

## II Christ Mediates for the Believer to Make His Performance—His Obedience, Service, Worship—Acceptable to the Father.

Many Ellen White statements speak of another aspect, a second dimension, of Christ's mediatorial ministry. They indicate that besides presenting the believers, as individual persons, moment by moment complete in Himself, Jesus makes their performance—their life as adopted children of God in Christ—perfectly acceptable to the Father.

As far as I know, no one has ever published a study on this aspect of Christ's mediatorial ministry. Apparently the students of Ellen White's writings have either overlooked it or failed to see its significance. We will therefore attempt to substantiate it here. First, we see *why* the believer needs Christ to mediate for his performance. Then we investigate *how*, according to Ellen White, the mediatorial ministry of Christ perfects the believer's actions so that they may meet the standard God requires.

### 1. Why the Believer Depends on Christ's Mediation in Order to Render Perfect Obedience.

The Christian's need to depend on Christ's mediation in order to render acceptable performance rests, first, on the absolute nature of the standard of perfection God has established, and second, on his own limitations as a sinner to meet the demands of the law.

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

God requires at this time just what He required of the holy pair in Eden—perfect obedience to His requirements. His law remains the same in all ages. The great standard of righteousness presented in the Old Testament is not lowered in the New (*Faith and Works*, p. 52). The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been—just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents—perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness (*Steps to Christ*, p. 62).

Many are deceived as to their true condition before God. They congratulate themselves upon the wrong acts which they do not commit, and forget to enumerate the good and noble deeds which God requires of them, but which they have neglected to perform (*The Great Controversy*, p. 601). The law demands perfect obedience. . . . The least deviation from its requirements, by neglect or willful transgression, is sin, and every sin exposes the sinner to the wrath of God (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 218). Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached (*Education*, p. 18).

We call attention to only three aspects of her statements: 1. The standard we must reach is not just obedience but *flawless obedience*, total compliance with God's will for humanity—mere approximations to perfection are not acceptable. 2. *The least deviation* from God's requirements is sin, and *every sin* exposes a person to the wrath of God. 3. Men are guilty not only for *doing evil* deeds but also for *not doing enough good* deeds.

Perfect obedience means the satisfaction of both the letter and the spirit of God's revealed word. It demands absolute harmony with all the divine principles that underlie *His entire will for man*. Anything short of this is imperfect obedience—an obedience that, instead of receiving God's approval, deserves His condemnation.

## PERFECT IN CHRIST

As a result, someone may never have violated a single specific prohibition of the Decalogue—such as taking God's name in vain, coveting, or bearing false witness—and still be condemned because he failed either to make God first or to love all his neighbors as himself all the time and under all circumstances. He neglected "justice and mercy and faith," which, according to Jesus, are "the weightier matters of the law" (Matt. 23:23, RSV).

The question as to whether the believer can meet God's standard of perfect obedience Ellen White answered both negatively and positively in her writings:

*No. Because he is a sinner, the believer cannot render perfect obedience to God, unless . . .*

It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God's law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us (*Steps to Christ*, p. 62).

Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367). It [the law] could not justify man, because in his sinful nature he could not keep the law (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 373). God will not bring His law down to meet the imperfect standard of man; and man cannot meet the demands of that holy law without exercising repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (*Faith and Works*, p. 29).

*Yes. In spite of his sinfulness, the believer can render perfect obedience to God, provided . . .*

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. . . . Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God's precepts (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 312-314).

The cross of Christ testifies to the immutability of the law of God. . . . Jesus died that He might ascribe unto the repenting sinner His own righteousness, and make it possible for man to keep the law (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 312).

An obvious tension exists between the two statements we have quoted. If taken at face value, they appear to contradict each other. However, when we examine them more carefully and study them on a broader basis, we find out that they do not contradict but complement each other. They belong to a type of writings that we should not consider to be either comprehensive, systematic, or conclusive. Instead, we must see them as partial statements that she never meant to constitute the full answer to the question they address. They merely point to a truth that is both deeper and broader than what they specifically express—a truth that, once understood, discloses their complementary nature and essential harmony.

