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LIVING WITHOUT AN INTERCESSOR IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez



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Introduction

Ellen G. White wrote a number of important statements about the cessation of Christ's mediation in the heavenly sanctuary that, because of their implications for the Christian life, deserve some attention.¹ There are different ways of approaching this study, but we will analyze them following the chronological order of her writings. This approach has several advantages: First, it allows us to see how the Lord guided her in gaining, over time, a better understanding of the topic. Second, we will see the reasons for using the topic in a particular context. Third, this approach allows us to interpret each statement within its own context, avoiding using a collage of statements from different sources and periods that would not take into consideration the context of each.² Finally, we will examine what Ellen White has to say about how we should prepare for living in the presence of God without a mediator. She rejects sinless perfection—the conviction that believers can reach a spiritual condition where they will no longer sin—but supports the biblical perfection that is inseparable from dependence on Christ's atoning work for us.³

¹ According to Carlos A. Steger, "Què significa vivir sin intercessor" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 1, these statements "have become for many a source of fear and anxiety. They understand that the intercession of Christ is indispensable to obtain forgiveness and are terrorized thinking that after Christ leaves the heavenly sanctuary they will be left to their own fate, with the possibility of sinning any time and being lost forever." George R. Knight, *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness: A Study of Sin and Salvation* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), 193, adds that some Adventists read these statements by Ellen G. White as implying that in order to live without an intercessor "one must be sinlessly perfect in the fullest sense of the word. The very thought of such a prospect has led many Adventists to spiritual agony—much of it less than healthy." What is offered in this paper is an attempt to read Ellen White contextually in order to clarify her understanding of Christian perfection in the context of the closing of Christ's intercessory ministry in the heavenly temple.

² The importance of carefully studying the context of any of Ellen G. White's statements has been forcefully emphasized by Knight, who shows that she was opposed to the practice of collecting statements from her own writings without taking into consideration the context of each one. See, George R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White: How to Understand and Apply her Writings* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1997), 85–89. We should suspect any list of statements from Ellen White collected in order to make a particular point, but which have been removed from their immediate context. This is particularly important in the area of her understanding of Christian perfection, a complex topic that requires careful analysis of her writings as a whole. On her understanding of Christian perfection, the following volumes are extremely useful: George R. Knight, *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness: A Study of Sin and Salvation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2001); and Woodrow W. Whidden, *Ellen White on Salvation: A Chronological Study* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1995).

³ According to Hans K. LaRondelle, *Perfection and Perfectionism: A Dogmatic-Ethical Study of Biblical Perfection and Phenomenal Perfectionism*, Andrews University

Early General Statements (1845, 1847)

We will first examine a number of Ellen White's statements from her early years in which no mention is made of the end of Christ's mediation, but which contain information she would later associate with the cessation of Christ's work. It will be shown that she had a progressive understanding of the eschatological events that will take place in the heavenly sanctuary and on earth shortly before the coming of Christ. Little by little, the Lord revealed to her information that resulted in a depiction of the last events that is complex but well integrated. This is particularly the case with respect to the cessation of Christ's mediation and its concomitant effects on the church and the world.

In one of Ellen White's early visions, dated approximately February 1845,⁴ before her marriage, she sees Jesus and the Father seated on the throne in the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. The vision is about events related to the movement of the Father and the Son from the holy place to the most holy. After the Father leaves for the most holy, she sees Jesus rising from the throne and a small group of His people following Him as He heads into the most holy place. On His way, Jesus stops. He "raised his right arm and we heard his lovely voice saying, wait ye, I am going to my Father to receive the Kingdom. Keep your garments spotless and in a little while I will return from the wedding, and receive you to myself."⁵ Jesus is now before the Father "as a great High Priest."⁶ The small company follows Him by faith and at Jesus' request the Father gives them the Holy Spirit as an answer to their prayers. Apart from the movement of God and Christ from the holy to the most holy place, the vision is important for us for two reasons: First, Jesus asks His people to keep their garments spotless while He officiates in the most holy place. He is interested in the integrity of their spiritual life. Ellen White will later clarify that the garments are preserved spotless through repentance, confession, and by appropriating the truth as it is in Jesus.⁷ But in the present

Monographs Studies in Religion III (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1971), 327, this is also the biblical understanding of perfection.

⁴ Ellen G. White reported the vision in Ellen G. White, "March 14, 1846, Letter from Sister Harmon. Falmouth, Mass. Feb. 15, 1846," *Day Star*, March 14, 1846, 13. It was also published in Ellen G. White, *To the Little Remnant Scattered Abroad*, Broadside 1, 1846, par. 7.

⁵ E. G. White, "Letter from Sister Harmon," par. 1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ According to Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 8:250: "God has not changed toward His faithful servants who are keeping their garments spotless. . . . Unless there is thorough repentance, unless men

context this idea is not developed. Second, there is a reference to the outpouring of the Spirit. The vision could be read as suggesting that the Spirit was given to the small congregation immediately after Jesus went into the most holy place. But this is something she will clarify through future visions. Although the vision describes the movement that initiates the work of Christ in the most holy place, nothing is said about the moment He will finish His priestly work in the heavenly temple.

In that same letter, she mentions another vision she has four months later (around June 1845) concerning future eschatological events. In this case, the order of the eschatological events is not the most important thing because the vision is only a brief summary of biblical end-time events. There is a time of trouble, Jacob's trouble, which God's people will experience after being sealed, but the nature of the sealing is not explained.⁸ There is a time of trouble that impacts the world with famine, pestilence, and war, while the people of God pray for deliverance. She observes Jesus rising up in the most holy place and she understands that He is coming out. For the first time in her writings, she implies that Christ will finish His high priestly work in the most holy place, but this is not clarified or developed. Since God's people are in anguish, Jesus announces to them the hour and day of His coming, and as a result "the saints were free, united and full of the glory of God, for he had turned their captivity."⁹ Then Jesus changes His priestly garments for His kingly robe and gets on the cloud that will take Him to earth. Obviously he has finished His work of mediation in heaven.

We find a similar situation in a letter Ellen White writes to Brother Bates on April 17, 1847.¹⁰ While in vision she is taken to the heavenly temple, to the holy and most holy places. There she sees the ark and inside it the tables of the Ten Commandments, with a special light around the fourth commandment.¹¹ The focus of the vision is on the eschatological importance of the Sabbath. She comments, "At the commencement of the time of trouble, we were filled with the Holy Ghost as we went forth [Hos 6:2-3] and proclaimed the Sabbath more fully."¹² During the time of trouble they "endured persecution" but in the land she "saw the sword, famine, pestilence, and great

humble their hearts by confession and receive the truth as it is in Jesus, they will never enter heaven."

⁸ E. G. White, "Letter from Sister Harmon," par. 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ James White, *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (Gorham, ME, 1947), 18-20.

¹¹ Ibid., 18.

¹² Ibid., 19.

confusion.”¹³ Thinking that God’s people were responsible for the judgments, the wicked come together to plan how to exterminate them. This is the time when the mark of the beast is enforced on the people and Sabbath observance becomes the decisive issue. During the time of trouble, God’s people leave the villages and cities and cry “day and night for deliverance.”¹⁴ It is the voice of God that delivers them, announcing the day and the hour of Jesus’ coming. At that moment “their countenances were lighted up with the glory of God; and they shone with the glory as Moses’ face did when he came down from Sinai.”¹⁵ The shining of the face shows that they, like Moses, have been in deep communion with God. The vision closes with the second coming of Christ.

Since the vision is about the eschatological significance of the Sabbath, Ellen White does not provide a detailed exposition of eschatological events.¹⁶ In future writings she will more fully clarify the sequence of these events. Surprisingly, for a vision that begins with the heavenly temple, she does not say anything about the end of Christ’s high priestly ministry in conjunction with the time of trouble. Neither in this vision nor in the previous ones do we find any emphasis at all on the spiritual preparation of God’s people for the time of trouble.

Statements in Chronological Order

Letter to Eli Curtis (1847)

Two weeks later, Ellen White writes a letter to Eli Curtis dated April 21, 1847,¹⁷ in which she adds a few more eschatological details. She writes to Brother Curtis in order to compare his views on some eschatological events with what God had revealed to her. She confirms some of his views and corrects others. The Lord had showed her that the standing up of Michael, mentioned in Daniel 12:1, is still

¹³ James White, “*Little Flock*,” 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶ She later clarifies her reference to the outpouring of the Spirit at the beginning of the time of trouble, which enables believers to proclaim the Sabbath with power. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 85–86, indicates that “‘the commencement of that time of trouble,’ here mentioned does not refer to the time when the plagues shall begin to be poured out, but to a short period just before they are poured out, while Christ is in the sanctuary. . . . At that time, the ‘latter rain,’ or refreshing from the presence of the Lord, will come, to give power to the loud voice of the third angel, and prepare the saints to stand in the period when the seven last plagues shall be poured out.”

