

# RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH

Man's submission to sin catapulted him into the Dominion of Satan. There, no one survives. That kingdom leader has neither the ability nor interest to sustain life. In turn, Paul noted: "*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*" (Romans 5:12). A divine judicial sentence had been given before man's fall that promised total elimination of any perpetrators of sin. God's handiwork was to be restored to perfection through a cleansing process.

- The sentence of death was a forever punishment. One act of disloyalty was enough to come under that sentence (Genesis 2:17). In mercy it was given before sin came in. Thus, man could choose his destiny!
- That is judicial prudence at the highest level. God operates His government within statutes and laws clearly explained to man. Thus, that destiny was man's free moral choice.

Satan successfully obtained man's submission, thus making the annihilation of the human race seemingly assured. It was a triumph for the underworld and a temporary vindication of its rebellion. Then legal questions were raised about Satan's permanent rights. A divine court of appeal was promised. God justified His "stern" laws and announced that all cases could be taken up on appeal! Satan's dominion would be challenged, his claims proved wrong. Opportunity to vindicate God's laws would come through man himself. That is part of the stunning mission of redemption. The transformed sinner will vindicate right at the end!

- If God abolished or changed those laws, Satan's claim would remain correct.
- God then would be seen as originally creating a flawed system.

Any change to God's universe and its operations would, in essence, immortalize uncertainty.<sup>1</sup> It would redefine God. His government would suddenly be fallacious. Heaven's government must be shown as pristine, unchangeable and fair. He had noted: "*For I am the Lord, I change not*" (Malachi 3:6). The "*Father of lights*" has "*no variableness, neither shadow of turning*" (James 1:17). Legally, therefore, heaven was faced with two choices:

1. Let man die – let the human race be extinguished (implying that the divine system failed).
2. A divine Lawmaker assumes the guilt and then the punishment through a substitutionary act. If this happened – God could open the appeals court.

In a perfect universe there were no other alternatives. Either Satan is right or God's fairness must be expressed through an *ultimate solution*: the Law Giver becomes subject to His own statutes! That would become a preeminent expression of justice and love.

"Sorrow filled heaven as it was realized that man was lost and that the world which God had created was to be filled with mortals doomed to misery, sickness, and death, and that there was no way of escape for the offender. The whole family of Adam must die. I then saw the

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<sup>1</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, October 8, 1894.

lovely Jesus and beheld an expression of sympathy and sorrow upon His countenance. Soon I saw Him approach the exceeding bright light which enshrouded the Father. Said my accompanying angel, 'He is in close converse with His Father.' The anxiety of the angels seemed to be intense while Jesus was communing with His Father. Three times He was shut in by the glorious light about the Father, and the third time He came from the Father we could see His person. His countenance was calm, free from all perplexity and trouble, and shone with a loveliness which words cannot describe. He then made known to the angelic choir that a way of escape had been made for lost man; that He had been pleading with His Father, and had obtained permission to give His own life as a ransom for the race, to bear their sins, and take the sentence of death upon Himself, thus opening a way whereby they might, through the merits of His blood, find pardon for past transgressions, and by obedience be brought back to the garden from which they were driven. Then they could again have access to the glorious, immortal fruit of the tree of life to which they had now forfeited all right."<sup>2</sup>

To be voluntarily sentenced by one's own laws for another's crime is socially and legally unthinkable. Yet, that is what God proposed and implemented. Accepting the punishment of a guilty created being defines inexpressible love as in no other way! But perhaps the most profound expression of that act is the divine requirement that Christ's very "nature" be changed to accommodate that rescue! With foreknowledge into this divine purpose, it is difficult to believe that God still acted out every particular!

"Under the mighty impulse of his love, he took our place in the universe, and invited the ruler of all things to treat him as representative of the human family. He identified himself with our interests, bared his breast for the stroke of death, took man's guilt and its penalty, and offered in man's behalf a complete sacrifice to God. By virtue of this atonement, he has power to offer to man perfect righteousness and full salvation. Whosoever shall believe on him as a personal Saviour shall not perish, but have everlasting life."<sup>3</sup>

### **The Implementation**

There was only one way that all of the legal issues could be resolved – God Himself must become vulnerable to His laws, then be confronted by Satan with enticing moral choices, just as Adam and Eve experienced – but without falling. He must be placed in such a position that no created being could claim he was an exception to sin. Finally, the penalty of death must occur to "buy back" or legally redeem mankind from death row. Only if these conditions were met would the God of statutes and laws have a right to make directives for man to return to God's dominion.

