

Christian Perfection

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Justification does something **for** us:

- Sins are forgiven
- Imputation of Christ's righteousness
- Restoration to divine favor
- New status in the eyes of God

As we continue to walk with God, dedicating our lives to God, **every day** the **justifying grace** of God

- Continues to cover us with Christ's robe of righteousness,
- Forgives sins – as the Holy Spirit continues to convince us of sin in our lives, and
- We stand before God as if we had never sinned.

Sanctification does something **in** us

- Beginning of a new life in Christ
- Beginning of restoration of the image of God
- Inward power is given to overcome temptations and the lingering presence of sin
- Impartation of Christ's righteousness

The inclination to sin we have inherited, with which we struggle, remains in the hearts of believers in Christ,

But, its power is no longer controlling believers. A new power is given in the new birth.

John 15:4-5 – “Abide in me, and I will abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Perfection is a biblical teaching

“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man **complete** [τελειον] in Christ.” Colossians 1:28 NASB

Key Components of *Last Generation Theology*

Perfection: True believers will follow the example of Jesus and overcome sin as He overcame. If they don't, they will not be saved, or be part of that last generation.
(semi-Pelagianism)

Is Last Generation Theology a biblical teaching regarding the concepts of sin and perfection?

To what extent is behavioral perfection expected of Christians before they die and of the last generation of believers at the moment of the Second Coming of Christ?

Confusion in Adventism

Perfection is a state of sinless behavior – no conscious mistake/sin will be done or seen in the life of a truly converted Christian.



THE WAY OF LIFE
 FROM PARADISE LOST TO PARADISE RESTORED.

Perfection refers to maturity in character and in one's relationship with God and others, a maturity that is always progressing.

Perfection will not be cognitively known by a believer – it is an experience that only God will be aware of.

1. Lingering Presence of Sin

We are justified, our sins are forgiven, and the Holy Spirit daily transforms our lives, but we remember that we continue to be imperfect sinners.

Should we consider the effect of the lingering presence of sin in the heart?

Philippians 2:3 – “Do nothing from **selfishness** or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.”

Selfishness

“The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from **true believers** . . . to the heavenly sanctuary. . . . But passing through **the corrupt channels of humanity**, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God.” (Manuscript 50, 1900, in *Selected Messages*, 1:344)

We need to be very careful about any teaching that says we can become perfect and never make any mistakes in our lives in order to be saved at the end of time.

It matters what we believe about this subject.

Why does this matter?

Unfortunate consequences:

Fear of God

Emphasis on personal efforts
(sanctification)

Little or no assurance of salvation

Living with guilt

2. Biblical Perfection

The Greek word used to refer to the concept of perfection is the adjective *teleios* and means

complete, perfect, full grown, mature.

The New Testament concept emphasizes maturity as distinguished from immaturity – not an idealized behavioral perfection.

In all these NT passages the obvious meaning of *teleios* is maturity – often in contrast to being a child.

- 1 Corinthians 14:20
- Ephesians 4:13
- Philippians 3:15
- Hebrews 5:14

1 Corinthians 14:20 NASB – “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be [*teleioi*] mature.”

Matthew 5:48 – “Therefore you are to be perfect [*teleios*], as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Philippians 3:8-16 is the most complete discussion of the concept of perfection/maturity in Paul's writings.

As Christian anticipates the end of time and the coming of Christ (which was Paul's hope in his lifetime), Paul emphasized perfection **as a mature growth in Christ**.

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

(Philippians 3:8-11 NASB)

“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect (verb *teleiō*), but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect [*teleioi*, mature], have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.”

(Philippians 3:12-16 NASB)

In Hebrew thought, perfection is attained within a relationship with God and emphasizes one's growing maturity in this relationship over a lifetime.

Christian Perfection

The biblical understanding of Christian perfection:

1. By faith, we are in Christ, and Him in us – and that is our entrance into eternal life. We are already perfect (mature) in Christ.
2. Sanctification and Perfection are first about character, not behavior (although behavior is a fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in one's life).
3. It is progressive and never ended.

“There is in the religious world a theory of sanctification which is false in itself and dangerous in its influence. In many cases those who profess sanctification do not possess the genuine article. Their sanctification consists in talk and will worship. Those who are really seeking to perfect Christian character will never indulge the thought that they are **sinless**. Their lives may be irreproachable, they may be living representatives of the truth which they have accepted; but the more they discipline their minds to dwell upon the character of Christ, and the nearer they approach to His divine image, the more clearly will they discern its spotless perfection, and the more deeply will they feel their own defects.” (*The Sanctified Life*, 7)