The first set of statements actually affirms that, because he is a sinner, the believer cannot render perfect obedience to God *without partaking* of what Christ makes available through His mediatorial ministry. In turn the second set states that, in spite of his personal sinfulness, the believer can meet God's standard of perfect obedience, *provided that he participates in* what Christ makes available to him.

Notice again: "Man cannot meet the demands of that holy law *without* exercising repentance toward God and

## PERFECT IN CHRIST

faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Through repentance the believer secures God's forgiveness and through faith he becomes a participant in Christ's saving righteousness—both of which are made available to him through the mediation of Christ. So the problem is not that the law is unreasonably demanding, but that fallen man is incapable of obeying it perfectly. In turn the solution is not to attempt to transcend our sinfulness—for that is not possible in this life—but to become participants in the victory and merits of Christ.

### **2. How the Mediator Makes the Believer's Performance Perfectly Acceptable to God.**

We have seen that, according to Ellen White, God requires not just obedience, but perfect obedience. And we have suggested that she also indicates that such obedience is possible only through the believer's repentance toward God and his faith in Jesus. Now we shall endeavor to establish exactly *how* the mediation of Christ makes it possible for the believer to meet the standard God has established.

Christ, *in the victories achieved in His death* on Calvary's cross, plainly lays open the way for man, and thus makes it possible for him to keep the law of God through the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There is no other way (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 342). Jesus became the Mediator between God and man, to restore the repenting soul to favor with God by giving him grace to keep the law of the Most High (*Faith and Works*, p. 119, italics supplied). Through the grace of Christ we shall live in obedience to the law of God written upon our hearts (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372). No sin can be tolerated in those who shall walk with Christ in white. The filthy garments are to be removed, and Christ's robe of righteousness is to be placed upon us. By repentance and faith we are enabled to render obedience to all the commandments of God,

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

and are found without blame before Him (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 472). Only through faith in Christ is [perfect] obedience [to the requirements of the law] possible (*In Heavenly Places*, p. 146).

Through faith in Christ obedience to every principle of the law is made possible (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 6, p. 1077). In order to meet the requirements of the law, our faith must grasp the righteousness of Christ, accepting it as our righteousness. Through union with Christ, *through acceptance of His righteousness by faith*, we may be qualified to work the works of God, to be colaborers with Christ (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 374, italics supplied). Christ became the sinless sacrifice for a guilty race, making men prisoners of hope, so that through repentance toward God because they had broken His holy law, and through faith in Christ as their Substitute, Surety, and righteousness, they might be brought back to loyalty to God and to obedience to His holy law (*Faith and Works*, p. 118).

We will examine three ideas appearing in her statements: 1. Perfect obedience to God's will is possible to the believer. 2. The only way to achieve it is through Jesus Christ—"through the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There is no other way." 3. God's grace, the righteousness of Christ, and the believer's repentance and faith are the true key to perfect obedience.

Our examination of Ellen White's writings has led us to a somewhat surprising discovery: They consistently teach that *perfect obedience* to God's will is possible *only* when, through faith, the believer participates in what Christ does for him as his mediator and substitute in the Father's presence.

Christ's mediation makes the believer's obedience perfectly acceptable to the Father in three distinct yet interrelated ways: (1) through substitution, (2) through

## PERFECT IN CHRIST

purification, and (3) through complementarity. What follows, grouped under these three headings, is but a sample of her statements.

**a. Perfect obedience through *substitution*.** The Father accepts the all-sufficient righteousness of Christ—His holy character, His perfect merits, and His flawless obedience—in *place of* the believer's imperfections, shortcomings, and sinfulness.

Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned (*Steps to Christ*, p. 62).

The only way in which he [the sinner] can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account. Christ's righteousness is accepted in place of man's failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son. This is how faith is accounted righteousness; and the pardoned soul goes on from grace to grace, from light to a greater light (*Selected Messages*, book I, p. 367).

The moment the sinner believes in Christ, he stands in the sight of God uncondemned; for the righteousness of Christ is his: Christ's perfect obedience is imputed to him (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 429). The truth is

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

plain, and when it is contrasted with error, its character may be discerned. All the subjects of God's grace may understand what is required of them. By faith we may conform our lives to the standard of righteousness, because we can appropriate to ourselves the righteousness of Christ (*Faith and Works*, p. 97).