How this was to be accomplished required altering the very nature of the Source of life. A spiritual being became *created matter* capable of encountering the devil. This is referred to as the "mystery of godliness." In many ways, eternity will never penetrate that divine quintessence.

- *"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory"* (I Timothy 3:16).

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<sup>2</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Early Writings*, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, April 18, 1893.

- “The incarnation of Christ is the mystery of all mysteries.”<sup>4</sup>
- Intriguingly, that redemptive **process** has an end. Its consummation is at the **center** of dramatic end-time prophecy: *“But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets”* (Revelation 10:7).
- Beyond man’s ability to analyze, feel or understand is the final absorption of the redeemed into administrative posts within the central government of the universe! Their change, the restoration process, is beyond even imagination.

“It had been provided that, should Adam fall a prey to the tempter's power, a ransom should be found in the Son of God, who should become man's Redeemer. An opportunity should be given to man to repent of his sin, and, through faith in Christ as his personal Saviour, to be restored to the divine image and favor. After the fall, the Lord said unto the serpent, ‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.’”<sup>5</sup>

The beautiful lyrics of a heavenly choir summarizes Christ’s success in that divine mission: *“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”* (Revelation 5:9).

Christ’s path from heaven (divine being) to earth (man/God) and back to heaven (retaining dual nature) was not easy. After assuming the dual nature He was rejected, despised, and became acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3), so much so he was called a “man of sorrows.” Finally, He suffered the pain of physical death. Permanently bonding to the work of His hands – His creation – gave our Lord Jesus Christ authority that no being in all the universe could wield. He became that “worthy Lamb.”

- As a God-man He could reach to the depth of human woe to reclaim and restore.
- As a man-God He could touch the throne of the universe and plead His perfect life/death on behalf of humanity.

“The power to redeem from sin and its effect is in Him alone, and to Him all men are directed.”<sup>6</sup>

*“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

Christ defeated Satan’s dominion and predicted, just before the Cross, that Satan – the prince of this world – would be “driven out” (John 12:31 – NIV). That was proleptic, for later John noted that the “whole world lieth in wickedness” (I John 5:19). But a way to break away from that bondage and escape that grip had been made. That promise is the key which the redeemed must trust to open the door to eternal life. Jesus noted:

- *“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”* (John 6:37).

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<sup>4</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Heavenly Places*, p. 41).

<sup>5</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, October 8, 1894.

<sup>6</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Life Sketches*, p. 472.

- For any temptation he said he would “*make a way of escape*” so it can be successfully confronted (I Corinthians 10:13).

### **Connecting with Heaven**

Through Christ’s incarnation and life, a new order of being was introduced into the universe. Intriguingly, this began with only one individual! He was the Son of God and Son of man. God the Father chose to dwell in this Being, Jesus.

“*For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell*” (Colossians 1:19) – a divine/human order was established. It was new!

The plan was beautiful. Then, by dying, the Son of man would legally become the Savior of man. This opened the way for every individual to become (Colossians 1:22):

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holy</li> <li>• Unblameable</li> <li>• And unproveable</li> </ul> | } | <p>As divinity would bond with man, a new kingdom of God would form with the Savior as its head. Each person could advance to become kings and priests. This would be the Melchizedek order.</p> |
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He not only paid the penalty for man’s sin but He became sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). Does this mean all are saved? Is everyone, therefore, justified before God and without guilt? That is the belief of many – but it is at variance with Scripture. Paul gives evidence of this in many ways:

- We implore you, Be ye “reconciled to God” (II Corinthians 5:20).
- Doers of the law “shall be justified” (Romans 2:13).
- Be ye doers and not only hearers of the word (James 1:22).
- To him that knows what good is and doeth it not is sin (James 4:17)
- We must put on the wedding garment (Matthew 22:11-12).

A vast array of Bible directives are presented that order unique standards. Salvation remains on a strong moral premise, showing that man must choose to accept specific conditions. But there is a caveat: We are unable to follow them because of our natures.

- That is one of the most fascinating dilemmas.
  - Christ bore our guilt, paid death’s penalty and did live by those standards.
  - Man is to replicate them – to be just like Jesus.
  - Faith anticipates that we will make Christ’s life our own.<sup>7</sup>
- But – there is an impasse between what is required and what man is capable of doing.

