



11-27-19

The 144,000: The Finished Product of the Plan of Salvation

When God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, He placed within them all the characteristics needed to comprise the human race. Adam named his new bride, "Eve," which means "life-giver", for she would become the mother of all living beings. Gen. 3:20. This means that the inherited characteristics of Adam and Eve would be passed on to all their progeny. Had they stayed true to God, the whole human race would have inherited righteous thinking and holy characters.

When God created this world, he had a specific purpose in mind. Although we do not know how the inhabitants of other worlds differ from us, we are told by Ellen White that human beings are a new and distinct order, with a high and holy purpose.

"All heaven took a deep and joyful interest in the creation of the world and of man. Human beings were a new and distinct order. They were made in the image of God, and it was the Creator's design that they should populate the earth. They were to live in close communion with heaven, receiving power from the Source of all power. Upheld by God, they were to live sinless lives....

"God created man a superior being; he alone is formed in the image of God, and is capable of partaking of the divine nature, of cooperating with his Creator and executing His plans." SD 7.

The fact that the world was created after the fall of Lucifer and the defection of the angels who fell with him, indicates that there was a special and important purpose for this earth and its inhabitants in the great plan of salvation. Ellen White draws aside the curtain and gives us these amazing insights:

"God had a knowledge of the events of the future, even before the creation of the world. He did not make His purposes to fit circumstances, but He allowed matters to develop and work out. He did not work to bring about a certain condition of things, but He knew that such a condition would exist. The plan that should be carried out upon the defection of any of the high intelligences of heaven -- this is the secret, the mystery which has been hid from ages." 6BC 1082.

"God created man for His glory. It was His purpose to repopulate heaven with the human race, when after a period of test and trial they had proved to be loyal to Him. Adam was to be tested to see whether he would be obedient. Had he stood the test, his

thoughts would have been as the thoughts of God, his character would have been molded after the similitude of the divine character." ST 5/29/1901.

"Jesus came to our world to dispute the authority of Satan. He came to restore in man the defaced image of God, to raise him, to elevate him, fit him for companionship with the angels of heaven, to take the position in the courts of God which Satan forfeited through rebellion." RH 5/08/1894.

"Heaven will triumph, for the vacancies made in heaven by the fall of Satan and his angels will be filled by the redeemed of the Lord." 7BC 949.

There are many things about this marvelous miracle that we cannot understand this side of heaven. But we can seek to understand all the knowledge that God has revealed to us so that we can better prepare to respond to the call that God has given us to be among the 144,000, who are the final generation of God's people upon earth, the finished product of the plan of salvation.

"We are to look to the man Christ Jesus, who is complete in the perfection of righteousness and holiness.... He is the pattern man. His experience is the measure of the experience that we are to gain. His character is our model.... As we look to Him and think of Him, He is formed within, the hope of glory.

"Let us strive with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand." 7BC 970.

The purpose of the plan of salvation has many facets. First, God must show that His perfect and holy law and character can be reproduced in humanity. When Satan rebelled in heaven he challenged the necessity of the law of God and deceived a third of the angels. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were tested upon obedience to the command of God, but they, too, yielded to the lies of Satan. So, before the great controversy is finished, God must show the universe that He has a people who not only agrees with His law intellectually, but will also cooperate with His cleansing process in their hearts so that every vestige of sympathy with Satan is removed.

Bible writers often speak of the depravity of the natural human heart in contrast with the requirements of God's holy character and His law. David lamented after his sin with Bathsheba:

"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.... Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Ps. 51:5-12.

Paul said: "I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." Rom. 7:22, 23.

Jeremiah penned an accurate picture of the impossibility of the natural fallen nature to produce righteousness: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." Jer. 13:23. "Judah's sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point, on the tablets of their hearts and on the horns of their altars. Even their children remember their altars and Asherah poles beside the spreading trees and on the high hills." Jer. 17:1, 2.

Please notice that sin is engraved on the tablets of the heart. The correlation between God's law being written upon tablets of stone, and sin being written on the tablets of the heart is inescapable, and of vital importance. Notice the similarity of the wording in these verses: "When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God." Ex. 31:18. "Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets." Ex.32:15, 16.

When God created Adam and Eve, the law of God was written upon their hearts. But when they chose to sin, they chose for themselves and for their progeny a divided heart and a bent to sin which would give Satan access to continue his temptations and his power over them from one generation to another.