**b. Perfect obedience through purification.** Like a purifying incense, the saving righteousness of Christ cleanses the believer's worship, obedience, and service of their sinfulness makes them acceptable to God.

Before the believer is held out the wonderful possibility of being like Christ, obedient to all the principles of the law. But of himself man is utterly unable to reach this condition. The holiness that God's Word declares he must have before he can be saved is the result of the working of divine grace as he bows in submission to the discipline and restraining influences of the Spirit of truth. Man's obedience can be made perfect only by the incense of Christ's righteousness, which fills with divine fragrance every act of obedience (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 532).

The incense, ascending with the prayers of Israel, represents the merits and intercession of Christ, His perfect righteousness, which through faith is imputed to His people, and which can alone make the worship of sinful beings acceptable to God (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 353). Neither time nor events can lessen the efficacy of the atoning sacrifice. As the fragrant cloud of incense rose acceptably to heaven, and Aaron sprinkled the blood upon the mercy seat of ancient Israel and cleansed the people from guilt, so the merits of the slain Lamb are accepted by God today as a purifier from the defilement of sin (*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 124).

All must be laid upon the fire of Christ's righteousness to cleanse it from its earthly odor before it rises in a cloud of fragrant incense to the great Jehovah and is accepted as

## PERFECT IN CHRIST

a sweet savor. . . . 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. "Lord, in my hand no price I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling" (*Faith and Works*, p. 24).

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 (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 368). The merit of Jesus must be mingled with our prayers and efforts, or they are as worthless as was the offering of Cain. Could we see all the activity of human instrumentality, as it appears before God, we would see that only the work accomplished by much prayer, which is sanctified by the merit of Christ, will stand the test of the judgment (*Christian Service*, p. 263).

### **c. Perfect obedience through complementation.**

Christ takes the believer's honest, though imperfect, efforts to live in harmony with God's will and *completes* them—He perfects them—with His own merits so that they meet the divine requirements.

Faith and works go hand in hand; they act harmoniously in the work of overcoming. Works without faith are dead, and faith without works is dead. Works will never save us; it is the merit of Christ that will avail in our behalf. Through faith in Him, Christ will make all our imperfect efforts acceptable to God (*Faith and Works*, p. 48). Although the good works of man are of no more value without faith in Jesus than was the offering of Cain, yet covered with the merit of Christ, they testify [to] the worthiness of the doer to inherit eternal life (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 382).

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

The life of Christ is a perfect fulfillment of every precept of [the] law. He says, "I have kept my father's commandments." The knowledge of the law would condemn the sinner, and crush hope from his breast, if he did not see Jesus as his substitute and surety, ready to pardon his transgression, and to forgive his sin. When, through faith in Jesus Christ, man does according to the very best of his ability, and seeks to keep the way of the Lord by obedience to the Ten Commandments, the perfection of Christ is imputed to cover the transgression of the repentant and obedient soul (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 135).

Through the merits of the Redeemer, *God accepts the efforts of sinful man* in keeping His law, which is holy, just, and good (*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 41; italics supplied). When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man's best service, and *He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit* (*My Life Today*, p. 250; italics supplied).

Although the following passage refers specifically to prayer, it helps us to understand how, according to Ellen White, the mediation of Christ perfects the believer's deficient performance.

Every sincere prayer is heard in heaven. It may not be fluently expressed; but if the heart is in it, it will ascend to the sanctuary where Jesus ministers, and He will present it to the Father without one awkward, stammering word, beautiful and fragrant with the incense of His own perfection (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 667).

Clearly Christ's mediation has a double effect upon the "sincere prayer": 1. It removes the imperfections the prayer had as expressed by the petitioner. 2. It makes it "beautiful" with the incense of Christ's own perfection.

