanctified through the truth [error never sanctifies]. What is truth? He declared, ‘Thy Word is truth. His disciples were to sanctified by *obeying* the truth. . . . We are to be brought into sacred nearness with the world’s Redeemer. *We are to be one with Christ as He is one with the Father.* What a wonderful change the people of God when they come into unity with the Son of God! We are to have our tastes, inclinations, ambitions, and passions all subdued, and brought into and harmony with the mind and spirit of Christ. . . .The grace of Christ is to work wonderful transformation in the life and character of its receiver; and if we are truly the disciples of Christ, the world will see that divine power has done something for us; for while we are *in* the world, we shall not be *of* it.” - My Life Today, p. 252

“He will beautify the meek with salvation.” Ps. 149:4. “The most precious fruit of sanctification is meekness.. . . True meekness softens and subdues the heart and gives the mind a fitness for the engrafted word. It brings the thoughts into the obedience to Jesus Christ. It opens the heart to the Word of God, as Lydia’s heart was. It places us with Mary, as learners at the feet of Jesus. The language of the meek is never that of boasting. . . . Meekness is the inward adorning which God estimates as of great price. He who garnished the heavens with the great orbs of light has, by the same Spirit, promised that He will beautify the meek with salvation.” –*Ibid*, 253.

Sanctification is defined as (1) “The act or process of God’s grace by which the affections of men are *purified* or alienated from sin and the world, and exalted to a supreme love of God.” Another definition is : “The work of the Holy Spirit whereby the believer is freed from sin and *exalted to holiness of life.*”

Both definitions are essentially the same. Sanctification and holiness are generally thought to be one and the same, and they are usually used interchangeably. But there is a difference. Sanctification is “the act or process of God’s grace by which the affections of men are purified or alienated from sin.” Though sanctification is an act or process, it may also denote the finished product, and as such is equivalent to holiness.

Holiness may be defined as the state resulting from sanctification. *It is perfected sanctification.* Thus considered, (1) *Conversion* is the beginning of the Paul’s Christian race; (2) *sanctification*—the rough road or narrow way the Christian must travel and “press toward the mark of for the prize of the high calling in God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14); and (3) *holiness*, the goal or the end of the road, the equivalent of perfection.

God is holy and perfect. He did not become so; He always has been. Man is asked and expected to strive after these virtues but should be very hesitant in claiming their possession.

A person at his conversion finds himself happy at that thought that all his past sins have been forgiven. He was once a slave to his favorite sins, but now he has been set free. Or is he? Some undoubtedly are, and never have another craving. But others are still tempted and have a daily battle to fight and resist temptation. They do not yield but the desire is still there. Sometimes it is more than they can bear. But they are determined in their heart to gain the victory, to persevere, and at last, they prevail and are set free. Perfect victory in Christ!

But let none be deceived. Satan may leave but he returns. He did this to Christ. Luke 4: 13 which says: "When the devil had ended all his temptation, he departed from Him *for a season*." The NKJV says, "and he departed from Him *until an opportune time*." And so he does with all men, young or old, church member, or minister. For this very reason we are warned: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. 10:12. Self-confidence is fatal. This was what caused Peter to deny Christ three times with cursing to boot. Matt. 26: 69-75. Often those who are congratulating themselves of their victory are at that moment at the greatest risk of falling! Our only hope is constant distrust of self and constant and complete dependence of Christ.

The sinner who strives against sin, "resisting unto blood," will receive due credit in his judgment. But God's plan of redemption includes a much higher and nobler experience than this. And what is it? To attain to such a degree of *hatred for sin* that it ceases to be a temptation! According to Paul, Christ "love righteousness, and *hates* iniquity" (Heb. 1: 9), an echo of Ps. 45:7. This is not a "love-hate relationship." It is the divine character of God, the very core of the nature of the great controversy between the mystery of godliness versus the mystery of iniquity that began in heaven, has been raging since then, and will reach its stupendous climax in the days to come, ending in complete victory of Christ over Satan, righteousness over sin, and love over hatred.

The sinner, who has decided by the grace of God to gain the victory over, say, gambling in its various forms, or sensuality, may *resist* this temptation and never fall again. He is credited with the victory and will receive his just reward. But one day the conviction comes to him that the very same God who kept him from falling could also *remove the desire for his sins and make him hate them*. He never prayed for hatred but love only before. But now he begins to pray, not only that his perverted tastes and corrupted values change, but that God will give him *perfect hatred* for his perverted tastes and corrupted moral values. And because of his importunate prayer (Luke 11: 5-13) God grants his heart's desire and he obtains complete victory. He is sanctified on these points.

There are those who can fight many enemies at once, but most are incapable of this. A woman who is struggling with worldly fashion, so beguiling today, may have all she can to tackle in just this *one* besetting sin and weakness. She has to concentrate on the case at hand. Only when she has defeated this one enemy is she ready to take on *another*. Our merciful God will generally grant a "breathing spell" for her to regain strength for the next bout. That's why He invited his fatigued disciples to "Come aside to a deserted place and rest awhile." Mark 6: 31.

Some Christians make the mistake of attempting to battle with all the forces of evil, and overcome all their sins at once. This is a sign of impatience and immaturity. Few, if any, can do this. The young shepherd boy David did not challenge the whole Philistine army at once. It would have been disastrous. Instead, he concentrated on the giant Goliath; and God gave him the victory. When Goliath was felled with one smooth stone in David's slingshot, the rest of the army Philistine army were routed and destroyed.