"I gave them this command: 'Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.' But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward." Jer. 7: 23, 24.

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.... In your hearts do not think evil of each other.' But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry. 'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the Lord Almighty." Zech. 7:8-13.

It is interesting to note that the law of God was written by the finger of God. This same phrase is used again by Jesus in Luke 11:17-20: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand?... But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you."

The same text is used in Matthew 12:28, but in this passage Jesus is recorded as saying: "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

Putting all of these texts together, it is clear that the finger of God is the Holy Spirit, which not only wrote the law of God on the tablets of stone, but can cast the presence

of evil spirits out of our lives and write the law of God upon our hearts if we will yield ourselves to Him. Paul also speaks of this transformation in those who yield themselves to the power of the Holy Spirit: "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." 2 Cor. 3:3.

"Christ desires nothing so much as to redeem His heritage from the dominion of Satan. But before we are delivered from Satan's power without, we must be delivered from his power within." COL 174, 5.

"Pressing close to His side and holding communion with Him, we become like Him. Through the transforming power of the Spirit of Christ, we are changed in heart and life. His words are engraved on the tablets of the soul, and we are His witnesses, representing Him in the daily life." TD 96.

"When we are truly seeking to do God's will, the Holy Spirit takes the precepts of His word and makes them the principles of the life, writing them on the tablets of the soul. And it is only those who are following the light already given that can hope to receive the further illumination of the Spirit. This is plainly stated in the words of Christ: 'If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.'" 5T 705.

"All who come to the Bible with a teachable and prayerful spirit, to study its utterances as the word of God, will receive divine enlightenment. There are many things apparently difficult or obscure which God will make plain and simple to those who thus seek an understanding of them.... But our success in finding it does not depend so much on our intellectual ability as on our humility of heart and the faith which will lay hold upon divine aid." 5T 704.

Thus we can see that the whole purpose of the plan of salvation is to bring the human race back to their original creation, in which the law of God was enshrined in the temple of their hearts. The earthly sanctuary was a visible model of the way back to the condition of man's heart before he sinned. David said, "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary." Ps. 77:13, KJV. For further study, let's take a second look at Jeremiah 17:1: "Judah's sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point, on the tablets of their hearts and on the horns of their altars."

The Brazen Altar in the courtyard was the first visible piece of furniture in the Sanctuary. Their sins were confessed, and the blood of the slain animal was placed upon the four horns of the altar. It was then taken into the Holy Place, where the blood was placed upon the four horns of the Golden Altar before the inner veil, and then sprinkled upon the Veil, where it would remain until the Day of Atonement. This ritual provided forgiveness for the repentant sinner, and expiation of the record of his sin at the end of the year.

But these yearly rituals only provided for the salvation of the people until Jesus came as the true Lamb of God and shed His blood for the sins of the world. When He ascended back into Heaven, He entered the true tabernacle not made by man where eternal salvation would be provided for all who enter that Sanctuary by faith in Him and receive

the benefits of the new covenant promise: "First he said, 'sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them'... Then he said, 'Here I am. I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second and by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 'This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.' Then he adds: 'Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.'" Heb. 10:8-17.

By these texts God tells us that it is His purpose to remove sin completely from our hearts and write again the law upon our minds, thus eradicating sin completely from those who participate with Him in the heavenly Sanctuary services which He is in the process of completing even now. But notice carefully the divine order that we must participate in to receive the benefit of the cleansing work of Jesus in the heavenly Sanctuary.

The brazen altar in the court of the earthly Sanctuary had four horns, one on each corner of the altar. These horns were not made separately and then placed upon the altar. They were formed out of the same material as the altar. Horns in the Bible represented strength and status, and the thrust of the heart to conquer, or overcome any perceived threat. In our fallen nature, this inner urge to conquer, or to protect ourselves, attributes much to the sins which we commit.

The brass on the altar in the court was not as refined as was the gold of the furniture in the inner two rooms of the Sanctuary. The lamb which was kept burning at all times on the brazen altar in the court assured the sinner that their sins were forgiven. But by the blood of Jesus, our High Priest, there is much more cleansing to be done in the heavenly Sanctuary which will produce the gold of character that we must have in order to be a finished product at the end of time. The goal of Christ's heavenly ministry is to produce a people who will have no dross in their characters -- nothing to separate them from a full and complete relationship with Himself, so that they can always hear His still, small voice and respond in perfect, loving obedience.