## PERFECT IN CHRIST

These considerations lead us to conclude that, according to Ellen White, Christ's mediatorial ministry is as essential as His death on the cross because through it He brings the plan of salvation to effectual realization for those who accept Him as their personal Saviour, by sharing with them the benefits of the redemptive work He completed at the cross. This sharing happens in a double way: 1. Christ imputes His atoning death, His redemptive victory, and His saving righteousness to the believer and thus presents him—as an individual person—perfectly righteous before the Father. 2. Christ imputes His personal merits to the believer's deficient life as a son of God and thus makes his obedience, his service, and his worship pleasing to the Father.

### **3. Some Scriptural Considerations.**

While some details contained in the statements previously discussed do not appear in the Bible, the basic concepts they present are thoroughly scriptural. The passages we discuss in this section should show the correlation. Paul states:

Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:18, 19).

Notice two basic points here: 1. The justification of the sinner rests not on what he is or on what he does—such as a perfect character or a flawless obedience—but on Christ's "act of righteousness." 2. "The many [a direct reference to the redeemed] will be made righteous" "through the obedience of the one man," namely Jesus Christ.

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

We have seen that, according to Ellen White, "the moment the sinner believes in Christ, he stands in the sight of God uncondemned; for the righteousness of Christ is his: Christ's perfect obedience is imputed to him." The believer "can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account." Although the passage in Romans does not use these exact words, it is clear that it establishes the same principle. Paul reveals the fact that Christ's act of righteousness results in "justification that brings life for all men." He thus indicates that the obedience of Jesus counts for—or is credited to—the believer so that the believer is made righteous on the basis of Christ's obedience imputed to him by faith.

The fact that Christ's mediation completes and perfects the partial compliance and imperfect efforts of the believer does not do away with the necessity of obedience, however. Jesus does not make conscious transgression and deliberate disobedience acceptable to God—only forgiveness, through repentance and confession can remedy that. Instead, it is the believer's true attempts to live a life worthy of God's adopted children in Christ (Eph. 4:1ff; 5:8ff) that the Saviour's righteousness cleanses of sin and makes perfect in the Father's sight.

Scripture teaches that Jesus "became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Heb. 5:9). This means that Jesus is the Saviour, not of those who consciously reject and deliberately contradict God's will for their lives, but only of those who obey Him. It also indicates that those who obey Him need Jesus as their Saviour. Not their obedience, but Christ is the source—the cause, the basis—of their salvation.

The "obedient" need a Saviour, not because they do wrong in obeying, but because God never planned

## PERFECT IN CHRIST

obedience to be another method to achieve saving righteousness—it is not the way for fallen beings to transcend their lost condition, outgrow their personal sinfulness, or achieve a state of spiritual wholeness. Paul states that “if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law” (Gal. 3:21). That is why no amount of obedience can give us access to salvation. Because eternal life exists only in Christ, we can have access to it only by possessing Him.

The second reason the obedient need a Saviour is that their obedience, being partial and imperfect, instead of earning them God’s favor, actually deserves His condemnation. That is why the One who is the “author and perfecter [“finisher,” KJV] of our faith, who . . . endured the cross . . . and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2), must originate redemption and bring it to completion (Phil. 11:6).

Peter states that the believer’s spiritual sacrifices—his worship, prayers, obedience, service—are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Evidently the basis on which God accepts the believer’s gifts of love and witness, praise and obedience, worship and service, is not the value of the gift or the merits of the giver. Instead, God responds favorably to them only when—and by reason of the fact that—the believer brings them through Jesus Christ, the mediator, who cleanses them of sin, removes their imperfection, and perfects them through the imputation of His personal merits. Only by approaching the Father through Christ does the believer show that he recognizes his true condition.

### 4. The Obedience of Faith

Since there is no uniform understanding of what constitutes true obedience, we will briefly discuss the

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

subject at this point. Some believe that in obedience it is the motive that counts. If the motive is selfish, then the obedience is worthless. But if the motive is love, then the obedience is genuine and pleasing to God. According to this view, a person's capacity to love holds the key to true obedience.

Others say that the difference between legalistic obedience and the obedience God requires lies in the power that the individual uses. If one obeys in one's own strength, then his response is legalistic and consequently unacceptable. However, if one obeys in the power of the Spirit, then one's obedience is true and genuine. Thus a person's capacity to use the power of the Spirit holds the key to perfect obedience.