¹⁷ See James White, “*Little Flock*,” 11–12.

in the future¹⁸ and will take place when Jesus finishes “his priestly office in the Heavenly Sanctuary,” exchanges His priestly garments for His royal robe, and rides forth “on the cloudy chariot, to ‘thresh the heathen in anger,’ and deliver his people.”¹⁹ While Jesus is traveling on the cloud to earth, “the saints will cry day and night to Jesus on the cloud, to thrust his sharp sickle and reap”²⁰ (Rev 14:14–16). She identifies the experience of the saints as the time of Jacob’s trouble, “out of which, the saints will be delivered by the voice of God.”²¹

This is the first time in her published writings that Ellen White makes an explicit connection between Daniel 12:1 and the end of Jesus’ priestly ministry in the heavenly temple. This also appears to be the first time she explicitly speaks about Jesus finishing His high priestly ministry in heaven. There are two important details we should take with us from this statement. First, her purpose is to show that this is one of the most important eschatological events yet to take place. The events that follow appear to be in chronological order. Christ leaves heaven on the cloud with a double mission: to express His anger against the wicked and to deliver His people. She clarifies that these events take place during “the time of Jacob’s trouble.” The saints’ need for deliverance is expressed through their intense prayers addressed to Jesus while He is on His way to earth. They are delivered by the voice of God, which, according to previous visions, tells them the day of the second coming. The closing of Christ’s ministry, according to this vision, is the event that ushers in the last chapter of the cosmic conflict before the coming of Christ. It is a transitional event leading to the punishment of the wicked and the deliverance of God’s people. For them, this is the moment that will bring to an end their conflict with the forces of evil. Second, Ellen White does not say anything about how God’s people should prepare to face these last events.

Letter 1: To Brother and Sister Hastings (1848)

In a letter written to Brother and Sister Hastings on May 29, 1848,²² Ellen White provides more information about the end of Christ’s mediation with an indirect emphasis on what is expected from God’s people. She mentions the intense trials she has been going through²³ and says the Lord instructed her to stay in Connecticut, where she was living at that time, promising to strengthen her to

¹⁸ See James White, “*Little Flock*,” 12.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ellen G. White, “Letter 1, 1848: To Brother and Sister Hastings,” in *Manuscript Releases*, 21 vols. (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981–1993), 4:323–325.

²³ Ibid., 4:323.

“endure the trials” she will face.²⁴ She exhorts Sister Hastings, “Let nothing cast you down but be encouraged and remember Jesus hath the watchful care over you.”²⁵ It is in the setting of her trials and the exhortation to trust in God that she writes:

Time is very short, deliverance is coming and Satan knows it and is working in great power. I can see the restraint is being taken off from the wicked, and very soon when Jesus steps out from between the Father and man it will be entirely gone. Now is the time we must watch on every hand, against the wiles of Satan and have steady, abiding faith in God, faith that will stand the trial, such faith as Elijah had when he prayed for rain.²⁶

There are several details in this statement that need our attention. First, contextually, the deliverance she is talking about is deliverance from trials she associates with Satan and his activities. Second, one of the main purposes of the statement is to show that after the end of Christ’s mediation the wickedness of the unrighteous will find full expression. Third, there is no reference to Christ’s work as high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, but this is assumed by Ellen White. Fourth, another primary purpose of the statement about the end of Christ’s work of mediation is to exhort the readers concerning what they should be doing now. She mentions two main spiritual preparations: 1) Christians should be on the alert—“to watch on every hand”—against the deceptions of Satan, and 2) they need to develop a faith in God that will stand “the trial.” This is important for her because trials could break the believers’ hold on the Lord. Notice that she refers to “the trial” and not to “trials.” The use of the definite article (“the”) and the singular (“trial”) suggests that believers will go through it after Christ is no longer “standing between God and man.”²⁷ Deliverance

²⁴ Ellen G. White, “Letter 1, 1848” in *Manuscript Releases*, 4:323.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4:324.

²⁶ *Ibid.* (Emphasis supplied).

²⁷ In fact, she clarifies that “the trial” will occur during the time of trouble, which she apparently also calls “the day of slaughter.” According to Ellen G. White, “The Life of Christ—No. 6,” *Youth Instructor*, May 1, 1873, par. 11, “fifteen hundred years after this night [the Passover night], Jesus, the antitype of the paschal lamb, died upon the cross for the sins of the world. The lamb without blemish represented the spotless Lamb of God, without the taint of sin. As the houses of Israel were to be sprinkled with blood in order for the avenging angel to pass over them, so it will be necessary for us to repent of our sins and avail ourselves of the virtue of the blood of Christ to guard us from the avenging angel of God in the day of slaughter. Through Christ alone is our pardon to be obtained. His blood will protect us from a sin-avenging God.” She does not explain what she means by “the time of trouble/day of slaughter,” but in the future she will

from the coming trial will require placing their faith in Him and His power to save—not in what they have accomplished. He can and will deliver those who place their faith in Him.²⁸ She will further develop the idea of placing one's faith in God in her later discussion of the ceasing of Christ's mediation; this idea will become decisive in the final victory of God's people.

In the letter, Ellen White moves from the trials²⁹ experienced by believers to the eschatological trial they will experience when Christ is no longer standing between the Father and humans. To get ready means to be watchful and learn to trust completely in God. That faith is acquired now when we face difficulties in the Christian life and choose to wait on the Lord—to trust in His power to save us even if the answer to our prayers is delayed.

Broadside 2 (January 5, 1849)

On January 31, 1849, Ellen White published in Broadside 2 (an article printed on a long sheet of paper) a vision she had on January 5, 1849.³⁰ The purpose of the article is to list in chronological order events related to the closing ministry of Christ in the heavenly temple and to exhort believers to be ready. In the vision, Ellen White is taken to the most holy place of the heavenly temple where she sees Jesus officiating as our high priest. Then she describes the events that will follow, moving back and forth so as to further clarify them: 1) When

write much more about the time of trouble. The time of the slaughter, she will clarify, is the time when God's wrath will be manifested against the wicked.

²⁸ She illustrates the nature of that faith by recalling Elijah's experience. He prayed for rain and, although his prayer was not immediately answered, he trusted in the Lord and kept on praying until the Lord finally answered his prayer. In other words, "he did not give up in discouragement. . . . Elijah had faith that holds on and that would stand the trials seven times" (E. G. White, "Letter 1, 1848"). In the letter, Ellen White proceeds to exhort Sister Hastings to "hold on to faith" as she faces her trials and not to pay attention to her feelings. She also expresses concern about church members: "I often awake myself crying to God's people to get ready, get ready that the cloak of Almighty God may be thrown around them and they be hid in the time of trouble"—that is to say, they will be under His protection (*ibid.*).

²⁹ When closing the letter, she asks Sister Hastings to "pray for me. I have trials that none but God knows of, but I have started for eternal life and I cannot stop this side. I must see the inside of glory, stagger not at the promise but believe. Faith, simple faith is what we want, a firm reliance and trust in God. Faith will drive back the powers of darkness; only have faith and you will have a clear, sweet atmosphere to live and breathe in" (E. G. White, "Letter 1, 1848", 4:325). . . . She strongly emphasizes the importance of faith—that is to say, complete reliance and trust in the Lord.

³⁰ Ellen G. White, *To Those who are Receiving the Seal of the Living God* (Broadside 2), January 31, 1849. A part of it was also published in E. G. White, *Early Writings*, 36–38; in *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 100–102; and in Ellen. G. White, "Dear Brethren and Sisters," *Review and Herald*, August 1, 1849, parr. 14–20. In the discussion we will quote from Broadside 2.

Jesus leaves the most holy place “every case” will be “decided either for salvation or destruction”³¹ (Rev 22:11). 2) The seven plagues (Rev 16)—the wrath of God—will fall upon the wicked (they rejected salvation).³² 3) The standing up of Michael (Dan 12:1) is the same as Jesus standing up after finishing His priestly work. 4) The wicked are enraged against the saints and determine to exterminate them. 5) The death decree (Rev 13:15) brings upon God’s people the time of Jacob’s trouble, causing them to cry out with anguish of spirit for divine deliverance. 6) God’s voice shakes the heavens and the earth and delivers them. “Their faces were lighted up with the glory of God.”³³ The closing of Christ’s priestly work in the most holy place of the heavenly temple climaxes in the deliverance of His people. At the present time, Ellen White indicates, four angels are holding the winds of strife on earth and God’s people are being sealed with the seal of the living God—a reference to Revelation 7. The nations are now angry, but the wrath of God is not yet being poured out and the time to judge the dead has not arrived (cf. Rev 11:18).

Concerning the preparation for the time of trouble, first she counsels that believers should not make provision for their temporal needs, because God will provide for them.³⁴ In other words, they should trust the Lord, thus returning to an important topic she addressed before. Second, church members should use their financial resources for the mission of the church—to make treasures in heaven. The reason is that shortly before the time of trouble they will lose all their properties and wealth. But there is no need to be overly concerned about this matter because the Lord will teach His people when to dispose of what they have.³⁵ Third, they need to have “clean hands and a pure heart.”³⁶ She seems to explain what she means by immediately writing, “Now is the time for the law of God to be in our minds (foreheads), and written in our hearts.”³⁷ “Clean hands and a pure heart” are the result of a sincere and profound submission to the law of God,³⁸ which is a transcript of His character of love.³⁹ This

³¹ E. G. White, *Seal of the Living God*, par. 2.

³² She reaffirms this within a year (1850); see E. G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:248.

³³ E. G. White, *Seal of the Living God*, par. 2.

³⁴ She writes, “I saw that our bread and water would be sure at that time, and we should not lack, or suffer hunger” (ibid., par. 9).

³⁵ E. G. White, *Seal of the Living God*, par. 10.

³⁶ Ibid., par. 11.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 443.

³⁹ On August 1, 1849, Ellen G. White writes that during the time of trouble God will protect “every soul that was decided on the truth, and was pure of heart” (E. G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth*, August 1849, par. 6; she is relating a vi-

obedience, Ellen White clarifies, is not a legalistic adherence to human works, but is based on a firm commitment to God, about whom she comments, “I have seen the tender love that God has for his people, and that it is very great.”⁴⁰ After being in vision in the heavenly city she exclaims, “I long to be there, and behold my lovely Jesus, who gave his life for me, and be changed into his glorious image” (to be glorified).⁴¹

Ellen White uses the phrase “to have clean hands and a pure heart” in a vision she had on December 20, 1845, about four years before the vision we are discussing, concerning the “travels of the Adventist people to the Holy City.”⁴² She describes how the glorious coming of Christ impacts both the wicked and the saints. When the saints find themselves in His glorious presence, a sense of unworthiness possesses them: “Then we all cried out, who shall be able to stand? Is my robe spotless?”⁴³ And this is Jesus’ answer: “Those who have clean hands and a pure heart shall be able to stand, my grace is sufficient for you.”⁴⁴ In other words, “Yes, you need clean hands and a pure heart, but that achievement without the realization of your unworthiness and your constant dependence on my grace would not be enough.” Grace is available to God’s people even after Jesus closes His ministry in the heavenly temple.