“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 ... He has not the wisdom or the strength to overcome; these belong to the Lord, and **He bestows them** on those who in

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<sup>7</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 82.

humiliation and contrition seek Him for help.”<sup>8</sup> There is the key! Beyond the Cross, saving merit can be legally granted to the sinner by Christ’s authority! This divine generosity is called “grace.” Man becomes justified or cleared of guilt by our Savior’s intercessory request – amazing!

Then how can this all be initiated? The above notation is filled with additional counsel of how that journey can occur. Man must:

1. Bow in submission to the discipline of His Word and the restraining influences of the Spirit of truth.
2. Persevere in overcoming every fault.
3. Constantly pray to the Savior to heal your sin-sick soul.
4. In humiliation and contrition seek His help. Strength is then bestowed.

These subjective directives must stimulate our sensitivities to objective action. It means that we step forward to please Jesus in everything. It means that we continually seek to discover new ways to make Him happy.

“God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom. The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness, they have a place at the King's feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng.”<sup>9</sup>

Meeting that high moral standard can be a satisfying challenge, if we fall in love with Jesus. If we see the requirements as legal mandates, our journey will be a non-ending source of oppression. If we see them as a wonderful way to please Jesus, the satisfaction will be endless! We will be legally secure – forever.

### **The Biblical Road Map**

Paul noted: *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* (Hebrews 11:6).

- The words here for “faith” is *pistis* and “believe,” *pisteuo*.
- They signify trust and confidence in what Jesus has done and continues to do.
- That confidence is so deep it encompasses our pledge of loyalty to Him.<sup>10</sup>
- *Pistis* anticipates action – this point is frequently overlooked. *Pisteuo* is acting.

This is so profound that God’s righteousness – His goodness – is revealed through that trust by His confidence in us. *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as*

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<sup>8</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 532.

<sup>9</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 315.

<sup>10</sup> Friberg Lexicon.

*it is written, The just shall live by faith*" (Romans 1:17) – all in anticipation of a growing friendship with Jesus!

This process begins through a growing acquaintance with Him. In fact, He said: "*learn of me*" (Matthew 11:29-30). We must personally discover how wonderful He really is!

"Christ's followers must imitate Christ in disposition. The Pattern is given us to copy, and no excuse will be accepted of God as a reason for not meeting the divine standard, however contrary it may be to our own nature, our own selfish desires and inclinations. **Like Christ** is the watchword, not like your father or your mother, but like Jesus Christ – hid in Christ, clothed with Christ's righteousness, imbued with the Spirit of Christ."<sup>11</sup>

We must "*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me*" (John 5:39). The very nature, life, actions and words of Jesus must be seen and absorbed. They must be the catalyst to everything we are!

How do we activate this process where Christ's righteousness – His obedience – His disposition – His character – are placed before God as ***if they were ours?***

- We repent of our sins.
- Genuine sorrow for sin leads to confession.
- "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (1 John 1:9).
- We are then legally seen without charges. This verse is a significant summation of Biblical Soteriology.

One of the wonders of the gospel of faith is knowing that pardon and justification are one and the same. We confess, then:

- "The sinner receives the forgiveness of his sins, because these sins are borne by his Substitute and Surety. The Lord speaks to His heavenly Father, saying: "This is My child, I relieve him from the condemnation of death, giving him My life insurance policy--eternal life--because I have taken his place and have suffered for his sins. He is even My beloved son." Thus man, pardoned, and clothed with the beautiful garments of Christ's righteousness, stands faultless before God.... ***It is the Father's prerogative to forgive our transgressions and sins, because Christ has taken upon Himself our guilt and relieved us, imputing to us His own righteousness.*** His sacrifice satisfies fully the demands of justice."<sup>12</sup>
- The amazing journey back to Eden has begun.
- It is all because Jesus showed it could be done, and through that ***authority***, He promises to defend the repentant sinner who wants to be like Him!

Christ's righteousness has now been imputed or legally given to us.<sup>13</sup> You now have on the wedding garment.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Daughters of God*, p. 169.

<sup>12</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Faith and Works*, p. 103.