"You may have the love of God burning upon the altar of your heart.... You may commune with God." 2T 296.

"It is not faith that claims the favor of heaven without complying with the conditions upon which mercy is to be granted, it is presumption; for genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the scriptures. Let none deceive themselves with the belief that they can become holy while willfully violating one of God's requirements. The commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Holy Spirit and separates the soul from God." GC 472.

We cannot commune with God if we are an opposition to His will. We cannot commune with God and hear His Holy Spirit speaking to us if we have cherished sin. We cannot commune with God if we love self more than others. A cleansed heart means a cleansed and perfect relationship between us and Jesus. When this is our goal, He will see us safely to the end of time.

This brings us back to the subject of the 144,000. The Bible tells us that this is the finished product -- the remnant -- of all of God's people who have ever lived. They represent every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, for they are comprised of those who are victorious over the accumulated sins of the whole human race since the beginning of time.

In Revelation 7:4, 5, the 144,000 are pictured as consisting of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. These numbers are symbolic of all those who follow Jesus through the battle with Satan and his followers at the end of time, and stand with Jesus through the great time of trouble.

"The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings -- and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." Rev. 17:12-14.

The 144,000 are also pictured as standing with Jesus on Mount Zion: "Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.... And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless." Rev. 14:1-5.

Some people believe that the 144,000 consist of the saved of all ages. However, this text specifically identifies them as "firstfruits" to God and the Lamb. In the Old Testament rituals, the first fruits of the harvest were dedicated to the Lord: "Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the first fruits of the crops you sow in your field.... Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God." Ex. 23:16, 19.

The nation of Israel was considered by God to be the firstfruits of all the nations of earth: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest." Jer. 2:2, 3.

Paul considered himself and his generation to be the firstfruits of the Christian Church, having received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we

wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved." Rom. 8:22-24.

James considered those who believe God's truth and follow Him to be a kind of firstfruits of all created beings: "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." James 1:18.

And first and most preeminent, Christ is the firstfruits of all those who will be saved: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he 'has put everything under his feet' [Ps. 8:6]." 1 Cor. 15:22-27.

Ever since the capitulation of our first parents to the wiles of the enemy, all of creation has been earnestly looking forward to the end of the great controversy between good and evil. But this will not take place until Jesus, the firstfruits, demonstrates in the lives of His followers that He can reproduce His own perfection of character in them.

"Christ is called the second Adam. In purity and holiness, connected with God and beloved by God, He began where the first Adam began. Willingly He passed over the ground where Adam fell, and redeemed Adam's failure." Y I June 2, 1898.

"When Christ bowed His head and died, He bore the pillars of Satan's kingdom with Him to the earth. He vanquished Satan in the same nature over which in Eden Satan obtained the victory. The enemy was overcome by Christ in His human nature. The power of the Savior's Godhead was hidden. He overcame in human nature, relying upon God for power." YI April 25, 1901.

Now that Jesus has won the victory in our human nature, He is able to transmit His victory into the heart of every person who will cooperate with Him and allow Him to cleanse them of every stain of sin.

"As Christ was glorified on the day of Pentecost, so will He again be glorified in the closing work of the gospel when He shall prepare a people to stand the test, in the closing conflict of the great controversy." 7BC 983.

"Two great opposing powers are revealed in the last great battle. On one side stands the Creator of heaven and earth. All on His side bear His signature. They are obedient to His commands. On the other side stands the prince of darkness, with those who have chosen apostasy and rebellion." Ibid. 982, 3.

Many people feel that the latter rain will cure their tempers and heal their defects of character. But notice carefully that at harvest time there are two groups -- the wheat and the tares. The latter rain will not make tares into wheat. It will only ripen the grain and seal forever those who have allowed the Holy Spirit to direct their lives and cleanse their characters.

"The latter rain, falling near the close of the season, ripens the grain and prepares it for the sickle.... The Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth. The ripening of the grain represents the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ." TM 506.

"The seal of the living God will be placed on those only who bear a likeness to Christ in character. As wax takes the impression of the seal, so the seal is to take the impression of the Spirit of God and retain the image of Christ." 7BC 970.

All that we have been studying so far in this article has been a description of the preparation necessary to be among the 144,000. They are described as being blameless. They are the firstfruits of all the followers of God throughout the history of the world. They are now prepared to take the place of the angels who fell, for they have been fully restored back into the perfect mind and character in which Adam and Eve were created before they sinned.