The fourth aspect of the preparation for the time of Jacob’s trouble grows out of the previous one on obedience to God’s law. The writing of the law in the mind and heart leads Ellen White to discuss the importance of controlling our minds. The reading of exciting books could lead some minds “away from present truth and a love for the holy Bible.”⁴⁵ They should not fill their minds with worldly thoughts and concerns, otherwise there would not be a “place in our foreheads for the seal of the living God.” For her, the forehead is the mind and the seal “is the Sabbath.”⁴⁶ It is the seal in the sense that it shows their total commitment to the Lord in their obedience to His will.

Fifth, believers need to spend their leisure time searching the Bible: “Let the commandments of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ be in your minds continually.”⁴⁷ In other words, let the mind be

sion she had on March 24, 1849) and exhorts God’s people not to waver on the present truth (ibid., par. 9). The truth she talks about is the Adventist message.

⁴⁰ E. G. White, *Seal of the Living God*, par. 6.

⁴¹ Ibid., par. 7.

⁴² E. G. White, “Letter from Sister Harmon”, par. 1.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ E. G. White, *Seal of the Living God*, par. 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., par. 12.

filled with the thoughts of God by meditating on His will for them and on Scripture. These are the ways God strengthens their union with Him and transforms them, showing that they are living as a people waiting for the coming of the Lord. “Now is the time to make our calling and election sure.”⁴⁸ When it comes to their preparation for the time when there is no intercessor in heaven, Ellen White places the emphasis on a religious experience that is genuine and reveals that the saints are immovably established on the biblical truth for these times while praising the Lord.⁴⁹

Review and Herald (1849)

On September 1, 1849, about eight months after the vision just discussed, Ellen White encourages believers to persevere in the faith.⁵⁰ She reminds them that time is very short and that soon “every case will be decided, either for Life, or for Death.”⁵¹ They should not be discouraged when facing trials and temptations but, as she had indicated before, trust in the Lord. By agonizing with the Lord in prayer and trusting in Him, they overcome every temptation “and through His grace come off victorious.”⁵² She alerts them about “some who profess the present truth, whose life does not correspond with their profession,”⁵³ as constant threat to God’s people. As believers they should take advantage of the fact that Jesus is still in the heavenly temple accepting their prayers and their confessions of sin and pardoning them.⁵⁴ But this work of mediation will come to an end:

When Jesus leaves the Sanctuary, then he that is holy and righteous, will be holy and righteous still; for all their sins will then be blotted out, and they will be sealed with the seal of the living God. But those that are unjust and filthy, will be unjust and filthy still; for then there will be no Priest in the Sanctuary to offer their sacrifices, their confessions, and their prayers before the Father’s throne. Therefore, what is done to rescue souls from the coming storm of wrath, must be

⁴⁸ E. G. White, *Seal of the Living God*, par. 12.

⁴⁹ God’s people are to fix “their eyes on the prize before them” and to glorify God “by praising him” (ibid., par. 6). The first has to do with the reward of the saints and the second with keeping our eyes away from ourselves and giving all glory to God.

⁵⁰ E. G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth*, September 1849, 31-32.

⁵¹ Ibid., par. 1.

⁵² Ibid., parr. 2-3.

⁵³ Ibid., par. 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., par. 7.

done before Jesus leaves the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary.⁵⁵

There are several details in this statement that deserve attention. First, a time will come when Jesus will leave the heavenly temple and what is announced in Revelation 22:11 will be fulfilled. The wicked will remain wicked because the mediation of Christ has finished and forgiveness of sin is no longer available to them. At that time, God's people will be sealed—they permanently belong to Him. Second, Ellen White provides the main reason for introducing in the article the topic of the end of Christ's priestly work: she wants to motivate believers to get involved in rescuing souls for the Lord before the close of Christ's mediation. People need to hear the message because their cases will soon be decided.

In the article, Ellen White encourages the saints to seek not to please themselves but the Lord by living a life totally dedicated to Him and by doing all they can to advance the cause.⁵⁶ She takes the opportunity to invite those with means to use them in soul winning.⁵⁷ They must work for God before “the dark night of trouble and anguish comes.”⁵⁸ This is probably a reference to the time of trouble that will occur after Jesus ceases His priestly work. She clarifies that “those who have the seal of the living God, will be sheltered from the storm of wrath, that will soon fall on the heads of those who have rejected the truth.”⁵⁹ The seal identifies them as true servants of the Lord.

Although Ellen White is not specifically dealing with the question of readiness for the time of anguish, the counsel given to encourage believers seems to indirectly address it. She emphasizes complete trust in the Lord when facing temptations, and living a life that corresponds with what they believe and that is totally dedicated to God. We see again how important it is to learn to trust in the Lord now in order to be prepared for the time of trouble. Meanwhile, they should confess their sins to the Lord while He is still interceding for them. This seems to be based on the typology of the Day of Atonement, during which the people of Israel penitently confessed their sins and relied on the Lord's forgiving grace.⁶⁰ But perhaps what seems to be more

⁵⁵ E. G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth*, September 1849, par. 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, parr. 5–6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, par. 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, par. 10.

⁶⁰ During the Day of Atonement, the people of Israel afflicted their souls and confessed their sins (Lev 16). Ellen White insists we are living in the antitypical Day of Atonement and that consequently believers need to afflict their souls before God and confess their sins (see Ellen G. White, “Notes of Travel,” *Review and Herald*, October 21, 1884,

important for her in this particular context is to be involved in soul winning now, while Christ is still interceding for sinners.

Early Writings (1850–1851)

In the book *Early Writings*, Ellen White develops and summarizes her understanding of the eschatological events that will take place once Jesus finishes His work of mediation in the most holy place of the heavenly temple.⁶¹ We will summarize them:

1) At that moment, the mission of the church comes to an end. The people of God “had accomplished their work and were prepared for the trying hour before them. They had received the latter rain, or refreshing from the presence of the Lord.”⁶² 2) The judgment of the righteous dead and the righteous living has ended. The final condition of humanity has been permanently fixed (Rev 22:11) because each case has been decided for life or death.⁶³ 3) Christ has

par. 4). We should now be “constantly humbling our hearts before God, with confession and repentance. . . . Jesus died for sinners, and He will pardon my sins, if I sincerely repent. It is of no avail to claim to believe on Christ unless we acknowledge the claims of God’s law and daily strive to obey its precepts” (E. G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 5:123–124). Here she combines the need of a constant state of repentance with submission to the will of God as revealed in His law. In other words, we daily seek to obey God’s law while at the same time constantly humble ourselves through confession and repentance (see also Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950], 490). For her, justification and sanctification are inseparable: “We are in the anti-typical day of atonement, and every soul should now be humbling himself before God, seeking pardon of his transgressions and sins, and accepting the justifying grace of Christ, the sanctifying of the soul by the operations of the Holy Spirit of Christ; thus the carnal nature is transformed, renewed in holiness after the image of Christ’s righteousness and true holiness” (Ellen G. White, *Appeal and Suggestions to Conference Officers* [1893, Pamphlet 2, 25–26]. The understanding of perfection as living in a state of repentance and submission to God’s will or constantly growing in God’s sanctifying grace is foundational for Ellen White. She exhorts the church to “approach God in the spirit of the poor publican who prayed, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’ (Luke 18:13)” (Ellen G. White, Ms 52, December 18, 1890, par. 7). See for further discussion, Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “Theology of the Last Generation: Description and Evaluation,” in Artur Steele, ed., *The Word: Searching, Living, Teaching* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 1:205–228.

⁶¹ The same material is found in Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing, 1945), 1:198–204, and in Ellen G. White, *Story of Redemption* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 402–408.

⁶² E. G. White, *Early Writings*, 279.

⁶³ A few years later, in 1860, Ellen White describes that moment as the occasion when the bright light from God is withdrawn from the wicked: “But there was a period when this light would cease. When he that is holy will remain holy forever, and when he that is filthy will remain filthy forever. When Jesus stands up; when his work is finished in the Most Holy, when there will be not another ray of light to be imparted to the sinner” (E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 2:275). In 1870 she uses more radical language to describe the impossibility of change after the close of Christ’s ministry: “No atoning

“made atonement for His people and blotted out their sins.”⁶⁴ 4) He throws the censer to the ground, indicating that His priestly work has come to an end and there is no more hope for the wicked: “There was then no mediator between guilty man and an offended God.”⁶⁵ 5) God’s restraint upon the wicked is removed and Satan has full control over them. 6) The seven plagues are poured out upon guilty sinners (the wrath of God). 7) Concerning God’s people, Ellen White states, “The saints were living in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor.” But she immediately adds that “every case was decided, every jewel numbered”⁶⁶—that is to say, they have nothing to fear because they belong to God (cf. Rev 22:11); they are His jewels. 8) A death decree is prepared against the people of God to be enforced at a particular moment. 9) At first the saints “were calm and composed, trusting in God and leaning upon His promise that a way of escape would be made for them.” But “soon I saw the saints suffering great mental anguish,” feeling that God had abandoned them “to perish by the hand of the wicked.”⁶⁷ “Day and night they cried unto God for deliverance.”⁶⁸ Angels protected them and “their cry came up before the Lord.”⁶⁹ The deliverance takes place at the coming of the Lord.