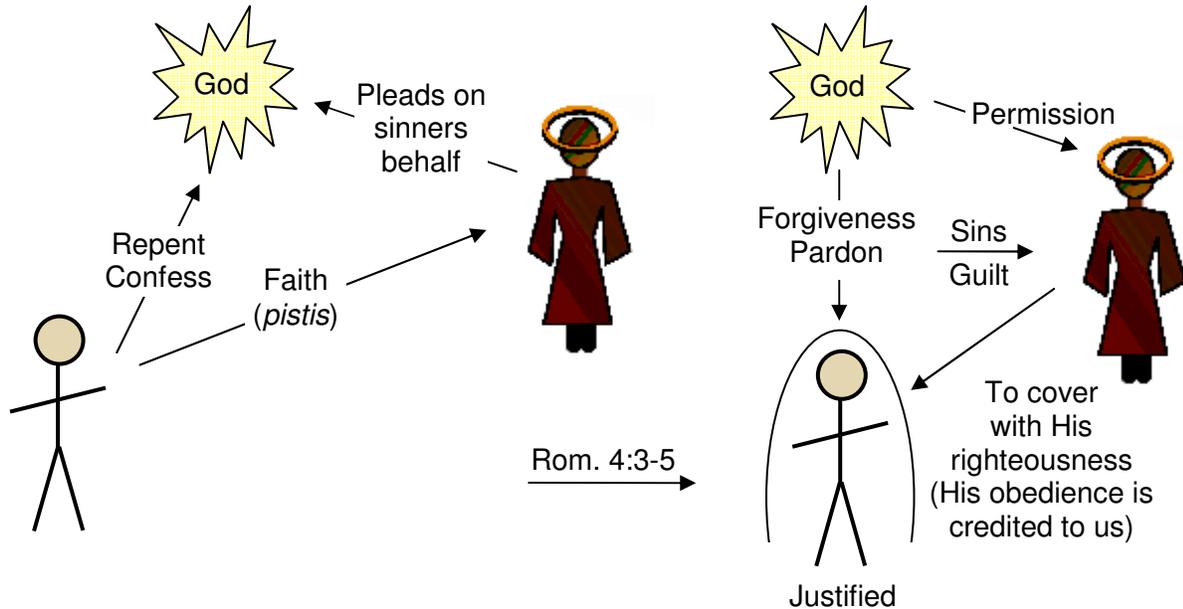
<sup>13</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Faith and Works*, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, December 20, 1892.

## The Journey with Christ

As our vision of Jesus deepens, our respect for Him grows. Concomitantly, our self-confidence in our goodness weakens.<sup>15</sup>

Spiritual strength comes by imbibing the nourishing Word. The soul must be constantly fed by such truth to be strong.<sup>16</sup>



This move **anticipates** action.

This begins a new life.  
We have made a complete surrender.

“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. The only way in which he 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.”<sup>17</sup>

## Becoming a Heavenly Citizen

Christ's life was a perfect expression of the law.<sup>18</sup> Once the garment of Christ's righteousness is on, there is willing and cheerful obedience to the law.<sup>19</sup> We then magnify it because His

<sup>15</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Faith I Live By*, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, January 24, 1893.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, November 4, 1890.

<sup>18</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Amazing Grace*, p. 148.

<sup>19</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, September 19, 1899.

righteousness is in the law.<sup>20</sup> This is what the final test will be based upon.<sup>21</sup> (Specifically, the Decalogue.)

The journey that follows is unique:

- We are given a special overcoming endowment of the Spirit (I Corinthians 10:13, Isaiah 27:5).
- As we persevere to overcome,<sup>22</sup> we are cleansed.
- We become His representative.<sup>23</sup>
- Additional power is given if our witness is met with opposition.<sup>24</sup>
- Daily we obtain clearer light.<sup>25</sup>

Once we are clothed with the garment of Christ's holiness, another step in our journey upward is introduced. The very essence of the divine nature must become a transforming influence, bringing purification of the soul and holiness. Jesus craves our presence and activity in His kingdom of Grace.

It is true that our acts of "good" sink into nothingness without a partnership with Jesus. But once we have reached out to Him in faith and repent of our sins, we begin to act just like He acts! Paul knew this when he said:

- *"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (Romans 3:20).
- *"For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified"* (Romans 2:13).