At this point I want to go into more detail about the description of the 144,000 as being representatives from the twelve tribes of Israel.

When God called Abraham, he was told that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens [Gen. 15: 5]. Later he was told that he would be the father of many nations [Gen. 17:3-6]. Centuries later Paul said: "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.... In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." Rom. 9:6-8. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who are baptized unto Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Gal. 3:26-29.

Somehow, in the providence of God, the 12 sons of Jacob, or Israel, possessed all the characteristics of the entire human race. This phenomena has been noted by Bible scholars, and is supported by scripture: "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance." Deut. 32:8, 9.

"God selected these twelve sons of Jacob because their hereditary dispositions and personality development together form a microcosm of all humanity. They represent every kind of person who has ever lived." Leslie Hardinge, With Jesus in His Sanctuary, p. 298.

Therefore the 144,000, who are the finished product of Jesus' work in the heavenly Sanctuary at the culmination of history, represent the wave sheaf, or firstfruits of the harvest of all humanity, the spiritual Israel which was promised to Abraham as his seed. They have carried the torch of truth to the finish line, have been victorious over the

beast and his image, have received the seal of God on their foreheads, and have been faithful to Jesus through the great time of trouble. Now they are privileged to stand with Jesus on Mount Zion and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb which no other group are privileged to sing, because it is the song of their experience:

"I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues -- last, because with them God's wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb." Rev. 15:1-3.

"Upon the crystal sea before the throne...are gathered the company that have 'gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name.' With the Lamb upon Mount Zion, 'having the harps of God,' they stand, the hundred and forty and four thousand that were redeemed from among men.... And they sing 'a new song' before the throne, a song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand. It is the song of Moses and the Lamb, -- a song of deliverance. None but the hundred and forty and four thousand can learn that song; for it is the song of their experience, -- an experience such as no other company have ever had. 'These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.' These, having been translated from the earth, from among the living, are counted as 'the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.'" GC 648, 9.

Since the message of Jesus' Second Coming was first given in 1844, God's people in each succeeding generation have looked forward to His coming in their day. Is it more time that Jesus is waiting for? Or is it the condition of His people that is the cause of the delay? Ellen White gives us the answer to this question:

"But the people were not yet ready to meet their Lord. There was still a work of preparation to be accomplished for them. Light was to be given, directing their minds to the temple of God in heaven; and as they should by faith follow their High Priest in His administration there, new duties would be revealed. Another message of warning and instruction was to be given to the church.

"Says the prophet: 'Who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap: and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.' Mal. 3:2, 3. 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 earth. This work is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14.

"When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing.... Then the church which our Lord at His coming is to receive to Himself will be 'a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.'" GC 424, 5.

Then the delay has been in the unfinished condition of God's people. We must be willing to cooperate with Jesus' work of cleansing us in His ministry in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly Sanctuary. We must be willing to participate with Him in this cleansing work. We must walk with Him, listen to Him, and obey Him as He reveals to us the things He sees that are written in the books of Heaven. We must wrestle with God as did Jacob in order to be overcomers and to be the spiritual children of Israel.

"Had not Jacob previously repented of his sin... God would not have heard his prayer and mercifully preserved his life. So, in the time of trouble, if the people of God had unconfessed sins to appear before them... they would be overwhelmed.... But while they have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they have no concealed wrongs to reveal. Their sins have gone beforehand to judgment, and have been blotted out; and they cannot bring them to remembrance.

"Satan leads many to believe that God will overlook their unfaithfulness in the minor affairs of life; but the Lord shows in His dealings with Jacob that He will in no wise sanction or tolerate evil. All who endeavor to excuse or conceal their sins, and permit them to remain upon the books of Heaven, unconfessed and unforgiven, will be overcome by Satan.... Those who delay a preparation for the day of God cannot obtain it in the time of trouble, or at any subsequent time. The case of all such is hopeless." GC 620.

What, then, is our duty at this time? We must make haste while Jesus is still ministering in the heavenly Sanctuary to make our calling and election sure [2 Pet. 1:10]. We must put away everything that hinders us and so easily besets us [Heb. 12:1], otherwise we will be among the slothful servants who put off the master's coming until it was too late:

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." Matt. 24:42-44.