The description of what takes place in heaven as Jesus finishes His priestly work is more detailed than in her previous writings. This is also the case concerning events taking place on earth. Ellen White’s primary interest is in the damaging effect of the closure of Christ’s mediation on the wicked. They are in physical, emotional, and spiritual pain on a planet controlled by the forces of evil. She assures God’s people that the end of Christ’s mediation is not damaging to them but that, on the contrary, Christ made the final atonement for them and their sins have been blotted out. They unquestionably belong to Him. This is what makes it possible for them to go through the time of trouble victoriously.⁷⁰ Angels will protect and sustain them

blood then pleads in your behalf to wash away the stain of sin. Just as you then are, you will remain. Just as you fall, so you must come up in the resurrection. And if you are living when the Son of Man is revealed, just as you are then found when he shall appear, if unready, so you must remain. The impure cannot then obtain perfection of Christian character. No work of purification can then be performed” (Ellen G. White, “Practical Remarks,” *Review and Herald*, April 12, 1870, par. 13).

⁶⁴ E. G. White, *Early Writings*, 280.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 284; cf. 43.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of the time of trouble in the Bible and in Ellen G. White’s writings see, Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Time of Jacob’s Trouble in the Bible, in Ellen G. White, and in Adventist Eschatology” (unpublished manuscript, 2017).

and Christ will finally deliver them. Since Ellen White is describing the eschatological events as they will happen, she does not discuss how to prepare for such a time. She adds that the faithful ones will patiently wait for the Lord.⁷¹

In a vision Ellen White has on May 14, 1851, the matter of the preparation for the time when there will be no intercessor in heaven is raised.⁷² She comments, "I also saw that many do not realize what they must be in order to live in the sight of the Lord without a high priest in the sanctuary through the time of trouble."⁷³ She clarifies that "those who receive the seal of the living God" will be protected during the time of trouble. They "must reflect the image of Jesus fully."⁷⁴ She relates this to the work of the latter rain that will "fit them to stand in the day of the Lord and to live in His sight." The preparation consists of purifying "their souls in obeying the whole truth."⁷⁵ This most probably refers to "having clean hands and a pure heart," mentioned by her before and to which she will return in *The Great Controversy* (see below). The soul is purified when there is submission to the truth given to the church; it transforms lives. But she is much more specific: "I saw that none could share the 'refreshing' unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action."⁷⁶ This is about the transformation of the inner self or the dethronement of selfishness that expresses itself in improper speech and actions.⁷⁷ This is not about reaching a state of sinless perfection. She goes on to add that in order for this to happen "we should . . . be drawing nearer and nearer to the Lord."⁷⁸

⁷¹ E. G. White, *Early Writings*, 282–284.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* On December 21, 1851, she exhorts believers saying, "Let us study to have our lives as near like Christ's as possible. . . . Oh, how hard it is for self to die" (E. G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 4:271). There is no common and specific level of spiritual development to be reached by every believer, but all should strive for the same: being like Christ in their own sphere. The fundamental problem is selfishness.

⁷⁵ E. G. White, *Early Writings*, 71.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ See discussion under the section "*The Great Controversy* (1888)."

⁷⁸ E. G. White, *Early Writings*, 71. Many years later, in 1892, when speaking about the loud cry, she states: "Today you are to give yourselves to God, that He may make of you vessels unto honor, and meet for His service. Today you are to give yourself to God, that you may be emptied of self, emptied of envy, jealousy, evil surmising, strife, everything that shall be dishonoring to God. Today you are to have your vessel purified that it may be ready for the heavenly dew, ready for the showers of the latter rain; for the latter rain will come, and the blessing of God will fill every soul that is purified from every defilement" (Ellen G. White, "It is Not for You to Know the Times and the Seasons," *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1892, par. 13). Again, the

The Great Controversy (1888)

The next discussion in Ellen White's writings on the end of Christ's high priestly ministry in heaven is found in her book *The Great Controversy*, chapter 24. This chapter is a biblical and historical discussion of Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary and the Adventist understanding of it. The main emphasis is on Christ's work in the most holy place after 1844 and the Millerites' misunderstanding of the events that were to occur at the end of the prophecy of the 2,300 days (Dan 8:14). They thought it was about the return of Christ, but the people were not ready for it. There was still a work of preparation to be accomplished that included receiving light concerning Christ's work in the heavenly temple, a message for the last days, and a mission for the church.⁷⁹

Spiritual Preparation

It is at this point in Ellen White's discussion that she introduces the coming of Christ into the most holy place announced in Malachi 3:2–3, consisting of a work of refinement and cleansing. Then she writes:

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 appearance.⁸⁰

This statement is the most detailed description found so far in her writings about the impact of the close of Christ's intercession on the people of God. It deserves careful attention. First, it is obvious that in this particular case Ellen White uses the ceasing of Christ's

fundamental problem is selfishness that manifests itself in a conduct that dishonors God and damages others and that is incompatible with our preparation for heaven. Notice that the purpose of this preparation is to serve others now.

⁷⁹ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 424–425.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 425.

mediation in the heavenly sanctuary to discuss the spiritual condition of God's people at that time.⁸¹ Second, the reference to spotless robes and the purification of their characters from sin "by the blood of sprinkling" is primarily about the objective work of Christ, through which repentant sinners are by faith cleansed from sin and covered by the spotless robe of Christ—that is, His imputed righteousness that cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:9). What purifies them is the blood of Christ (Rev 7:14). For Ellen White, the spotless robe represents the righteousness of Christ imputed to repentant sinners that will transform their lives.

Third, they are involved in a battle with evil, but they will be victorious through "the grace of God and their own diligent effort." The sequence is important. Effort without grace is useless before the Lord because efforts are always imperfect. She again points out that grace is available to God's people after Christ ends His priestly work. We saw earlier, in the discussion of Broadside 2, that according to Ellen White, the people of God will feel unworthy when they see Christ coming in glory and will ask themselves, "Is my robe spotless?" The answer to the question is that they have to depend on Christ's grace to be able to stand before the Lord. It is because of His grace that their efforts are acceptable to God and made effective in their battle against evil. In context, the battle against evil is primarily against the end-time evil powers that seek to overcome and destroy them.

Fourth, Ellen White brings the spiritual preparation to a more personal level by specifically speaking about what God's people should be doing now, while the investigative judgment is taking place in heaven. She explains that this judgment will result in the removal of "the sins of penitent believers" from the heavenly sanctuary. This is an important phrase because she is speaking about the sins of believers, but believers who live the Christian life in a state or condition of penitence, based on the typology of the Day of Atonement. That is to say, they are constantly relying on the forgiving grace of Christ. At the same time, they should be involved in a work of purification, which she explains as a "putting away of sin." She does not explain what she means, but provides a key that helps us understand what she has in mind: "This work [of purification; putting away of sin] is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14." We will explore this in a moment.

⁸¹ This is also suggested when she writes, "When the work of investigation shall be ended, when the cases of those who in all ages have professed to be followers of Christ have been examined and decided, then, and not until then, probation will be close, and the door of mercy will be shut" (E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 428).

Finally, Ellen White states that when “this work shall have been accomplished the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearance.” This is a very important statement not only for what it says, but also for what it does not say. It does not say that when the work is done then Christ will come, but that they will be ready for His coming, whenever it may happen. This implies that we should be at all times involved in the work of putting away sin in order to be ready for the second coming. In other words, what she is saying is not limited to the group of people who will be alive when Jesus comes. We should always be ready for the coming of the Lord. What is expected from those who will be alive at His coming is the same that is expected from all believers now.

The Putting Away of Sin

We should now return to the work of “the putting away of sin” and Revelation 14. Ellen White returns to the topic of Revelation 14 at the end of chapter 24, the one we are studying. The “putting away of sin” consists of receiving and appropriating the three angels’ messages: we have to be “prepared to receive and give to the world the solemn warning of the third angel of Revelation 14.”⁸² How, then, do we prepare for the coming of the Lord? Her answer is very clear: “The messages of this chapter [Rev 14] constitute a threefold warning which is to prepare the inhabitants of the earth for the Lord’s second coming.”⁸³ Therefore, this specific message is “for the testing and purification” of the Christian church⁸⁴ and requires the abandonment of worldly hopes and ambitions and the joyful acceptance of “the advent of the Lord.”⁸⁵ The proclamation of the fall of Babylon and the need to come out of it is a call to apostate Christianity to abandon its unfaithfulness to the Lord and their love for worldly things and seek self-denial, humility, and godliness.⁸⁶

In order for humans to stand in the judgment, “the message commands them ‘to fear God, and give glory to Him,’ ‘and worship Him that made heaven, and the earth.’”⁸⁷ “The result and acceptance of these messages is given in the words: ‘Here are they that keep the

⁸² E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 432.

⁸³ Ibid., 435. Speaking about the reaction of the churches to the message of William Miller, she says, “Had the message of the first angel been accepted by Christians they would have seen their worldliness and would have ‘separated from the influence of the world’ (ibid., 379).”

⁸⁴ Ibid., 380.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 353.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 385.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 436.

commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”⁸⁸ In their preparation for the judgment, all are expected to “keep the law of God” because it is “the standard of character.”⁸⁹ Without obedience to it, “worship is not pleasing to God.”⁹⁰ She adds that “faith is essential” in order to keep the law of God because it is impossible to please the Lord without it.⁹¹ Obedience is inseparable from placing one’s faith in the provision God has made for us through Christ. We are once more back to the topic of trusting God by placing our faith in Him. In fact, in 1888 Ellen White defines “the faith of Jesus” as the faith that believers place in Jesus as their Savior—justification by faith.⁹² For her, gospel and law are inseparable and constitute the most fundamental components of the Adventist message. When both of them are part of our religious experience we are putting sin away from our life.

