

AS THE STARS FOREVER

One of the principal objections to what has come to be known as Last Generation Theology,

--is the claim that this particular theological construct is based primarily on a few Ellen White statements—one in particular—but supposedly not on the Bible.

If we had more time, we could focus on some of the other claims concerning Last Generation Theology—most of which are demonstrably false

--and perhaps we can focus on these during the question-and-answer time.

But the most important premise I hope to establish here today, is the Biblical foundation of this particular theological construct.

I want each of you, as well as those who will be listening to this message on tape, to be as clear as possible regarding the Biblical evidence for this teaching.

I would hope that we have gone far in this series already in demonstrating this evidence from the Bible, as well as from the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy.

But what I'd like us to focus on primarily this afternoon is the issue of what the Bible teaches—and what the Spirit of Prophecy echoes—regarding the subject of character perfection and sinless obedience.

The basic issue in the perfection controversy in contemporary Adventism is whether or not Biblical perfection refers to sinless conduct, or whether it refers to what one author calls a “relative state of growing maturity.”

Now notice carefully that I use the phrase “sinless conduct” in the definition of character perfection so far as classic Adventism is concerned.

We're talking here about choices, my friends. Not the eradication of our inherited fallen natures.

Hopefully what was presented this morning should be sufficient to demonstrate that Jesus inherited the same fallen nature we inherit at birth.

And that didn't make Him a sinner.

The fallen human nature stays with us till Jesus comes in the clouds. It is choices and conduct that we are discussing,

—and by the way, as Jesus said, conduct includes the cherished desires and intentions of the heart.

(Mention murder and adultery.)

Now the verse with which this conversation usually begins is the one from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which most of us are familiar with.

Matt. 5:48:

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Now the popular argument of many in contemporary Adventism is that “perfect” in this passage does not carry the meaning of sinlessness.

Brothers and sisters, I maintain that when we consider both Biblical evidence and simple logic, this verse can't mean anything else.

Stop and think about it.

Can any created being be as spiritually mature as God the Father?

“Be ye therefore mature, even as your Father in heaven is mature”?

Not even the sinless angels can do that!

Even they didn't understand the implication's of Lucifer's rebellion until Jesus died on the cross, according to what Ellen White says.

Now it is true there are times in the Bible when the word “perfect” does not mean the total absence of sin.

At other times it does.

But one word does not a doctrine make. Or unmake.

Everything the Bible says about the spiritual condition expected of God's people needs to be taken into account.

The biggest mistake on the part of those Adventists who don't believe in sinless perfection, is that they focus too much on the single word “perfect” as the Bible uses it,

--rather than on all the other verses in the Bible which speak of the spiritual attainment God seeks from men and women.

But there are, in fact, verses in the Bible which speak of perfection as the absence or conquest of sin.

Let's look at some of them:

Job 1:1,8:

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. . . .

“And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?”

And despite horrific loss and tragedy, what does the Bible say about Job:

Job 1:22:

“In all this Job sinned not, neither charged God foolishly.”

And when his wife told him to “curse God and die”?

Job 2:10

“In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

Regarding Lucifer, we find in the book of Ezekiel:

Eze. 28:15:

“Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.”

And perhaps one of the clearest statements in the New Testament is the following:

II Cor. 7:1:

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

But now let's consider other passages in the Bible which don't mention the word “perfect” in its various forms,

--but which do speak of sinless conduct as a goal both real and attainable for the followers of God.

(Mention handouts of both Bible and Ellen White statements on sinless living.)

Psalm 119:1-3:

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.

“Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart.

“They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways.”

Psalm 119:11:

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.”

I Cor. 15:34:

“Awake to righteousness, and sin not.”

II Cor. 10:4-5:

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds,

“Casting down imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Eph. 5:27:

“That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

This last verse makes a good transition as we now look at those Bible passages which specifically describe this goal of sinless conduct as applying to the Last Generation of history.