Some of you may be saying, "But what must I do to be ready for Jesus' coming?" Sin is such a nebulous concept. We are used to it, we have grown up with it, and it is a part of the warp and woof of society and of the lives of every human being since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. Only Jesus, the spotless Son of God, came into this world without the tendencies to sin written upon the tablets of His heart. In Psalms 40:6-8 He prophesied about Himself at His birth:

"Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." KJV.

When God revealed to Mary that she was chosen to be the mother of the long-awaited Messiah, the angel said to her: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35, KJV.

Many people believe that when Jesus came into this world as a human being, He assumed not only the nature of humanity but also the inherited propensities to sin which we have all received at birth, but that He resisted these inclinations perfectly throughout His life, and therefore did not sin. But the Scriptures tell us plainly that He was holy, harmless and undefiled from His conception; therefore He is a High Priest who can save us to the uttermost:

"The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.... Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need -- one who is holy, blameless, pure [undefiled, KJV], set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens." Heb. 7:18, 24-26.

Here is our blessed hope! Jesus, the Holy One of God, is able to bring us back to that same condition of purity and holiness if we will cooperate fully with His ministry as High Priest in His closing work in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly Sanctuary. What, then, is the key to our restoration? It is found in the word, "holiness," for it is to this condition that we must return in our journey back to Eden before the fall of our first parents. To the natural human mind this is incomprehensible. But to those who are enlightened by the Spirit and the Word, the truths of redemption become more clear as we see the day of Christ's return approaching.

"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble." Prov. 4:18, 19, KJV.

I believe the key word that unlocks the mystery of perfection is, "holiness." As we have already noted, Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that the child who would be born of her would be holy from His birth. Even the demons who encountered interactions with Jesus were forced to admit that Jesus was the holy Son of God: "Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are -- the Holy One of God!" Mark 1:23, 24.

But this condition of holiness is not reserved only for Jesus, for through a relationship with Him, man must become holy in order to be able to stand in the presence of a holy God: "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." Heb.12:14, 15.

In order to understand the subject of holiness, we need a simple, clear definition of the word. This we find from Ellen White:

"Holiness is agreement with God." 5T 743.

"If man is to become immortal, his mind must be in harmony with God's mind." T on SB 116.

This means that the whole plan of salvation is focused upon one goal -- to bring fallen human beings back into harmony and oneness with God's mind on everything. The carnal mind is at enmity with God and in harmony with the devil. Therefore, in order to restore our minds back into the perfect state with which we were created, we must have a constant, personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and the ministry of Jesus for us in the heavenly Sanctuary. This calls for a purposeful focus and determination to connect with Jesus every day and maintain that connection throughout the varied experiences that the day will hold. We must begin the day with God, stay in conscious connection with Him throughout the day, and end the day with God before we go to sleep at night. Even in the night seasons, if we wake up we need to be communing in our hearts with God.

Jesus is our example of this kind of life. He came into the world connected with His heavenly Father and in perfect agreement with Him and His Law, and He maintained that constant communication throughout His life on earth. How is it possible to have that same relationship with God, when we come into this world already contaminated with sin? As David said: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Ps. 51:5.

Ellen White reveals some very important information about how sinful tendencies and character traits are passed on from parents to their children:

"Even before the birth of the child, the preparation should begin that will enable it to fight successfully the battle against evil.

"Especially does responsibility rest upon the mother. She by whose lifeblood the child is nourished and its physical frame built, imparts to it also mental and spiritual influences that tend to the shaping of mind and character.... The effect of prenatal influences is by many parents looked upon as a matter of little moment; but heaven does not so regard it.... The well-being of the child will be affected by the habits of the mother.... If before the birth of her child she is self-indulgent, if she is selfish, impatient, and exacting, these traits will be reflected in the disposition of the child. Thus many children have received as a birthright almost unconquerable tendencies to evil.... But if the mother unswervingly adheres to right principles, if she is temperate and self-denying, if she is kind, gentle, and unselfish, she may give her child these same precious traits of character." MH 371-3.

"It is inevitable that children should suffer from the consequences of parental wrongdoing, but they are not punished for the parents' guilt, except as they participate in their sins. It is usually the case, however, that children walk in the steps of their parents.

By inheritance and example the sons become partakers of the father's sin. Wrong tendencies, perverted appetites, and debased morals, as well as physical disease and degeneracy, are transmitted as a legacy from father to son, to the third and fourth generation. This fearful truth should have a solemn power to restrain men from following a course of sin." PP 306.