Time of Trouble

In the chapter entitled “The Time of Trouble,”⁹³ Ellen White also addresses the closing of Christ’s work of mediation in the heavenly sanctuary. The purpose of the chapter is to describe the events that take place in heaven and on earth at that moment. The key eschatological events are listed in order. The experience and plans of the wicked are mentioned and the experience of the remnant is described in order to motivate them to prepare for such a time. What she says is essentially what she had previously written in her writings, but greatly enriched. She begins listing the events that will lead to the end of Christ’s work—for instance, that the people of God have accomplished their work and have been sealed; in heaven every case has been decided and the sins of God’s people have been blotted out.

“Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above.”⁹⁴ She adds, “The destiny of the world has been forever fixed,”⁹⁵ and “darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a God without an intercessor.”⁹⁶

⁸⁸ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 436.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² She asks, “What constitutes the faith of Jesus, that belongs to the third angel’s message?” Her answer was, “Jesus becoming our sin-bearer that he might become our sin-pardoning Saviour. He was treated as we deserve to be treated. He came to our world and took our sins that we might take His righteousness. Faith in the ability of Jesus to save us amply and fully and entirely is the faith of Jesus” (E. G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 12:193).

⁹³ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 613–634.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 613.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 615.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 614.

The power that restrained the wicked, now removed, is identified with the withdrawal of the Spirit of God.⁹⁷ A death decree is issued against

⁹⁷ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 614. Ellen White comments that “when Christ ceases His intercession in the sanctuary, the unmingled wrath threatened against those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark (Revelation 14:9, 10), will be poured out” (627). Notice that the Spirit will be withdrawn only from the wicked but not from God’s people. The Holy Spirit will accompany them to the very end. In fact, according to Ellen White, the work of the Spirit prepares God’s people to live without an intercessor in heaven. Using the metaphor of the early and latter rain, she identifies two main works of the Spirit within the Christian church. As the early rain causes the seed to germinate and to be ready for the harvest, “so the Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process for spiritual growth” that will result in “the completion of the work of God’s grace in the soul.” In other words, through the Spirit the “moral image of God is perfected in the character. We are transformed into the likeness of Christ.” The latter rain “represents the spiritual grace that prepares the church for the coming of the Son of man.” It brings the “seed to perfection.” How is this to happen? “There must be a constant development of Christian virtue, a constant advancement in Christian experience” (E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 506). The perfect Christian is one who is constantly growing in Christ. She clarifies, “Divine grace is needed at the beginning, divine grace at every step of advance, and divine grace alone can complete the work” (ibid., 508). She emphasizes that “if we are true to the promptings of the Spirit of God, we shall go on from grace to grace, and from glory to glory, until we shall receive the finishing touch of immortality” at the second coming (Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988], 376). This is God’s forgiving and sanctifying grace. In 1868 Ellen White writes, “None are living Christians unless they have a daily experience in the things of God and daily practice self-denial, cheerfully bearing the cross and following Christ. As he advances toward perfection, he experiences a conversion to God every day; and this conversion is not completed until he attains to perfection of Christian character, a full preparation for the finishing touch of immortality” (E. G. White, *Testimonies*, 2:505). It is this spirit of daily conversion—that is, daily practicing self-denial—that prepares us for the second coming. At the same time, “God should be the highest object of our thoughts. Meditating upon him, and pleading with him, elevate the soul and quicken the affections. A neglect of meditation and prayer will surely result in a declension in religious interests” (Ellen G. White, “God Requires Energy in His Work,” *Review and Herald*, August 17, 1886, par. 3). We are prepared for “the finishing touch of immortality” when through the power of the Spirit we allow the precious truth given to us “to elevate, refine, and sanctify the receiver” (Ellen G. White, “The Privilege of God’s People,” *Review and Herald*, October 23, 1888, par. 9). A year later she comments, “It is vain for us to think that we are prepared for the finishing touch of immortality, while we live in willful transgression of any of God’s precepts” (Ellen G. White, “The Test of Doctrine,” *Review and Herald*, August 27, 1889, par. 4; emphasis supplied). The fundamental problem is having a spirit of open disobedience to God. We need a faith that works (Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks* [Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990], 1:204) and that follows Jesus step by step (ibid.). Ellen White speaks in very practical terms when she exhorts workers, “Let your aim be nothing short of perfection of Christian character.” Then she explains, “Let your lives be unselfish and blameless, that they ever may be a living rebuke to those who are selfish.” Those who “have preserved their bodies and spirits in holiness, in sanctification and honor, will then receive the finishing touch of immortality” (Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1991], 215). This

the people of God because of their faithfulness to God's law and they are "plunged into those scenes of affliction and distress described by the prophet as the time of Jacob's trouble."⁹⁸ During this period "their confidence in God, their faith and firmness, will be severally tested. As they review the past, their hopes sink; for in their whole lives they can see little good. They are fully conscious of their weakness and unworthiness."⁹⁹ But they are victorious through the power of prayer, by holding to God's promises, and through perseverance;¹⁰⁰ they have placed their faith in the Lord. Notice that she keeps together a sense of unworthiness on the part of God's people while at the same time they continue to trust in Him.

She then counsels on how to be ready for that experience. We need to learn to trust in God when facing distressing circumstances, to take time to pray,¹⁰¹ to be "diligent students of the Scriptures," and to have a deep love for the truth, for it will shield us from the satanic delusions that will take captive the world.¹⁰² More specifically, Ellen White adds:

Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation . . . He has kept His Father's commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble.¹⁰³

Seeking "to become perfect in Christ" means that our perfection is only possible in union with Christ.¹⁰⁴ Perfection is preceded by redemption in Christ. Ellen White then defines Jesus' perfection as His keeping the commandments of the Father. He did not rebel against God's will as expressed in His law. Notice also that while in Christ there was no sin—He was sinless—we are sinners, and in order for us not to have sin in us we have to confess and repent. Unconfessed sin is a rebellious sin that people are unwilling to acknowledge. Our perfection takes place in our union with Christ, meaning that we have confessed our sins to Him and He will enable us to keep

is only achieved through the power of the Spirit in the life of believers.

⁹⁸ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 616.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 618–619.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 621.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 622.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 625.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 623.

¹⁰⁴ This was also pointed out by Steger, "Sin intercessor," 12.

God's commandments. Since the union precedes the obedience, the obedience is the evidence or fruit of the union.

But Ellen White is more specific as she explains what she means in the statement quoted above. First, it is in this life that we are to separate sin from us, through faith in the atoning blood of Christ [justification by faith in Christ—a topic to which she will return in *Patriarchs and Prophets* to clarify even more]. Our precious Saviour invites us to join ourselves to Him [conversion and sanctification possible in Christ], to unite our weakness to His strength, our ignorance with His wisdom, our unworthiness to His merits [always trusting in and depending on Christ and His grace].¹⁰⁵

Second, in order to assist us in our spiritual growth, God will allow us to pass through circumstances that develop our faith.¹⁰⁶ “It rests with us to co-operate with the agencies [His providence, the Holy Spirit, etc.] which He employs in the work of conforming our characters to the divine model.”¹⁰⁷

We develop a character like Christ's by placing our faith in Him (justification by faith), by cooperating with the divine agencies (sanctification), and by uniting our weaknesses with His strength and merits (constantly depending on His forgiving and sanctifying grace).¹⁰⁸ Even during the time of trouble the saints will need to

¹⁰⁵ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 623.

¹⁰⁶ On how in God's providence we go through trials that purify us, see, Ellen G. White, “A Message of Purification,” *Southern Watchman*, February 7, 1905, parr. 1–9, in which she describes God's intention for us, saying: “The religion of Christ transforms the heart. It makes the worldly-minded man heavenly-minded. *Under its influence the selfish man becomes unselfish, because this is the character of Christ.* The dishonest, scheming man becomes upright, so that it is second nature to him to do to others as he would have others do to him. The profligate is changed from impurity to purity. He forms correct habits; for the gospel of Christ has become to him a savor of life unto life” (par. 8; emphasis supplied).

¹⁰⁷ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 623.

¹⁰⁸ In Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1941), 69, she exhorts believers to develop a character like that of Christ. She even speaks about God's people “perfectly” reproducing His character in their lives (ibid., 69). Knight has provided what is probably the most balanced reading of this statement by examining its context. Ellen White states, “Christ is seeking to reproduce Himself in the hearts of men. . . . There can be no growth or fruitfulness in the life that is centered on self. If you have accepted Christ as personal Saviour, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. . . . As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. . . . Your faith will increase . . . , your love will be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble and lovely” (ibid., 67–68). Knight concludes that perfectly reproducing the character of Christ means the denial of self in loving service to others; it is a “caring relationship.” “Thus the perfect Christian is the caring Christian” (Knight, *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness*: 191–192. See *A Study of Sin and Salvation*, n. 97). This should never be separated from the believer's constant

rely on His grace because they will “be placed in the furnace of fire; their earthliness must be consumed, that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected.”¹⁰⁹ On a more practical level, this likeness to Christ should be revealed in a life that is so “firmly established upon His [God’s] word that they will not yield to the evidence of their sense.”¹¹⁰ They will firmly stand on the Bible and the Bible alone.