You and I have “Goliaths” to confront and destroy in our private lives. Know what they are and immediately begin the battle by first putting on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6: 10-18) and never carelessly or presumptuously cast away any part of this armory while constantly engaged in this eternal life-and-death combat. It would be wiser if we focused on particular sins or weaknesses that constantly overcome us—such as short tempers, discourteous manners, slovenly habits, disrespect for our parents, habitual tardiness, prejudice and bigotry, hypocrisy, evil-surmising, idleness, gossiping, etc., instead of spreading ourselves thin over too wide an area—trying to overcome all at once too much, too soon. This is why most fail, become discouraged, and give up striving.

Paul says we should “Lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endure the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right of the throne of God.” Heb. 12: 1, 2, K. J.V. What are some of these prominent “weights”?

“Envy, malice, evil thinking, evil-speaking, covetousness---these are weights that the Christian must lay aside if he would run successfully the race for immortality. Every habit or practice that leads into sin and brings dishonor upon Christ, must be put away, whatever the sacrifice. The blessing of heaven cannot attend any man in violating the eternal principles of right.

“The competitors in the ancient games, after they had submitted to self-denial and rigid discipline, were not even then sure of the victory. . . . However eagerly and earnestly the runners might strive, the prize could be awarded to but one. One hand only could grasp the coveted garland. Some might put forth the utmost effort to obtain the prize, but as they reached forth the hand to secure it, another, an instant before them, might grasp the coveted treasure.

“Such is not the case of the Christian warfare. No one who complies with the conditions will be disappointed at the end of the race. Not one who is earnest and persevering will fail of success. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong [Eccl. 9:11]. The weakest saint, as well as the strongest, may wear the crown of eternal glory. All may win who, through the power of divine grace, bring their lives into conformity to the will of Christ. . . . Every act casts its weight into the scale that determines life’s victory or defeat. And the reward given to those who win will be in proportion to the energy and earnestness with which they have striven.

“Paul knew that his warfare against evil would not end so long as life should last. Ever he realized the need of putting a strict guard upon himself, that earthly desires might not overcome spiritual zeal. With all his power he committed to strive against natural inclinations. Ever he kept before him the ideal to be attained, and this ideal he strove to reach by willing obedience to the law of God. His words, his practices, his passions---all were brought under the control of the Spirit of God.” –Acts of the Apostles, pp. 312-315.

“It is good to pray for the conversion of the *whole world* but it is better to concentrate our work to a few souls whom we can bestow special attention and personal efforts. As we win soul one at a time, let us also confront our weaknesses and sins one by one.”

Sanctification is a work of a lifetime. As we walk this way, taking on one challenge, problem, trial, and temptation after another, we are actually making progress in the work of sanctification. Each day on this path brings us *nearer* the goal of holiness. From the start, God is imputing, and imparting His righteousness to us. We are not yet perfected but we are headed in that direction, perfection meaning, moral or character perfection. And should we die before we reach this goal, God will judge our *motives* and the diligence and faithfulness of the *effort* employed in using the abundant *grace* of God

to overcome as Christ did. It is the *motive* that gives the stamp to the act. God will credit us for what we *would have* accomplished *had* time and opportunity allowed. This was why the repentant, dying thief on the cross was assured salvation that day for had time and opportunity be granted him, as most of us are granted now, he would have been a faithful disciple of Christ, willing to die for His sake and the truth just like the other disciples.

“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. It takes every ray of light that God sends to us to make us the light of the world.” –Letter 31, 1880, quoted in *Notebook Leaflets* p. 66.

Trees are a symbol of man. The fruit of the tree is not perfected in a day. It takes weeks and even months from the time when the first bud appears before a tree produces a ripe fruit. *Yet each stage reveals perfection.* The bud is perfect, so is the incomplete fruit, and so is the perfected fruit. *So it is with the human being.* The little baby may be perfect, so the child, so the developing youth, so the grown man. Each is perfect in its own sphere and stage—but not yet complete.

The Bible uses the word “perfect” to denote two things: (a) *incomplete, though perfect stage* (b) *complete perfection*. Paul illustrated this by saying: “Not that I have already attained, *or am already perfected*; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold on me.” Phil. 3: 12. Paul did not claim perfection. But in verse 15 he states, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [“mature”-NKJV], be thus minded.” In verse 12 he says that he is not perfect, but in verse 15 he says he is perfect [mature].

Paul denies that he had already reached a spiritual state of *non-development*. He does not claim, as others do, of instantaneous sanctification or “sudden absolute perfection” by any single experience. He had made great progress in becoming Christ like, but the goal was still *before him*, not behind him.

M.L. Andreasen points out that term *teleioi* means *relative perfection*, not the absolute perfection so pointedly denied in verse 12.” Paul does not claim absolute perfection, the equivalent of holiness, but he does claim *relative perfection*. This is emphasized in verse 16: “Nevertheless, to the *degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.” N.K.J.V. Will anyone ever attain to the absolute perfection to which Paul said he had not attained? We should be disappointed if Paul claimed so; for no man who attains it will ever claim to be so. God for sure knows it, but the truly sanctified person is not aware of it because he constantly looks to Christ and His absolute perfection, and is constantly growing in a state of progressive sanctification towards the goal which Christ has set before us, which

Paul describes in the following words: “That Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, *that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.*” Eph. 3: 17-19, KJV. Anyone who claims to have *already* attained to an unalterable state of holiness is, in fact, guilty of Pharisaical and presumptuous righteousness. He may not be wicked but he is unsaved. For the nearer as sinner comes to the perfect God, the more aware he is of his own shortcomings and sinful nature. It is only when a man loses sight of God in self-righteousness and self-confidence will he ever claim holiness!