Now one of the major arguments against Last Generation Theology is the claim that it upholds an inconsistent standard for salvation—one for previous generations, and another for the last generation.

Well first of all, the Bible is clear that God upholds different standards for different generations.

Let’s consider the evidence.

Prov. 4:18:

“But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

Jesus declared:

Luke 12:48:

“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”

In the parable of the sower, referring to the seed falling on good ground, we read as follows:

Matt. 13:8:

“But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.”

Here we see different standards of attainment among the saved, pointed out in these passages.

Martin Luther was a great man in his time, whom God used mightily in the work of starting the Protestant Reformation.

But perhaps some of us don't realize that if he were alive today—with the same beliefs, practices, and prejudices he held then

—that he would be unwelcome as a speaker at just about every Adventist gathering I know of—from Adventist Forum meetings to Hartland convocations.

And why is that?

I suppose many of us could list a number of erroneous doctrines that Luther held, that would likely debar him from just about any conservative Adventist assembly I could think of.

For example, he didn't accept the Sabbath, and he was a strong predestinarian.

Not to mention the fact he was also an avid beer-drinker!

But the liberals among us—who might not object to the above issues—wouldn't invite him either. Because among other things, he was also a virulent anti-Semite.

Listen to the words of William L. Shirer in his landmark account of the history of Nazi Germany:

“It is difficult to understand the behavior of most German Protestants in the first Nazi years unless one is aware of two things: their history and the influence of Martin Luther. The great founder of Protestantism was both a passionate anti-Semite and a ferocious believer in absolute obedience to political authority. He wanted Germany rid of the Jews and when they were sent away he advised that they be deprived of ‘all their cash and jewels and silver and gold’ and, furthermore, ‘that their synagogues or schools be set on fire, that their houses be broken up and destroyed . . . and that they be put under a roof or stable, like the gypsies . . . in misery and captivity as they incessantly lament and complain to God about us’—advice that was literally followed four centuries later by Hitler, Goering, and Himmler.”

William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), p. 236.

God certainly used Martin Luther to do a great work for Him.

But no one I know would recommend someone with Luther's beliefs to be a professor at our Seminary.

God does expect higher attainments from succeeding generations, in accord with greater light and truth revealed.

And the reason God has given the most light to the Seventh-day Adventist movement since 1844, is because He is expecting the highest possible attainment from the final generation of human history.

That's the reason God gave all the counsel He has given the Adventist Church,

--about health practices, adornment, entertainment, worship styles, relationships, and a host of other issues.

Little wonder that back in 1977, Anglican scholar Geoffrey Paxton, in his book *The Shaking of Adventism*, made this observation, after having reviewed over a hundred years of Adventist teachings:

“The doctrine of the perfecting of the final generation stands near the heart of Adventist theology.”

Geoffrey J. Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism* (Wilmington, DE: Zenith Publishers, 1977), p. 114.

It's like the intensive training Olympic athletes and Navy SEALs go through.

A special mission requires special training.

And this is why Scripture places a special focus on the perfecting of history's final generation.

Let's look at what the Bible says.

Starting with Jesus:

Mark 4:26-20:

“And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground:

“And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

“For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself: first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear.

“But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”

Notice how preparation for the harvest is a process, not something that happens all at once.

Any farmer or gardener understands that you don't pick or harvest produce until it is ripe.

When do you put the sickle in? “When the fruit is brought forth.” Not before.

The apostle John understood this principle, and brings it into focus in the book of Revelation:

Rev. 14:14-16:

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.

“And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in Thy sickle, and reap; for the time is come for Thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.

“And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.”

Now what does it mean for the harvest to be ripe?

Other Bible passages help us understand what this means. The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes total sanctification on the part of Christians as a prerequisite for the return of our Lord:

I Thess. 5:23:

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

II Peter 3:11,12,14:

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

“Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? . . .

“Wherefore, brethren, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

Now there are those in contemporary Adventism who would have us believe that the word “hasting” in this verse does not mean to make Jesus’ coming happen soon.