Victorious People of God

There is another place in *The Great Controversy* where Ellen White’s mention of the end of Christ’s intercession is relevant to our study and related to the preparation of God’s people for that event. She sees God’s end-time people standing on the sea of glass singing a new song and following the Lamb. They have victoriously passed through a great tribulation—the time of trouble—and have been translated alive from the earth. “They have stood without an intercessor through the final outpouring of God’s judgments. But they have been delivered, for they have ‘washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ ‘In their mouth was found no guile for they are without fault before God.’”¹¹¹

Ellen White is quoting from Revelation 14:1–5 as she describes the moment of victory of the 144,000. From that passage she provides the reason for their deliverance from the anguish that will take place after Jesus ends His work of intercession. First, they wash their robes in the blood of Jesus. This cleansing is what the blood of Christ did for them, and not what they did for themselves. Second, they are so committed to the truth that there is no guile (Gk. *pseudos*, “lie”) in their mouth.¹¹² Deception is a characteristic of evil powers and one of the reasons for their exclusion from the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:27; 22:15; cf. 2:9; 3:9). The phrase “they are without fault” could function as a summary of all that was said before—that is to say, they are “blameless” because they washed their robes in the blood of Jesus and they were totally committed to God’s truth; they constantly relied on Christ’s forgiving and sanctifying grace.

reliance on Christ’s forgiving grace.

¹⁰⁹ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 621.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 625.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 649.

¹¹² “What is in mind here is not merely general truthfulness, but the saints’ integrity in witnessing to Jesus when they are under pressure from the beast and the ‘false prophet’ to compromise their faith and go along with the idolatrous lie” (G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999], 746).

Summary

We can summarize what Ellen White says in *The Great Controversy* concerning the preparation for the time when believers will be without intercessor by saying that by connecting this preparation to Revelation 14, she was emphasizing the need to place our faith in Jesus as our Savior who justifies us by faith. This is the eternal gospel that the remnant is to proclaim and without which Christian perfection is impossible. Second, the three angels' messages are in fact God's invitation to the human race to prepare for Christ's glorious return. Receiving and proclaiming these messages will prepare God's people for what lies ahead. The remnant must clearly comprehend the message entrusted to them and allow it to sanctify them in the service of the Lord. They should be firmly established on it intellectually and experientially. Sin is removed from their lives by depending on God's forgiving grace in submission to His will (sanctification). Obedience to God's law shows they have indeed accepted Christ as Lord and will rely, to the very end, on His achievements and not on their own performance. In this setting, the Sabbath commandment plays an important role in a world that has rejected it. It has become "a sign of loyalty to the true God,"¹¹³ the seal of the living God. Ellen White will enlarge that concept even more, arguing that the seal of God is "a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved."¹¹⁴ This has been the experience of countless believers throughout the Christian church who were even willing to give their lives in obedience and service to God.

The end-time remnant will overcome because they are absolutely persuaded that the message they proclaim, the eternal gospel for the last days, is the truth and is from God. Through God's grace they will not be moved from their firm commitment to their Lord and His truth. This is obviously the result of the work of the Spirit in their lives and is related to reflecting the image of Christ, whose commitment to the Father was unshakable. "The seal of the living God will be placed upon those only who bear a likeness to Christ in character." To be like Christ is to stand firmly on the gospel of truth for these last days. After all, "the remnant . . . purify their souls by obeying the truth."¹¹⁵ But this obedience to God is grounded in a constant dependence on Christ's forgiving grace. The remnant is formed by "penitent believers" who unite their weakness with Christ's strength and merits.

¹¹³ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 438.

¹¹⁴ "Ellen G. White Comments: Isaiah," in Francis D. Nichols, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1977), 4:1161.

¹¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book Two (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 380.

***Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890)**

Ellen White's reference to the close of Christ's priestly ministry in the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* is found in the section dealing with Jacob's anguish during the night before meeting Esau. She uses this experience as a prefiguration of what the people of God will go through before the coming of Christ—that is, the time of trouble. She again connects it with the work of Christ: "When Christ shall cease His work of mediation in man's behalf, then this time of trouble will begin."¹¹⁶ This means that the case of every person would have been decided forever and "there will be no atoning blood to cleanse from sin"¹¹⁷—grace will no longer be available for the wicked (Rev 22:11). Since the Spirit will be withdrawn from them, they will seek to destroy the people of God but the remnant will constantly cry out to God for deliverance. Satan will attempt to terrify them with the thought that their cases are hopeless because their sins "have been too great to receive pardon."¹¹⁸ They will examine their lives and, acknowledging their shortcomings, their hope will sink by looking at themselves. But remembering God's past mercies and their own sincere repentance, they "will plead His promises made through Christ to helpless, repenting sinners."¹¹⁹

Ellen White says little about the preparation of God's people for this most difficult experience, but what she says is extremely significant. She mentions the importance of prayer in their lives and the need for "unyielding faith"—elements she has mentioned several times before. Self is to be surrendered to God in order to develop a "trusting faith in Him."¹²⁰ However, her primary emphasis is on the need to repent and confess sins to the Lord now. God's people should not go into the time of trouble with concealed wrongs to reveal to God; it will be too late.¹²¹ The divine promise is that if they confess their sins to God now, then He will pardon their transgressions. They are to lay hold of God's promises and trust in Him. This clarifies what she says in other places about the need for God's people to be "penitent believers" during the antitypical Day of Atonement while waiting for the coming of the Lord. A true Christian will live in a state of constant repentance while working with God to develop a character like Christ's. This will assure them that during the time of trouble they will not have unconfessed sins. In fact, she says that at that time God's

¹¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 201.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

people will not even remember the specific sins they had committed because they will have been forgiven.¹²² This is obviously the effect of the work of the Spirit in their minds.

Her emphasis on the need for God's end-time people to repent and confess their sins before Christ finishes His work in the heavenly temple climaxes with a new thought not explicitly expressed by her in previous discussions: during the time of anguish, the people of God will have to "depend solely upon the merits of the atonement. We can do nothing for ourselves." She adds, "We must trust in the merits of the crucified and risen Saviour. None will ever perish while doing this."¹²³ God's remnant people will be victorious trusting not in what they have achieved but in what Christ did for them through His atoning sacrifice. As a matter of fact, they see themselves as unworthy but by faith hold onto the mercy of God's grace. Satan may try to remind them that their sins are many, but they will trust in the atonement of Christ for them and they will overcome.

In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White utilizes the end of Christ's work of mediation to remind the church that our greatest need now is to live a life of contrition before God during the antitypical Day of Atonement. The effectiveness of Christ's atonement is still available to those who confess and repent of their sins; Christ is still our mediator before the Father. They need to go into the time of trouble totally persuaded that their sins have been forgiven through the blood of Christ and then, during the struggle with the enemy, continue to trust in the mercy and merits of our Savior who, through His grace, has already forgiven us. We should never trust in our own achievements.

***Southern Watchman* (1905)**

Ellen White returns to the topic of the closing of the ministry of Christ in the sanctuary in an article written in 1905.¹²⁴ It is a brief summary of chapter 23 in *The Great Controversy*, discussed earlier, and therefore there is no need to analyze it further.

***Review and Herald* (1907)**

This is the last time Ellen White mentions in her writings the closing of Christ's ministry in the heavenly temple.¹²⁵ Much of what

¹²² Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 202.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ellen G. White, "Christ's Closing Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary," *Southern Watchman*, January 24, 1905, parr. 1–10.

¹²⁵ Ellen G. White, "Gifts and Offerings," *Review and Herald*, January 17, 1907. It was written by her on December 6, 1906. Compare it with discussion under the section

she says is found in *The Great Controversy*, but here the purpose is a little different. She uses the end of Christ's high priestly work to encourage church members to give freely of their resources to sustain the work of God while Christ is still interceding for sinners and to be personally involved in the mission of the church.¹²⁶ In order for this to happen, they should be sanctified by the truth they proclaim, which contextually means they should "be purified and cleansed from all pride and selfishness,"¹²⁷ an idea she has mentioned several times before. She summarizes these ideas by stating that "every true Christian is so to represent the plan of salvation in his own consistent life, and in his unselfish efforts in behalf of others."¹²⁸ Selfishness and pride are removed when believers give of what they have for the service of the church, share the message, and seek to live up to it. She again mentions the need to put away sin and explains it to mean obeying God's ordinances, which in this specific case are the laws related to tithe and offerings.¹²⁹ Obedience to the law contributes to putting away sin in the sense that by submitting to it we stop violating it, fully trusting that our past disobedience has been covered by Christ's imputed righteousness.

The article is very practical in its approach to the question of what is needed in order to be prepared for the coming conflict; in fact, it is homiletical. She stresses the importance of overcoming selfishness and pride and putting away sin by giving tithe and offerings—that is, obeying God's ordinances—by being personally involved in the proclamation of the message, and by living a life that corresponds to our faith.

Analysis and Theological Significance

Our discussion of Ellen White's statements regarding the moment Christ ends His high priestly work in the heavenly temple has revealed a number of important theological and practical truths. We will summarize the main reasons she provides for her references to that event. In most cases she introduces several reasons within the same article. Then, we will summarize what she says about the preparation of God's people for the time of trouble and their experience.

"*Review and Herald* (1849)."

¹²⁶ E. G. White, "Gifts and Offerings," parr. 1, 14–16.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 24.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, parr. 4–8.

Diversity of Purposes

First, she mentions the end of Jesus' mediation to show that it is one of the most important eschatological events that will occur before His return (Letter to Eli Curtis, 1847). This is the primary emphasis in Broadside 2. In *Early Writings* (1850) she provides more eschatological details of the events connected to the closure of Jesus' intercession, thus placing a significant emphasis on events that will take place in heaven and on earth. The most detailed discussion of the eschatological events related to that event is found in *The Great Controversy* (1888).

