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Chapter Six

An Examination of Ellen White's Major Themes

We have come a long way in our journey with Ellen White in this book. First we examined her long life. We then looked at the work of the Ellen G. White Estate since her death and examined her various writings.

Now we are ready for the final phase of our introduction to Mrs. White. In this chapter we will examine seven major themes that run throughout her writings. They represent ideas that help us understand her theology and her burden for individuals and the church. Also they integrate the various strands of her thinking into a unified network of concepts that provide an interpretive framework for not only single documents but for entire sectors of her writings (such as health, education, and family living).

The following seven themes are not the only ones that we could have chosen, but they do seem to be among her most basic, and they are certainly prominent throughout her works. As a result, these seven themes offer integrative and interpretive insight into Ellen White's writings that will help us read her with better understanding.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Perhaps the central and most comprehensive theme in the [p. 110] writings of Ellen White is that of the love of God. Why do we begin with this theme? The answer is that it is the one she repeatedly treats first and foremost in her major books. A few illustrations of that point will help us grasp the theme's crucial place in her thought.

One of the most forceful illustrations of the centrality of God's love in Ellen White's writings is that the phrase "God is love" provides the first three words in the first volume of the Conflict of the Ages Series (*Patriarchs and Prophets*) and the last three words of the series' final volume (*The Great Controversy*).

Why is that so? Because, as we shall see below, the fact of God's lovingness is the central point of the great struggle between good and evil, as portrayed by Mrs. White. As a result, she emphasizes God's love at every opportunity. "God is love" is the phrase that provides the context for her telling of the massive great controversy story.

Another significant illustration of the centrality of the theme of God's love to Ellen White's writings is that a discussion of that all-important topic provides the content for the first chapter of *Steps to Christ*. The book's opening words are "Nature and revelation alike testify of God's love" (SC 9).

Mrs. White goes on to point out how the natural world "speaks to us of the Creator's love" and that even in a world of sin the message of God's love shines through. After all, "there are flowers upon the thistles, and the thorns are covered with roses. 'God is love' is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass" (SC 9, 10).

Yet, she points out, the things of nature in a world of sin "but imperfectly represent His love." The supreme and clearest illustration of God's love for us, she emphasizes, is God's sending Jesus to save us from our sins (SC 10-13).

The chapter closes with the following underlining of the central theme of the book. "Such love [as God had for us in providing for our salvation in Jesus] is without parallel. Children of the heavenly King! Precious promise! Theme for the most profound meditation! The matchless love of God for a world that did not [p. 111] love Him! The thought has a subduing power upon the soul and brings the mind into captivity to the will of God. The more we study the divine character in the light of the cross, the more we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice, and the more clearly we discern innumerable evidences of a love that is infinite and a tender pity surpassing a mother's yearning sympathy for her wayward child" (SC 15).

A third powerful illustration of God's love as being the central theme of Ellen White occurs in the opening pages of *The Desire of Ages*. Jesus, she points out in the book's first paragraph, "came to reveal the light of God's love" (DA 19). On the next page she writes that Jesus' life demonstrated "that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which 'seeketh not her own' has its source in the heart of God" (DA 20). Her conclusion on the final page is that through Christ "love has conquered" (DA 835).

The love of God is uplifted first, last, and all through Ellen White's writings. She repeatedly treats it first and last in her most important books, and it provides the beginning and ending words for her treatment of the Conflict of the Ages, with more than 3,500 pages in between. It appears to be the theme that undergirds and provides the context for all other themes in her writings.

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

A second integrating theme that runs throughout her work is that of the great controversy, or struggle, between Christ and Satan. It builds upon the theme of God's love.

Mrs. White emphasizes repeatedly that the focal point of the great controversy is Satan's aim to misrepresent the loving character of God. Thus in the first chapter of *Steps to Christ* we read that Satan has worked to get people to fear God as a being who is "severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice--one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them" (SC 11).

[p. 112] According to Ellen White, the core of the controversy has extended beyond Satan's attempt to misrepresent God's character to a deliberate distortion of His law. Thus we read in the early pages of *The Desire of Ages* that "Satan represents God's law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts" (DA 24). Again, she

writes in *The Great Controversy*: "From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan's purpose to overthrow the law of God" (GC 582).

Of course, in the thinking of Ellen White the character of God and the principle undergirding the law of God are not two elements but one. God's character is one of love, as is the principle at the heart of His law. Thus Satan's intent in the great controversy is to discredit God's love in its several manifestations.

It is that attempt at misrepresentation that God has had to fight against. Ellen White sets the stage for her treatment of God's reaction to Satan on the opening page of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, when she writes that "the history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love" (PP 33).