"The habits formed in youth, although they may in afterlife be somewhat modified, are seldom essentially changed. Your entire life has been molded by the legacy of character transmitted to you at birth. Your father's perverse temperament is seen in his children." 4T 499.

Recent scientific studies also support this law of genetics:

"There is a 'new science' that should cause the Christian world, especially Seventh-day Adventists, to take notice. Epigenetic research has been around for 16 years, and it has revealed that the phrase in the second commandment in Exodus 20:5 that reads 'visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation,' is a fact of science. Through his research in epigenetics at Ressler's Laboratory at Emory University in Atlanta, a man named Brian Diaz discovered that things we experience, choices we make, what we think and the way we think are mysteriously passed on to our children through DNA.... Reading carefully what he and others have written, one discovers that children's characters are not only molded by what they see their parents and others doing, but also by what is passed down to them through parental epigenetics....

"But the good news is that we aren't stuck with our epigenetic inheritance. If we love God enough to trust Him, and trust Him enough to be obedient to Him, we can claim His Bible promises that tell us God is 'able to sanctify us wholly' (1 Thess. 5:23, 24); that God is 'able to present us faultless' (Jude 24) before His throne. Truly, God is great and gracious to us." Wallace Frost, pastor of the Burnt Mills Church in Silver Spring, Maryland. September 2006 Visitor, p. 13.

Add to this the impact made upon children by parental example and treatment of them and other members in the family as they are growing up. And in today's world, the media may have more impact upon the mind, character, and development of children and youth than any other single influence in the environment. And yet the day of God is hastening on, and the people of this generation are about to see the culmination of history and face their Maker to give answer for their own lives and the influence they have had upon the lives of their families and others.

Listen to the prophet Zephaniah as he sees our day and speaks to the people who will be alive to see the coming of Jesus: "The great day of the Lord is near -- near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord.... Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day

of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.... Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation, before the appointed time arrives [the decree bring forth, KJV] and that day sweeps on like chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger." Zeph. 1:14-2:3.

There is a chapter in volume 5 of the Testimonies that it would be well for all to read, for there are truths that apply to our time in history. Here are some excerpts from that chapter:

"With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps an account with all nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account will remain open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath commences. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. There is no more pleading of mercy in their behalf....

"The day of God's vengeance is just upon us. The seal of God will be placed upon the foreheads of those only who sigh and cry for the abominations done in the land. Those who link in sympathy with the world are eating and drinking with the drunken and will surely be destroyed with the workers of iniquity....

"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 on the day of Pentecost....

"What are you doing, brethren, in the great work of preparation? Those who are uniting with the world are receiving the worldly mold and preparing for the mark of the beast. Those were distrustful of self, who are humbling themselves before God and purifying their souls by obeying the truth -- these are receiving the heavenly mold and preparing for the seal of God in their foreheads. When the decree goes forth and the stamp is impressed, their characters will remain pure and spotless for eternity.

"Now is the time to prepare. The seal of God will never be placed upon the forehead of an impure man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of an ambitious, world-loving man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of men or women of false tongues or deceitful hearts. All who receive the seal must be without spot before God--candidates for heaven." 5T 208, 212, 214, 216.

But how can we come to the place where our hearts and minds are cleansed from every spot of impurity? First, we must believe with our whole heart that God is a revealer of secrets and that He can reveal to us even the deepest levels of the thoughts and intents of our heart. We must spend time with Him in His Word, and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us the mysteries of His will for us. We must search our hearts as with a lighted candle to see if there is anything that is in disagreement with God's law as it is lived out in the perfect life of Jesus. Please remember that this is not something that we can do

on our own. It is the work of God through the power of the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us with groans that cannot be uttered [Rom. 8:26, KJV] before the throne of God. All Heaven is waiting for us to cooperate with the three members of the Godhead who will assist us in this work of cleansing our soul temple.

"While Christ is cleansing the Sanctuary, the worshippers on earth should carefully review their life, and compare their character with the standard of righteousness." Ev 224.

In reviewing our lives, what are we searching for? Many of us who are going through this experience with Jesus as He searches our hearts, find that He is revealing to us where wrong patterns of thinking and feeling have started in childhood, either toward our parents, siblings, or others in our early environment. It is here that the roots and beginnings of our thinking processes have begun. Since we cannot change these things of the past, it is left to us to change our response to them to be in harmony with the thoughts and feelings that Jesus puts in our hearts.