Second, she connects it with the work of Christ in the heavenly temple after 1844 in order to indicate that His work of mediation there is coming to an end, thus introducing into the discussion the theological significance of the doctrine of the sanctuary (*The Great Controversy*, 1888). His high priestly work is of major significance in God's redemptive plan. It had a beginning and it will have an end. Third, one of the main reasons for which Ellen White references the end of Jesus' mediation is to encourage church members to prepare for the time when they will be on earth without a mediator. In some cases either no specific preparation is even mentioned (Curtis, 1847; *Early Writings*, 1850) or it is not a primary concern; in others it is the primary reason (Hastings, 1848; *Review and Herald* 1849; *Early Writings* 1851; *The Great Controversy*, 1888; *Review Herald*, 1847).

Fourth, sometimes Ellen White is primarily interested in describing the experience of the wicked or what God will do on behalf of His people once there is no mediator for them before God (*Early Writings* 1850; *The Great Controversy*, 1888). Fifth, she uses this topic to encourage believers who are going through difficult trials now to trust in God (Hastings, 1848) or persevere in the faith (*Review and Herald* 1849). Sixth, she employs the event to motivate church members to be personally involved and use their financial resources in the mission of the church (Broadside 2, 1849; *Review and Herald*, 1907). Seventh, Ellen White uses it in conjunction with Jacob's experience to describe the experience of God's people during the time of trouble (*The Great Controversy*, 1888; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 1890).

Preparation and Experience

Since these two elements—preparation and experience—are so closely connected to each other, it is appropriate to discuss them together. The first usually leads into the nature of the experience the saints will have after Jesus closes His priestly work of intercession in the heavenly temple. We will begin with her earlier statements and explore how these were developed in her writings. In defining this preparation for the end, we should not give the impression that

believers are preparing to be victorious during the time of trouble on account of their perfection. There is a deeper purpose for Christian perfection.

Be Alert Against Deception

In the letter to Sister Hastings, Ellen White tells her that since Satan is powerfully active now, we need to be on guard against his deceptions, which will increase as God's restraint over him is removed. She will revisit this idea in 1888 (in *The Great Controversy*) to clarify that the way we are shielded from Satan's deceptions is through our love for biblical truth, through which we are firmly established in God's plan.

Develop Faith in God

In the same letter to Sister Hastings, Ellen White discusses the trials in the life of Christians and suggests that such trials will help them learn to trust in God and place their faith in Him, knowing He will deliver them. This kind of trust will be needed after the close of Christ's priesthood in heaven. The following year, Ellen White encourages believers facing trials and temptations to trust in God, for He will make them victorious over both (*Review and Herald*, 1849). In *Early Writings* (1850), we are told that during the time of trouble God's people will trust in Him. This idea is further developed in *The Great Controversy* (1888), stating that the faith and firmness of God's people (their confidence in God) will be severely tested during the time of trouble. She uses this future experience to motivate them to trust in God now when facing trials. God allows them to have such experiences to help develop their faith in Him. In this way their character is conformed to the divine model, Jesus Christ. Character is developed by learning to trust God in all circumstances. She goes so far as to say that God allows the severe testing of His people during the time of trouble in order to consume their earthliness, so that the image of Christ may be more perfectly reflected in them. Even during the time of trouble, God's people will be aware of their weaknesses and unworthiness.

The need for absolute trust in God found in *The Great Controversy* is further developed in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890). Ellen White specifically mentions that Satan will test their faith by insinuating that their sins are so numerous there is no hope of forgiveness for them. As a reaction to such a threat the saints examine their lives, looking inwardly to acknowledge their shortcomings and realizing there is hardly any hope for them. Yet, they remember God's past mercies toward them and their former repentance, and by faith they take hold of God's promises for repentant sinners. It is important to notice that

she describes God's people during the time of trouble as being in a state of penitence, relying by faith on God's forgiving grace and not on their personal victory over sin.

Participation in the Mission of the Church

Since the time is coming when the door of divine mercy will close, Ellen White encourages believers to be deeply involved now in soul winning for the Lord (Broadside 2, 1849; *Review and Herald*, 1849 and 1907). They should use their financial resources now to promote and support the cause of God. Their money and properties will not be of any use to them during the time of trouble. There is no need for them to accumulate material provisions for the time of trouble because God will provide for their needs (Broadside 2, 1849). Spiritual development and preparation for the coming of Christ is dynamic and not simply introspective; it is fundamentally expressed in service to others and in placing one's financial resources at the service of God and His church.

Removing Sin from Believers' Lives

This is one of the most important preparations one can make for the time when Christ ceases His mediation. It is first introduced in the context of the end of Christ's priestly work in Broadside 2, 1849. Ellen White specifically states that God's people need to have "clean hands and a pure heart," meaning that the law of God should be written in the heart, which is the promise of the new covenant. This is really about one's personal commitment to Christ. In 1845 ("Letter from Sister Harmon," *Day Star*), Ellen White hears Jesus using the same phrase—"clean hands and pure hearts"—in response to His people's confessions of unworthiness at the moment of His coming. But this time Jesus directly connects it to His grace. He expects them to be pure and clean while at the same time relying on His grace.

The call to perfection in the context of the cessation of Christ's mediation is developed in more detail in *The Great Controversy* (1888). Ellen White addresses the need to put sin away now, in preparation for the time of trouble. How is this to be done? The answer, she says, is found in the messages of the three angels (Rev 14:6–12). Accepting and sharing these messages will prepare us for the coming of Christ (cf. *Early Writings*, 1851). More specifically, she writes that we put away sin by keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus or in Jesus—law and gospel. The forensic declaration of justification (imputed righteousness) is inseparable from obedience (imparted righteousness). She will add that character perfection consists of being sprinkled by the blood of Christ and having spotless robes. She will clarify that statement by indicating that becoming

perfect in Christ consists of separation from sin through faith in the sprinkling of Christ's blood that cleanses us from sin (justification by faith), by being united to Him (conversion and sanctification), and by uniting our weaknesses to His power and merits (constantly depending on His grace, not looking to ourselves). This is about a deep personal relationship with the Lord that is always accompanied by an awareness of the people's sinfulness. This same cluster of ideas is also found in Ellen White's description of God's victorious people after the conflict is over. She describes them, using the language of Revelation 14:3–5, as a people in whose mouth there is no deceit (fully committed to the truth as it is in Jesus), who washed their robes in the blood of Christ and, consequently, are “blameless” before the Lord.

The total dependence of God's people on Christ's work while living without a mediator in heaven is clarified even more in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890). At that time they will have to depend on the merits of Christ's atonement and not on their accomplishments. At the present time, during the antitypical Day of Atonement, they live a life of contrition; they are “penitent believers,” as she phrases it in *The Great Controversy*. While obeying the truth and keeping the commandments, they still realize the need for God's grace. Therefore, now is the time to repent and confess sins, an idea she had already mentioned in the *Review and Herald* (1849).

Prayer and Bible Study

Ellen White considers prayer and the study of Scripture as indispensable preparations for the final conflict. During the conflict they will have to pray day and night for deliverance, implying that it is their duty now to pray constantly to the Lord. They will be victorious through prayer and perseverance (*The Great Controversy*, 1888). Meditating on Scripture strengthens the soul and firmly grounds believers in biblical truth (Broadside 2, 1849; *The Great Controversy*, 1888). They are so grounded in the truth that, through the power of the Spirit, they are immovable.

As we look at what Ellen White says about the experience of God's people after the closing of Christ's high priestly work, her main concern is the need for an absolute commitment to Jesus on account of His atoning work for them. This is the foundation of their obedience to the law of God, to the truth they proclaim, and to the mission of the church. This is in principle a call to victory over our selfishness and pride (*Early Writings*, 1851; *Review and Herald*, 1907). Out of their deep gratitude to God, they seek to please only Him. In all these matters they remain fully aware of their constant need for Christ's forgiving grace, living as penitent believers during the antitypical Day of Atonement. Overcoming selfishness will result in a display of God's

love in their lives. Sin is not cherished in their hearts and there is no room in it for a spirit of rebellion against God. They are permanently at peace with God.

Perhaps the most important question related to our topic is about the fundamental purpose for seeking moral, biblical perfection. It is clear that Ellen White never excuses sin, but instead stresses again and again that we can be victorious over it. For instance, she writes, “He places every human agent under obligation to do his best. Moral perfection is required of all. Never should we lower the standard of righteousness in order to accommodate inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrong-doing.”¹³⁰ In context, she is talking about the harmonious development of the whole person:

And those who would be workers together with God must strive for perfection of every organ of the body and quality of the mind. True education is the preparation of the physical, mental, and moral powers for the performance of every duty; it is the training of body, mind, and soul for divine service. This is the education that will endure unto eternal life.¹³¹

In procuring this all-embracing moral perfection, the Lord expects us to do our best. But notice that the goal of moral perfection is not to be saved or to reach a state of impeccability that will assure us victory during the time of trouble. It is to make us more effective “for divine service.” If this were not the case, then the search for moral perfection would be a selfish attempt to be ready to survive during the time of trouble! It would be the opposite of true Christian perfection. To avoid such a conclusion, she unmistakably states that “we should cultivate every faculty to the highest degree of perfection, that we may do the greatest amount of good of which we are capable.”¹³² The more we reflect the character of Christ, the more effective our witnessing will be.¹³³ Biblical perfection is about enabling us to fulfill the mission

¹³⁰ E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 330.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, 329 (Emphasis supplied).

¹³³ In E. G. White, *Testimonies*, 1:144, she proceeds to explain how moral perfection is to be achieved: “A noble, all-round character is not inherited. It does not come to us by accident. A noble character is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ. God gives the talents, the powers of the mind; we form the character. It is formed by hard, stern battles with self. Conflict after conflict must be waged against hereditary tendencies” (*ibid.*, 331). She brings together our efforts and the merits and saving grace of Christ. This struggle against the self will never end before the return of Christ. She unequivocally writes, “We can overcome. Yes; fully, entirely. Jesus died to make a way of escape for us, that we might overcome every evil temper, every sin, every temptation, and sit down at last with Him” (*ibid.*, 1:144). See Knight,

of the church by revealing the selfless love of God for sinners in our lives!