God's demonstration of His love in the ongoing conflict with Satan forms the focus, as we noted earlier, of the five-volume Conflict of the Ages Series. Beyond those volumes, it provides the theological framework that gives direction and context to the rest of her writings.

God's foremost exhibition of His love was His sending of Jesus. Ellen White argues that God demonstrated His love in the context of Satan's charges by developing the plan of salvation in which Jesus would die for the human race. However, Jesus came not only to die for humanity, but to portray God's love in the face of Satan's accusations. Speaking to that point, Mrs. White tells us that "it was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men" (SC 11). Likewise, in response to Satan's claim, Jesus came to demonstrate that the law was love indeed and that it could be kept (DA 24).

By His life and death, claims Ellen White, Jesus won the victory [p. 113] for the Godhead. "Through Christ's redeeming work," she penned, "the government of God stands justified. The Omnipotent One is made known as the God of love. Satan's charges are refuted, and his character unveiled" (DA 26).

The concluding paragraph of *The Great Controversy* ties the themes of love and cosmic conflict together nicely. We read that "the great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love" (GC 678).

The concepts of God's love and the great controversy lead to a third theme that permeates Ellen White's writings and links all the various themes together. That third theme focuses on Jesus, His cross, and salvation through His grace.

JESUS, THE CROSS, AND SALVATION THROUGH HIM

Not only did Ellen White picture Jesus as doing battle with Satan in the realm of cosmic controversy, but she constantly set Him forth in a very personal way. From the time of her

conversion, she uplifted Jesus as the only hope for every individual. At that point in her life she realized that "it is only by connecting with Jesus through faith that the sinner becomes a hopeful, believing child of God." All the longing of her heart, she reports, was "Help, Jesus; save me, or I perish" (LS 23).

Ellen White never forgot her early struggles in salvation, when she believed that she had to be good before God could accept her. Finding Jesus and salvation through faith in His merits became a central theme in her writing and preaching ministry all the way from her first vision, in which she saw safety for the Millerites only as they "kept their eyes fixed on Jesus" (EW 14), up to her death in 1915.

A profound sense of human helplessness undergirded her theology of salvation in Jesus. She pointed out that "the result of the [p. 114] eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man's experience. There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist. To withstand this force, to attain that ideal which in his inmost soul he accepts as alone worthy, he can find help in but one power. That power is Christ" (Ed 29).

But in spite of her belief in human unworthiness, Mrs. White's view of Jesus was one of unlimited hope for a lost world. "In every human being, however fallen, He beheld a son of God, one who might be restored to the privilege of his divine relationship. . . . Looking upon men in their suffering and degradation Christ perceived ground for hope where appeared only despair and ruin. Wherever there existed a sense of need, there He saw opportunity for uplifting. Souls tempted, defeated, feeling themselves lost, ready to perish, He met, not with denunciation, but with blessing" (Ed 79).

For Ellen White, Jesus was not merely a good friend in time of need; He was a Saviour who died on the cross for each individual. In a favorite passage from *The Desire of Ages* we read that "Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His" (DA 25).

That Jesus died for our sins, that He paid the penalty for our sins on the cross, was a theme she never tired of repeating. "Christ crucified for our sins, Christ risen from the dead, Christ ascended on high, is the science of salvation that we are to learn and to teach" (8T 287).

Faith in Christ's salvation (or righteousness by faith) is a teaching that permeates Ellen White's writings. By faith individuals appropriate the blessings of salvation won at the cross. She uplifted a "faith in the ability of Christ to save us amply and fully and entirely" (1888 Materials 217). That faith extends to Christ's ministry for His children in the heavenly sanctuary.

For Ellen White, the death of Christ on Calvary not only made salvation possible for every individual, but also settled the [p. 115] issue of God's character in the great controversy. "Christ's death," she stated, "proved God's administration and government to be without a flaw. Satan's charge in regard to the conflicting attributes of justice and mercy was forever settled beyond question. Every voice in heaven and out of heaven will one day testify to the justice, mercy, and exalted attributes of God" (MS 128, 1897).

In the mind of Ellen White, the life of Jesus, His death on the cross, His ministry in applying the merits of His death in the heavenly sanctuary, and the acceptance of Christ's work by the believer through faith stands as a great thematic cluster at the center of her understanding of Christianity. Nothing was more important to her than that intimately related complex of ideas. "Lift up Jesus," she wrote to ministers, "lift Him up in sermon, in song, in prayer. . . . Let the science of salvation be the burden of every sermon, the theme of every song. . . . Hold forth the word of life, presenting Jesus as the hope of the penitent and the stronghold of every believer" (GW 160).