Rather, they tell us, it simply means to look eagerly for His coming.

Well, I’ve taken the time to look at eight (8) major modern translations of the Bible, and each of them render this verse in a manner identical to—and at times even stronger—than the King James Version.

NKJV, RSV, ESV, NASB:

“hastening the coming”

NIV:

“speed its coming”

NEB:

“work to hasten it on”

NLT:

“hurry it along”

TEV (Good News Bible):

“do your best to make it come soon”

So the fact that Jesus’ coming is to be hastened by the spiritual preparedness of His people is clearly set forth in Second Peter, chapter 3, verse 12.

Let's look at some other passages:

I John 3:2-3:

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. “And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

Zeph. 3:13:

“The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”

Rev. 14:5:

“And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God.”

Again we hearken back to the example of Jesus, who has shown how this is done:

I Peter 2:21-22:

“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in His steps. “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.”

In the messages to the seven churches in Revelation, all the promises are given to the overcomers.

But only the church of Laodicea is promised an overcoming experience identical to that of Jesus:

Rev. 3:21:

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.”

I hope it is clear by now that when Ellen White makes her signature statement on Last Generation Theology, to which we now turn, that she marches in lockstep with Holy Scripture:

COL 69:

“Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”

This, of course, is not by any means the only Ellen White statement on the subject of perfection and the final generation.

Let's look at a number of others:

GC 425:

“Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon the earth. . . .

“When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing.”

EW 71:

“I also saw that many do not realize what they must be in order to live in the sight of the Lord without a high priest in the sanctuary through the time of trouble. Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully. . . . I saw that none could share the ‘refreshing’ (latter rain) unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action.”

1T 187:

“Those who come up to every point and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation.”

5T 214:

“Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us, as the early rain fell upon the disciples upon the day of Pentecost.”

FH 44:

“No impurity can enter the pearly gates of the golden city of God. And the question for us to settle is whether we will turn from all sin and comply with the conditions God has given us, that we may become His sons and daughters. . . .

“When you are all ready, having overcome your sins, having put away all your iniquity from you, you are in a condition to receive the finishing touch of immortality.”

2T 355:

When He comes, He is not to cleanse us of our sins, to remove from us the defects in our characters, or to cure us of the infirmities of our tempers and dispositions. If wrought for us at all, this work will be accomplished before that time. When the Lord comes, those who are holy will be holy still. . . . The Refiner does not then sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done in these hours of probation.”

3SM 360:

“In the day of judgment the course of the man who has retained the frailty and imperfection of humanity will not be vindicated. For him there will be no place in heaven. He

could not enjoy the perfection of the saints in light. He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God.”

RH April 1, 1902:

“The Saviour is wounded afresh and put to open shame when His people pay no need to His word. He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness. He desires them by practicing the principles of truth to show to the world that God’s grace has power to sanctify the heart.”

Conclusion: As the Stars Forever

In his tribute to the slain President Kennedy at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, Robert F. Kennedy quoted the following lines from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*,

--lines I often use at the close of any seminar I conduct on the subject of Last Generation Theology:

When he shall die
Take him and cut him out in little stars
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun

Well, neither Robert Kennedy nor William Shakespeare was original with this thought.

It came from the book of Daniel:

Dan. 12:3:

“And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.”

Ellen White comments on this verse in the following passage, with which we will close our seminar:

5T 81-82:

“When trees without fruit are cut down as cumberers of the ground, when multitudes of false brethren are distinguished from the true, then the hidden ones will be revealed to view, and with hosannas range under the banner of Christ. Those who have been timid and self-distrustful, will declare themselves openly for Christ and His truth. The most weak and hesitating in the church, will be as David—willing to do and dare. The deeper the night for God’s people, the more brilliant the stars. Satan will surely harass the faithful, but, in the name of Jesus, they will come off more than conquerors. Then will the church of Christ appear ‘fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.’”