This may appear like a fine line, but it isn't! It may seem contradictory, but that is far from reality. There is a vast difference between:

1. Pretending to be like Him and
2. Being – deep inside – like Him

This is where the Bible introduces that other word for faith or belief. *Pistis* is what we've just discussed. It is a noun. But *pisteuo* is a verb. It is tied to themes related to salvation and everlasting life.

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth [pisteuo] in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

*"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth [pisteuo] on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life"* (John 5:24).

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<sup>20</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Faith and Works*, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Maranatha*, p. 200.

<sup>22</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Heavenly Places*, p. 129; cf. James 4:7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Lift Him Up*, p. 315; cf. My Life Today, p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Maranatha*, p. 95.

*“He that believeth [pisteuo] and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).*

*“But we believe [pisteuo] that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:11).*

*“And they said, Believe [pisteuo] on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).*

This is why many have said: Justification is our title to heaven (comes by *pistis*). Sanctification is our fitness for heaven (*pisteuo* is our “being” more and more like Him). *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Corinthians 5:17).* This is a genuine change with Christ in us (Colossians 1:27).

“As we meditate upon the perfections of the Saviour, we shall desire to be **wholly transformed**, and renewed in the image of his purity. There will be a hungering and thirsting of soul to become like him whom we adore. The more our thoughts are upon Christ, the more we shall speak of him to others, and represent him to the world.”<sup>26</sup>

“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.”<sup>27</sup>

“The sanctification of the soul by the operation of the Holy Spirit **is the implanting of Christ's nature in humanity.** It is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ revealed in character, and the grace of Christ brought into active exercise in good works. Thus the character is transformed more and more perfectly after the image of **Christ in righteousness and true holiness.** There are broad requirements in divine truth stretching out into one line after another of good works. The truths of the gospel are not unconnected; uniting they form one string of heavenly jewels, as in the personal work of Christ, and like threads of gold they run through the whole of Christian work and experience.”<sup>28</sup>

These ideals are more than platitudes in the Christian walk. They are transforming forces that must lead us to becoming more and more like a citizen of the eternal kingdom.

“We can be sanctified only as we render obedience to the truth as it is unfolded to us. We cannot live in conscious disobedience of any precept of God, and not be on the losing side. We need to behold the character of Christ, and by beholding become changed into his image.”<sup>29</sup>

“God's people are in danger of being separated from the Sun of Righteousness. ‘This is the will of God,’ the apostle says, ‘even your sanctification.’ This sanctification means perfect love, perfect obedience, entire conformity to the will of God. We are to be sanctified to him through obedience to the truth. Our conscience must be purged from dead works to serve the living God. If our lives are conformed to the life of Christ through the sanctification of mind, soul, and

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<sup>26</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Christian Education*, p. 57.

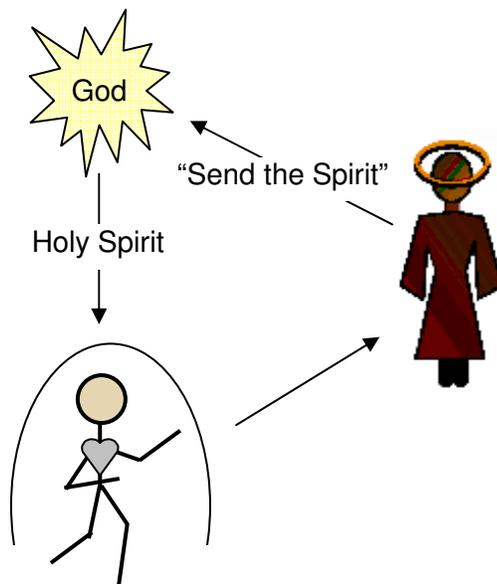
<sup>27</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Last Day Events*, p. 183.

<sup>28</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, bk 3, p. 198.

<sup>29</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, July 4, 1895.

body, our example will have a powerful influence on the world. We are not perfect; but it is our privilege to cut away from the entanglement of self and sin, and go on unto perfection. 'We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' Great possibilities, high and holy attainments, are placed within the reach of all who have true faith. Shall we not anoint our eyes with eye-salve, that we may discern the wonderful things God has for us?"<sup>30</sup>

This now brings us to the final steps in our walk upward.



More and more I become like Jesus as the Spirit transforms my heart. This cycle never ceases.

Franklin S. Fowler, Jr., M.D.  
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<sup>30</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Youth Instructor*, August 24, 1899.