Again, she penned, "The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. I present before you the great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, salvation and redemption--the Son of God uplifted on the cross. This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers" (GW 315).

THE CENTRALITY OF THE BIBLE

Parallel to Ellen White's emphasis of Christ, the living Word of God, was her concern with God's Written Word. In her first book (1851) she wrote: "I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice" (EW 78). And 58 years later she stood before the 1909 General Conference session with a Bible in her hands, saying, "Brethren and sisters, I commend unto you this Book." They were her last spoken words to a General Conference session of the church.

Ellen White exalted the Bible throughout her lifetime. To her [p. 116] it was the revealed will of God, and it provided the knowledge that led to a saving relationship with Jesus. "In His Word," she declared, "God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience" (GC vii).

She particularly emphasized the centrality of the Bible in times of theological conflict. For example, as the church moved toward the controversial General Conference session of 1888 at Minneapolis and some were seeking to use other authorities for doctrine and Bible interpretation, she repeatedly pointed her fellow church leaders back to Scripture. "We want Bible evidence for every point we advance," she told them in April 1887 (1888 Materials 36). In July 1888 she wrote that "the Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine" (RH, July 17, 1888).

"Search the Scriptures carefully to see what is truth," she counseled Adventism's leading ministers a month later. "The truth can lose nothing by close investigation. Let the Word of God speak for itself, let it be its own interpreter.

"Our people," she continued, "individually must understand Bible truth more thoroughly, for they certainly will be called before councils; they will be criticized by keen and critical minds. It is one thing to give assent to the truth, and another thing, through close examination as Bible students, to know what is truth. . . . Many, many will be lost because they have not

studied their Bibles upon their knees, with earnest prayer to God that the entrance of the Word of God might give light to their understanding. . . .

"The Word of God is the great detector of error; to it we believe everything must be brought. The Bible must be our standard for every doctrine and practice. . . . We are to receive no one's opinion without comparing it with the Scriptures. Here is divine authority, which is supreme in matters of faith. It is the word of the living God that is to decide all controversies" (1888 Materials 38-40, 44, 45).

She claimed that "the Word of God is sufficient to enlighten [p. 117] the most beclouded mind and may be understood by those who have any desire to understand it." She regarded her own writings as an instrument to bring people "back to the word that they have neglected to follow" (5T 663).

That last point is an important one. Ellen White always held that her function was to point people to the Bible. "The Spirit was not given," she wrote, "--nor can it ever be bestowed--to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested" (GC vii). Thus, she held, her own prophetic ministry needed to be tested by the Bible. She saw her writings not as a substitute for the Bible but as "a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light" (CM 125).

For Ellen White, personal Bible study was of the utmost importance for every Christian. And while that was true in a general way, it would be especially crucial in the closing days of earth's history. At the end of time, she asserts, "Satan employs every possible device to prevent men from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible" so that human beings will not be able to detect his own deceptions (GC 593). Thus Bible study becomes a part of the endtime struggle. And "none," she states, "but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict" (GC 593, 594).

That thought brings us to a fifth pervasive integrative theme in Ellen White's writings--the second coming of Jesus.

THE SECOND COMING

The Second Coming was of central importance to Ellen White from the time of her conversion in the Millerite experience of the 1840s. The reality of the nearness of the Advent dominated her life and shaped her writing career. As such, it tied in with each of the other six themes we are discussing. Thus the Second Coming is a focal point of truth in the Bible, it is the climax of salvation in Christ, it signals the beginning of the end of the great controversy between good and evil, it is a supreme expression of God's love, it is the point of the three angels' messages, and it provides [p. 118] an incentive for living the Christian life. The Second Coming left no part of Ellen White's thinking unaffected.

She taught that the Second Advent must be at the center of Seventh-day Adventist teachings and activities. "All the discourses that we give," she said, "are plainly to reveal that we are waiting, working, and praying for the coming of the Son of God. His coming is our hope. This hope is to be bound up with all our words and works, with all our associations and relationships" (Ev 220).

For Ellen White the return of Christ was not only a future reality, but it had a sense of immediacy that demanded urgency in preaching its message to all the world in as short a time as possible. "Sound an alarm through the land," she wrote. "Tell the people that the day of the Lord is near, and hasteneth greatly. Let none be left unwarned. . . . We have no time to lose. . . . The coming of the Lord is nearer than when we first believed. The great controversy is nearing its end. Every report of calamity by sea or land is a testimony to the fact that the end of all things is at hand. Wars and rumors of wars declare it. . . . The Lord is coming. We hear the footsteps of an approaching God. . . . We are to prepare the way for Him by acting our part in getting a people ready for that great day" (Ev 218, 219). It was the truth of the Advent and the nearness of that event that set the stage for Adventist mission outreach.