Still others argue that we achieve true obedience when we precisely keep all ten commandments of the moral law. In their view, sin is no more than transgression of the letter of the law, narrowly defined as the Decalogue. Therefore if one does what it commands and abstains from what it forbids, then he renders true, total, and flawless obedience—an obedience acceptable on its own merits because it fully satisfies the standard set by God.

Obviously all three views have some merit—they are genuine and necessary parts of the answer. But they do not provide the complete explanation to what constitutes perfect obedience. Let us consider each view:

1. Love is indeed the only true motive. But love does not dictate what is good and what is evil. It cannot determine the moral quality of a deed, nor has it any power to make a wrong into a right. So unless one is properly informed and rightly guided by the principles of the moral order by which God rules the universe, love can prompt him to do something contrary to what is

## PERFECT IN CHRIST

truly good, right, and loving. Right motives and good intentions do not always lead to actions in harmony with God's will.

2. To say that the kind of power we use determines the nature of our obedience is inadequate for two basic reasons. First, it is inadequate because the injunctions of the law either command or prohibit us to do something without specifying either the method we must follow or the power we must employ in order to obey. For example, the commandment does not say "You shall not steal through the power of the Spirit." Instead, it says "You shall not steal," period. Therefore, if we have indeed refrained from stealing, then we have obeyed all this specific commandment requires of us. How we managed to obey is totally irrelevant as far as the demands of the law are concerned.

Second, and more importantly to make a distinction between obeying through the power of the Spirit and complying in our own strength creates a false antithesis. According to Scripture, the sinful nature of fallen man neither wants nor is able to obey God's will. Notice this passage from Paul:

The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit (Rom 8:7-9).

We therefore conclude that no fallen being ever endeavors to obey God's will all on his own. By himself he has neither the will nor the power to do what is right. His sinful mind does not want to submit to God's will, and his sinful nature does not have the strength such conformity requires. In view of this, we further conclude that, to the extent that a sinful being obeys God at

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

all, to that extent he is also responding to the promptings and acting by the enabling power of the Spirit.

3. The view that true obedience means faithful compliance with all ten commandments of the law falls short because God's will for fallen man transcends the specific commands and prohibitions contained in the Decalogue. As a partial statement of God's will for us, the law tells us only what we must do in order to live morally right, but it has nothing to say concerning what we must do to be saved. The law evaluates our behavior and tells us wherein we have sinned, but it does not explain to us how to be free of our guilt and have our condemnation revoked; nor does it reveal to us all that we must do in order to continue living in a proper relationship with God once we have been accepted into His fellowship. In other words, the law discloses that we are sinners but does not say how we are to be saved from our sin. It reminds us that we need a Saviour but does not say how or where we can find Him.

God's instructions—His decrees, statutes, and commands—telling us what to do to remedy our sin problem do not appear in the Decalogue. We find them only in the gospel as expressed in both Testaments of Scripture. Briefly stated, the Old Testament sinner had to bring, for example, a lamb as a sin offering to the tabernacle, confess his sin on its head, and kill it so the priest could use the lamb's blood to make atonement and secure God's forgiveness for him (Lev. 4-6). Failure to obey the laws regulating this ceremony had much greater consequences than rendering less than flawless obedience to the Decalogue. *God had made provision for those whose obedience did not measure up to the demands of the law, but none for those who failed to secure His forgiveness through the means He provided.*

## PERFECT IN CHRIST

This is a clear indication that the decision concerning whether a particular Israelite was obedient or not ultimately depended, not on his relationship to the law, but on his relationship to the lamb God provided as a symbol of Christ. We therefore conclude that, according to the Old Testament, the truly obedient were those who, having done their best to live in full harmony with the laws of God, recognized their transgression and shortcoming and came to God with the blood of a sacrifice to secure His forgiveness, and thus retain their place as members of God's covenant people. True obedience obviously included both submission to the injunctions of the moral law and compliance with the demands of the gospel as represented in the tabernacle services.