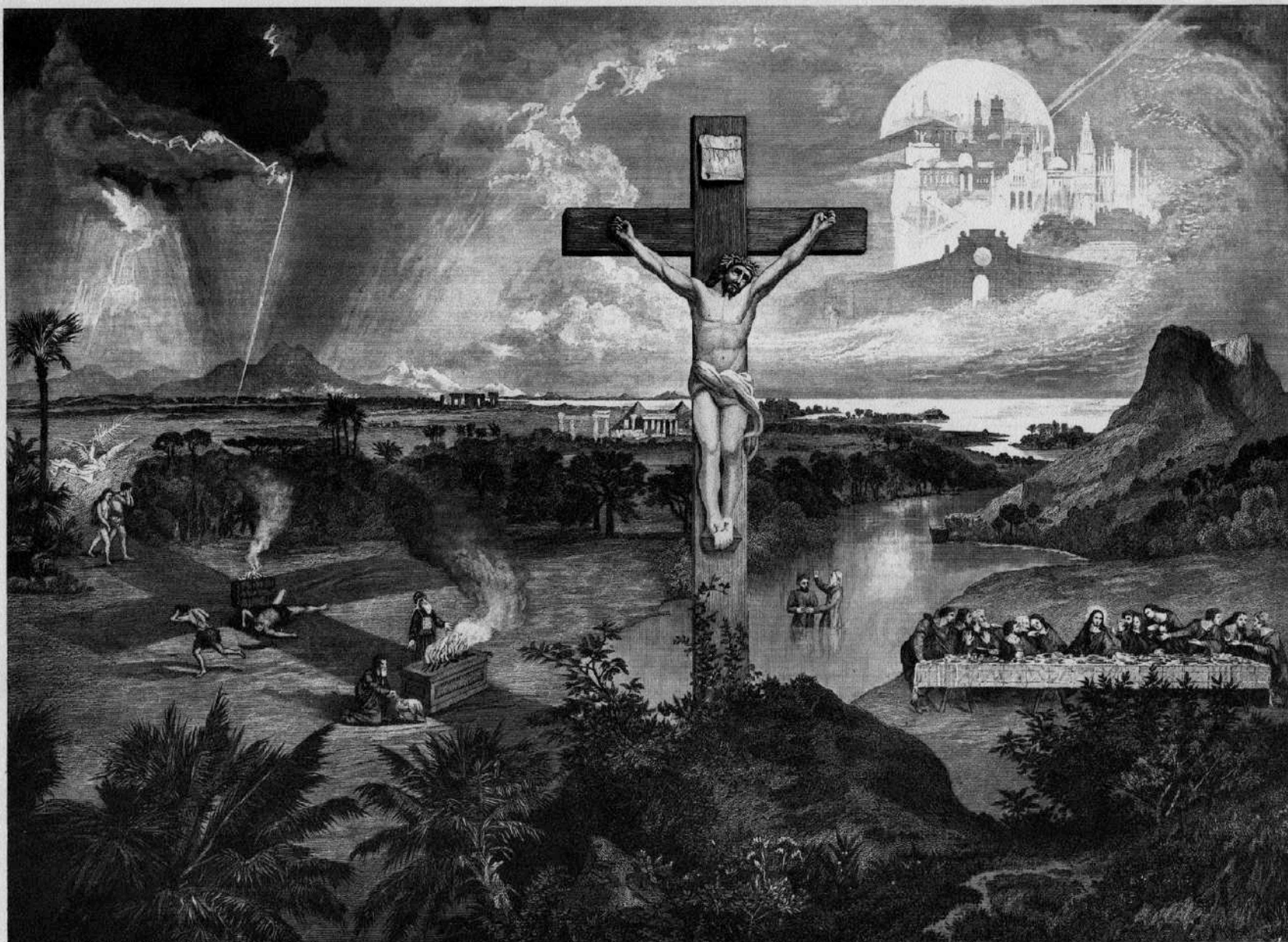
4. Jesus' life and character is to be contemplated: He is our example.
5. Yet, Jesus' example will never completely be reproduced in our lives – “the closer we get to Him the more sinful we see ourselves.”
6. By faith and union with Christ, the Holy Spirit gives power to overcome to those who surrender their lives to God.

“Christ is our pattern, the perfect and holy example that has been given us to follow. We can never equal the pattern; but we may imitate and resemble it according to our ability.” (*Review and Herald*, February 5, 1899)

“What efforts are we putting forth as the believers of unpopular truth, in self-denial, in self-sacrifice? **We can never equal the Pattern**, because it is infinite goodness practiced in His human nature, [yet] **we should make determined efforts with all the powers of our being to follow His example. ...** We are entrusted with the grace of God, and our commission is to resemble Him, making it our first business and calling to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” (*Manuscript Releases*, 16:299)

7. Christian perfection is a dynamic process of growth in Christ in surrender to God – a process that is already complete in Christ and at the same time one that continues to transform our character as we walk with the Holy Spirit.
8. Christian perfection is about fully manifesting the character of God in our lives, living His love toward others.

9. It is a state of being that the believer will never be conscious of because the closer we follow Jesus' example and character, the more sinful we see ourselves.
10. In Christ, at various stages of our journey with God, we are known to God as complete and perfect.



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Christ, the Way of Life



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“The Lord Jesus imparts all the powers, **all** the grace, **all** the penitence, **all** the inclination, **all** the pardon of sins, in presenting His righteousness for man to grasp by living faith—which is also the gift of God. If you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, **the proposition would be rejected as treason**. ... Christ for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. And **any works that man can render to God will be far less than nothingness**. My requests are made acceptable only because they are laid upon Christ’s righteousness. The idea of doing anything to merit the grace of pardon is fallacy from beginning to end. ... Man can achieve no praiseworthy exploits that give him any glory.” (Manuscript 36, 1890, in *Faith and Works*, 24)