Conclusion

As we conclude our study it may be useful to begin listing some of the things Ellen White does not say about the experience and condition of God's people after Jesus finishes His work of mediation in the heavenly sanctuary.¹³⁴ She does not describe them as having reached a state of sinless perfection—a phrase she never uses in her writings—or as being impeccable.¹³⁵ She does not suggest that during the time of Jacob's trouble they find comfort in the fact that they have been victorious over sin. Ellen White does not teach that Christ will abandon them once He finishes His work of mediation in heaven, and neither does she teach that at that moment the mantle of justification by faith will be removed from God's people. She does not state that they have to stand before God by themselves without Jesus. Ellen White does not even imply that the Holy Spirit will withdraw from the remnant when Christ ceases His work of mediation.

On the positive side, many important theological and practical insights arise from our study of the topic. We will summarize the most important ones:

1. The closure of Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is one of the most important eschatological events that will take place at the close of the cosmic conflict. It is a transitional event that ends the mode God has always worked with the human race by introducing a new way of relating to sinful human beings.¹³⁶ The atoning blood of Christ will cease to be efficacious for the mass of end-time unrepentant sinners who have persistently rejected it. It

The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness, 171–172. This specific emphasis on victory demonstrates that believers will be constantly involved in a spiritual conflict but that there is no reason for them to be defeated. Victory is always a possibility through the grace of God. It also suggests that there will never be a time before the coming of Christ when believers could claim complete freedom from the struggle against their sinful nature. In this constant struggle for victory, as we have indicated, we will also have to rely on God's forgiving grace.

¹³⁴ See also Knight, *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness: A Study of Sin and Salvation*, 196–197.

¹³⁵ She writes, "When the conflict of life is ended, when the armor is laid off at the feet of Jesus, when the saints of God are glorified, then and then only will it be safe to claim that we are saved and sinless. True sanctification will not lead any human being to pronounce himself holy, sinless, and perfect. Let the Lord proclaim the truth of your character" (Ellen G. White, "The Whole Duty of Man," *Signs of the Times*, May 16, 1895, par. 4).

¹³⁶ For similar ideas see Steger, "Sin intercessor," 3–5.

thus ends the saving work of Christ in heaven on behalf of sinners—a momentarily sad, but ultimately necessary, event.

The saving efficacy of the cross for sinners is directly related to the work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart. He has been constantly calling them to embrace the gift of salvation through Christ's atoning work. Therefore, this transitional event introduces a change in the activity or work of the Spirit on the planet. Consequently it also changes the way God relates to the wicked. For the first time in the history of the human race, the wrath of God is activated in its fullness and finality, without a touch of divine mercy for rebellious human beings who will soon be put out of their self-imposed misery. The end of Christ's mediation is an eschatological event of cosmic proportions in which each member of the Godhead is personally and directly involved. It fixes once and for all the destiny of each human being, thus sealing their character forever. But it also transitions to the most glorious eschatological event ever seen on the planet—the second coming of Jesus, the full realization of the blessed hope.

2. The transitional nature of the close of Christ's high priestly work does not alter in any way how Christ relates to His faithful and loyal people on earth. During that transition they will face the last vicious attack of evil powers against them, but their reaction is amazing: in the middle of the struggle they exclusively rely on Christ's atoning blood. Yes, they will look at themselves, but only to realize that their hope is not located in their achievements or their spiritual condition. These are not enough to make them victorious. What they find is a deep sense of unworthiness and hopelessness. Pride and selfishness do not reign over them; thus they reflect the loving character of Christ. Their only hope is to look by faith at the cleansing power of the blood of Christ that purifies them from sin. Indeed, His grace will be enough for them. They are still covered by the righteousness of Christ.¹³⁷

3. The preparation for that troublesome period consists of receiving or appropriating and sharing the messages of the three angels in Revelation 14:1–12. This message will prepare the whole world for the coming of Christ. The message is about the eternal gospel—justification by faith in Christ (“faith of/in Jesus”)—and about their humble submission to the will of God as revealed in His law as a transcript of His loving character. The appropriation of the message transforms and sanctifies them to reflect the image of the

¹³⁷ She writes, “We cannot say, ‘I am sinless,’ till this vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body. But if we constantly seek to follow Jesus, the blessed hope is ours of standing before the throne of God without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; complete in Christ, robed in His righteousness and perfection” (E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book Three, 355; see n. 138). Cf. Knight, *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness*, 177.

Savior who was absolutely loyal to the Father. By sharing the message they participate in the mission of Jesus, who came to us with a message of salvation.

4. The preparation for the time of trouble also includes putting away sin from God's people. This takes place by accepting the atonement of Christ, through which they are justified by faith, and by obedience to the truth or sanctification. For Ellen White, these two elements are inseparable from each other. She understands character perfection to include justification and sanctification. Using the typology of the Day of Atonement, Ellen White indicates that God's people need to learn to live the Christian life in a state of constant repentance and confession of sin, while following Christ step by step in submission to His will, all done by the sustaining and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. They are penitent believers. Therefore, the closer they come to Jesus, the greater their sense of unworthiness and the more they will rely on the merits of Christ and not on their alleged state of sinless perfection.

5. God's people should have also learned to commune with the Lord through prayer and the study of and meditation on Scripture. They will have developed a deep love for the truth that protects them from satanic deception and provides for them a solid foundation on which to stand. They are solidly and firmly grounded in the saving work of Christ and in the Bible. Consequently, they are immovable in their allegiance to God. This is not a matter of sinning or not sinning—whether they have become impeccable or sinless. They are still human beings with a fallen human nature who, under the influence and protection of the Spirit, have made the ultimate commitment to the Lord. They are so firmly committed to the Lord and His truth that, rather than betraying Him, they are willing to totally trust in Him and His saving power in the midst of their mortal struggles. This has been the divine standard for God's people throughout the history of the cosmic conflict and continues to be the goal for those living shortly before Christ finishes His work of mediation.

For those who may want to press the question of the sinless perfection of the remnant, the answer is a simple one: according to Ellen White, God's people do not see themselves as having reached that state.¹³⁸ They will be firmly established on the biblical truth for

¹³⁸ The following statement is probably one of the best summaries of Ellen G. White's understanding of Christian perfection:

We need to be refined, cleansed from all earthliness, till we reflect the image of our Saviour, and become "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Then we shall delight to do the will of God, and Christ can own us before the Father and before

the last day, but they will see themselves as unworthy, having to rely on Christ's saving grace, until the second coming.¹³⁹ This is how they express their deep love to the one who redeemed them. The call to develop a character like Christ's (Christian perfection) is not an end in itself. The ultimate goal of Christian perfection is to make us more efficient servants of God and others by revealing the love of Christ in our lives.

the holy angels as those who abide in Him, and He will not be ashamed to call us brethren. But we shall not boast of our holiness. As we have clearer views of Christ's spotlessness and infinite purity, we shall feel as did Daniel, when he beheld the glory of the Lord, and said, "My comeliness was turned in me into corruption."

We cannot say, "I am sinless," till this vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body. But if we constantly seek to follow Jesus, the blessed hope is ours of standing before the throne of God without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; complete in Christ, robed in His righteousness and perfection (E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book Three, 355).

It is obvious that she took Christian perfection extremely seriously and phrased it in practical terms: Reflecting the image of Christ means that we delight in doing God's will for us. This perfection should never lead to spiritual pride because the clearer we perceive the holiness of Christ, the more unworthy we would see ourselves. She then rejects sinless perfection by making clear that we will not be sinless until the second coming of Christ when our bodies will be transformed into Christ's glorious body. She spells out what she specifically means by Christian perfection: First, it means that we are constantly seeking to follow Jesus—we have accepted Him as the Lord of our lives and as our model. Second, it means that we have the hope of standing before the throne of God 1) without spot or wrinkle, and 2) complete in Christ, meaning "robed in His righteousness and perfection." Being perfect or complete in Christ consists in receiving the imputed righteousness and perfection of Christ that transform us into His likeness.

¹³⁹ When we place the emphasis on the sinlessness of the remnant, we create theological conflicts that are not necessary and that Ellen White did not formulate for us. She points to the sufficiency of Christ's atonement and so should we. The commitment of the remnant is so radical that they will not rebel against their Savior. If we want to say more than that, perhaps it would be right to suggest that "God's sealed and faithful people are regarded as perfect in the sense that they are no longer cherishing sin or committing known sins—sins that are deliberately or willfully performed. They will be imperfect in the sense that they still have sinful natures; and thus all that they do is less than the best. They still have unavoidable deficiencies, but they do not indulge in or commit premeditated acts of sin" (Whidden, *Ellen G. White on Salvation*, 136). Knight had already made essentially the same point (in 1992) by commenting that Ellen G. White "indicates that 'cherished' sins are the real problem rather than sins of omission or unconscious sins (mistakes)" (*The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness*, 197).

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ThD, is the retired director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventhday Adventists and continues to work part-time for the Institute. He also served as pastor, academy teacher and director, theology professor and academic vice president at Southwestern Adventist University (Keene, Texas) and Antillean Adventist University (Mayagüez Arriba, Puerto Rico), and president of the latter. He has published over twelve books, numerous pamphlets, and hundreds of articles in books, journals, and magazines. Among his books are *Esther: A Theological Approach*, *Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* and *Jewelry in the Bible*. He is editor of the Biblical Research Institute Studies in Adventist Ecclesiology series.



Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600

Website: adventistbiblicalresearch.org
E-mail: biblicalresearch@gc.adventist.org
Phone: 301-680-6790
Fax: 301-680-6788