Ellen White closely related her focus on the Second Advent and its mission outreach corollary to the apocalyptic books of Daniel and the Revelation. Those books and the end-time picture they set forth found a special place in her teaching and writing. "There is need of a much closer study of the Word of God," she wrote in 1896; "especially should Daniel and the Revelation have attention as never before in the history of our work" (Ev 577). Again, she urged, "there should be a closer and more diligent study of the Revelation, and a more earnest presentation of the truths it contains--truths which concern all who are living in these last days" (Ev 197).

Ellen White's own writings on the Second Advent demonstrate that she followed her own injunction to study Daniel and [p. 119] the Revelation. Her writings are seasoned throughout with treatments of and allusions to those two apocalyptic books.

Mrs. White wrote some of her most inspiring prose in connection with the cluster of events surrounding the Second Advent. Picturing the Second Advent itself, she writes: "By the people of God a voice, clear and melodious, is heard, saying, 'Look up,' and lifting their eyes to the heavens, they behold the bow of promise. The black, angry clouds that covered the firmament are parted, and like Stephen they look up steadfastly into heaven and see the glory of God and the Son of man seated upon His throne. . . .

"The wicked look with terror and amazement upon the scene, while the righteous behold with solemn joy the tokens of their deliverance. Everything in nature seems turned out of its course. . . . In the midst of the angry heavens is one clear space of indescribable glory, whence comes the voice of God like the sound of many waters, saying: 'It is done.' Revelation 16:17.

"That voice shakes the heavens and the earth. There is a mighty earthquake. . . . The firmament appears to open and shut. The glory from the throne of God seems flashing through. . . . The proudest cities of the earth are laid low. . . . Prison walls are rent asunder, and God's people, who have been held in bondage for their faith, are set free" (GC 636, 637).

Ellen White's description of the resurrection of the righteous is equally encouraging. "Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. . . . Throughout the length and breadth of the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. . . .

"The living righteous are changed 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.' At the voice of God they were glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up

to meet their Lord in the air. . . . Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers' arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God" (GC 644, 645).

Of all of Ellen White's depictions of experiences related to the [p. 120] Second Advent, perhaps those of life in the new earth are the most heartening. "There," she writes, "immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. . . . Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. . . . There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body" (GC 677).

As we can see from the above quotations, not only did the cluster of events related to the Second Advent form a major integrating theme in Ellen White's writings, but her sense of the reality of those events burned within her soul. That thematic cluster provided direction for her writings and an orientation for her life.

Intimately tied to Mrs. White's understanding of the Second Advent is a sixth theme that helps us comprehend her life and writings. That theme is the message of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12 and the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

THE THIRD ANGEL'S MESSAGE AND ADVENTIST MISSION

Revelation 14:6-12, with its description of the messages of the three angels, stands at the very heart of Seventh-day Adventist identity as Ellen White saw it. She held from the beginning of her ministry to its end nearly 71 years later that God had especially commissioned Adventism to preach the message of the third angel.

Catch the sense of mission in her words: "In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. . . . They have been given a work of the most solemn import--the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.

"The most solemn truths ever entrusted to mortals have been given to us to proclaim to the world. The proclamation of these truths is to be our work. The world is to be warned, and God's people are to be true to the trust committed to them" (9T 19).

[p. 121] Like the other Seventh-day Adventist leaders, Ellen White viewed the three angels' messages as a "perfect chain of truth" (EW 256) that extended from the 1840s to the end of time. The first message (the hour of the arrival of God's judgment), they concluded, had been initiated by the preaching of William Miller in the 1830s and 1840s, while the second (the fall of Babylon) began to be preached in 1843 when the Advent believers were being expelled from their churches for believing in the Bible doctrine of the premillennial Second Coming.

Those two messages were important, but they merely paved the way for the preaching of the third angel's message. It is in the third message that Seventh-day Adventism found its commission and unique identity. Ellen White and the other Sabbatarian believers held that "when Christ entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary [in October 1844] to perform the closing work of the atonement, He committed to His servants the last message of mercy to be given to the world. Such is the warning of the third angel of Revelation 14. Immediately following its proclamation, the Son of man is seen by the prophet coming in glory to reap the harvest of the earth" (SR 379).

Ellen White repeatedly taught that "this [the message of the third angel] is the last message" for a world soon to be destroyed. "There are no more [messages] to follow, no more invitations of mercy to be given after this message shall have done its work. What a trust!" (5T 206, 207).