The same is true in the New Testament. Jesus stated plainly that He had not "come to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . but to fulfill them" (Mat. 5:17). He did not come to free us of the responsibility to live morally right, or to abolish the principles that govern God's creation so that we may please our sinful nature at will. But saying so does most definitely not mean that every time Jesus urged His listeners to keep either His own or the Father's commands He referred specifically to the Ten Commandments. Nor does it mean that the Saviour's call to discipleship imposes no further obligations than what the law requires—that His demands on us begin and end with what the Decalogue spells out.

When we read Christ's assertion "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15), many of us almost automatically think He is referring to the Ten Commandments. We must remember, however, that Jesus is here speaking primarily in His role as Saviour. Therefore the expression "obey what I command," though it may include the Decalogue, it is most certainly

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

not limited to it. Christ's command focuses especially on the demands and obligations that the gospel imposes on the believer. It deals not just with what we must do in order to "live a life worthy of the calling" we received, as Paul puts it (Eph. 4:1), but especially with what we must do in order to respond to this calling so that we may be reconciled to the Father and receive the adoption as sons and daughters of God.

The directives of the gospel originate in its particular nature and contribute to the realization of its unique objectives. Therefore they are essentially different from the injunctions of the law. Needless to say, the demands of the gospel are as binding and normative as those of the law. The salvation God provides in Christ demands certain specific responses from the sinner. For example, when during His earthly ministry Jesus proclaimed the good news of God, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15, RSV), He did more than appeal to the conscience of His listeners. He, in fact, made repentance and faith mandatory for any sinner seeking reconciliation with God. In the process, He revealed that they are a test of a sinner's obedience as truly as any of the commandments of the law.

Luke reports that as "the word of God spread," "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). We can be sure that many of these priests were as faithful to the law as is reasonable to expect of any fallen being. Like Paul they were "faultless" according to the law (Phil. 3:6). However, had they not become obedient to the gospel, they would have had no access to grace and hence no hope of eternal life.

Paul received "apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" (Rom. 1:5). "The obedience of faith" (RSV) comes

## PERFECT IN CHRIST

only from those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. *Without this faith-participation in the redemptive work of Christ, no amount of law-keeping will be able to reconcile us to God, grant us the right of adoption, and give us access to the Father's eternal inheritance.*

Jesus revealed that the demands of the gospel are mandatory when He said that "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" and "whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:16,18). Clearly a person's eternal destiny depends not on whether he obeys the law—if that were the standard no one would ever be saved—but on whether he responds as demanded by the gospel. Paul expressed the same point when he stated that "those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" "will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:8, 9). As was the case in Old Testament times, God has made provision for our failure to render flawless obedience to the law, but none for those who do not respond as the gospel demands.

It is therefore logical to conclude that, according to the New Testament, true obedience is ultimately determined not by a person's success in obeying the injunctions of the law, but by his faithful compliance with the demands of the gospel. *Consequently, the truly obedient are those who, having done their best to live as is worthy of the sons and daughters of God in Christ, recognize their sinfulness, imperfection, and unworthiness, and approach the Father in repentance and faith so that Christ's atoning blood may cleanse them of their guilt and His saving righteousness may keep them in a right standing with God.*

In view of this, it is also logical to say that when the biblical writer states that Jesus is "the source of eternal

## HIS OBEDIENCE, SERVICE, WORSHIP

salvation for all who obey him" (Heb. 5:9), he does not refer to a hypothetical group of superachievers who through their flawless obedience to the law develop in their own lives a righteousness as complete and meritorious as that of Christ. Instead, the writer speaks of those obedient to the Saviour as He confronts them in the gospel—namely the believers of all ages who "obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:8) in the fullest sense of the expression.

Although different in phraseology, the basic elements we have derived from Scripture are essentially the same as those we have seen earlier in Ellen White's writings: 1. Perfect obedience is possible only through repentance toward God on account of our sin and through faith in Christ for saving righteousness. 2. When we respond to the gospel in repentance and faith and come to the Father, trusting in the merits of the Son, our divine High Priest imputes the benefits of His redemptive work to us in order to make up for our deficiencies and to present us to God perfectly righteous in Christ.