For example, if there has been any abuse in our upbringing, the natural response might be to become very self-protective and hold grudges against anyone who might remind us of what we experienced in our childhood. If there was neglect, favoritism, or modeling wrong behavior, these things can follow us throughout our entire lives. Jesus wants to set us free from anything that has wounded us during our lifetime, or from inherited damage which has been passed on through our family lineage. Without help from God we can never be completely freed from inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil.

"Without the transforming process which can come alone through divine power, the original propensities to sin are left in the heart in all their strength, to forge new chains, to impose a slavery that can never be broken by human power." Ev 192.

In order to reveal to us these hidden defects of character -- or thoughts and feelings [5T 310], -- God allows us to go through trials that bring out our thoughts and feelings into our behavior and thus demonstrate to us where we need the healing grace of God. These experiences give us an opportunity to search our hearts before God and to repent of all sinful thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and ask for deep healing from Jesus, who alone can transform us into His image and likeness. Those who do not go through this experience of cleansing and healing will not be ready to meet Jesus in peace when He comes, for He is like a refiner's fire; and when He appears in glory, His very presence will destroy the sinner along with his sin.

"By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ." TM 506.

"This experience everyone who is saved must have. 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." CT 102, 3.

Do you see why it has taken 6,000 years for God to produce a perfected remnant of His people? The sin problem is deeper and more pervasive than is perceived on the surface, and like a cancer, enters into the very inner soul of humanity. We must learn that behind every sin is a lie of the devil, believed and acted upon. Satan assigns a demon to every child at its birth, whose duty it is to carry on the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation. By long practice he knows the weaknesses and propensities in every family. Fortunately, Jesus also assigns to every child an angel to woo the mind of the child toward heavenly things. There is an unseen battle being waged over every soul from birth to death. By the time Jesus comes, every person will have made a permanent decision for everlasting life or for eternal extinction.

"Children are the lawful prey of the enemy because they are not subjects of grace. They have not experienced the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus. The evil angels have access to these children and some parents are careless and suffer them to work with but little restraint. Parents have a great work to do in this matter by correcting and subduing their children and bringing them to God and claiming His blessing upon them. By faithful and untiring effort and the blessing of grace entreated of God upon the children, the power of evil angels will be broken, a sanctifying influence is shed upon the children, and the powers of darkness must give back." CT 118.

We have now come to the final generation in earth's history. Comparatively few people are responding to the call of God to prepare for the close of probation. The media has more appeal to the people of this world than do the appeals of the Holy Spirit. For most, the sins of the fathers upon the children have passed a point of no return.

"Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. Their venom is like the venom of a snake, like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears, that will not heed the tune of the charmer, however skillful the enchanter may be." Ps. 58:3-5.

It has taken all these years to teach us the virulent nature of sin. But now it is time for us to take full advantage of what Jesus has done for us, not only on the cross, but what He can and is doing for those who cooperate with Him in removing the sin problem itself. But it takes our willing cooperation every step of the way back to purity of heart and cleansing of the soul so that every thought, word, and deed will be in complete agreement with the mind of Christ. This is the condition which the 144,000 will reach in the closing work of Christ in the heavenly Sanctuary. The last dregs of rebellion and impurity will have been removed, and they are in complete agreement with the Father and the Son on every matter. Then they will rejoice in the consciousness that their sins have been washed away in the blood of the Lamb, and that the evil one has no more power over them.

"Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us. O Lord, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone do

we honor. They are now dead, they live no more; those departed spirits do not rise. You punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them." Isa. 26:12.

As representatives of the whole human race, the 144,000 will stand with Jesus on Mount Zion. They have followed Him faithfully through His cleansing work in the Most Holy Place, and have had their sins blotted out from their lives and from the books of Heaven. They have stood firmly with Jesus in the final battle with the beast and his image, and have overcome. They have seen the earth ravaged during the seven last plagues, and have endured privation and threats of death. Now they are free to forever be with Jesus and go with Him wherever He goes, and to worship at His throne throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity, nevermore to part from their beloved Lord and Savior. Now is the time, and we are the people who are being called to be the wave sheaf, the firstfruits of the earth. Let us respond with eagerness and joy to God's final call to follow Him completely through the days ahead until we see Him coming in the clouds of glory.

And now, "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy -- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." Jude 24, 25.

*All scripture texts are taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

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