Mrs. White taught that the preaching of the third angel's message (along with the first two) would be worldwide. It is that firmly held belief, rooted in Revelation 14:6-12, that has literally driven the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the ends of the earth with its evangelistic message.

The third angel's message, Ellen White declared, was not only to be global, but to draw out and test human beings. "The third angel's message must do its work of separating from the churches a people who will take their stand on the platform of eternal truth." It is a "life-and-death message" (6T 61). Again, she penned, "the Lord has been pleased to give His people the third [p. 122] angel's message as a testing message to bear to the world. John beholds a people distinct and separate from the world, who refuse to worship the beast or his image, who bear God's sign, keeping holy His Sabbath-the seventh day. . . . Of them the apostle writes, 'Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus' [Rev. 14:12]" (Ev 233).

Thus we find the perpetuity of the law of God and the restoration of the Biblical Sabbath at the heart of the Adventist understanding of the third angel's message. Early Seventh-day Adventists had no problem seeing those elements in the third message. They were also quick to grasp the great controversy aspect of Revelation 13 and 14 that pitted those who had the mark of the beast against those who kept all of God's commandments.

But what many failed to see in the third angel's message was the meaning of "the faith of Jesus." That is a point that Ellen White sought to clarify for her fellow church members at the 1888 General Conference session at Minneapolis. The faith of Jesus (which can be translated from the Greek as faith in Jesus), she emphasized, means "Jesus becoming our sin-bearer that He might become our sin-pardoning Saviour. . . . He came to our world and took our sins that we might take His righteousness. Faith in the ability of Christ to save us amply and fully and entirely is the faith of Jesus" (1888 Materials 217). Thus she could say in another connection that "justification by faith. . . . is the third angel's message in verity [truth]" (1SM 372).

From Ellen White's perspective, the third angel's message combined law and gospel. As long as the Seventh-day Adventists overemphasized the law and the Sabbath to the detriment of the gospel of grace, they were not preaching the full third angel's message. That was the denomination's weakness before 1888. But beginning with 1888 and Adventism's fuller

understanding of the third angel's message, Ellen White could claim that Adventists then had the full message and that "the loud cry of the third angel [had] begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer" (1SM 363).

The centrality of the third angel's message with its imperative [p. 123] to worldwide mission stands at the very center of Ellen White's thought as a foremost interpretive theme. And like the other interpretive, integrating themes, it networks with the other six.

Before we move away from the theme of the third angel, it should be pointed out that not only were Ellen White's extensive writings on the law, Sabbath, righteousness by faith, the great controversy, and other topics directly related to the third message, but so were her voluminous comments on education, health, publishing, and the gospel ministry.

Adventist education was to train people to spread the third angel's message. The health message (the right arm of the third angel; see 1T 486) was to provide people with better health so that they could more adequately preach the Advent message, and to lead others to the truth through the witness of Adventist health institutions. The publishing and ministerial programs were also to spread the last message to the world before the final harvest of Revelation 14:14-20.

The third angel's message is also directly related to the final Ellen White theme that we will examine in this short overview--everyday Christian living and character development.

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

Christianity, as Ellen White saw it, is to affect every part of a person's daily life. Far from being something that happens to people when they are in church, true Christianity transforms people from the inside out. It changes their hearts, but that inner change, if it is genuine, carries over into family relationships, schooling and work, and even how people use their spare time. The large amount of material that Ellen White has written about recreation, marriage, health, the use of our time and abilities, and similar topics speaks to the practical implications of Christianity.

The belief in a conversion experience that transforms the heart undergirds her many counsels on practical Christianity. That belief is coupled to an understanding that outward actions stem from inward motives. Thus once a person is converted, it is only [p. 124] natural for him or her to live a Christian life through the power of God's Spirit.

Ellen White pictures the core of practical Christianity to be acting like Jesus rather than living by the principles of Satan's kingdom. And underlying the way of Jesus versus the way of Satan are two principles that diametrically oppose each other. "Sin," she points out, "originated in self-seeking," in selfishness. By way of contrast, self-giving love is "the great principle which is the law of life for the universe." "The angels of glory find their joy in giving. . . . It is the glory of our God to give" (DA 20, 2 1). Jesus illustrated the law of self-sacrificing love in daily life. He came not only to die for us, but "to give us an example of obedience." Christ "revealed a character the opposite of the character of Satan" (DA 24, 25).

From the perspective of Mrs. White, people will live either according to the principle of Satan's kingdom (selfishness) or by the principle of God's kingdom (self-sacrificing love). No other options exist. Nor can people's principles be held only in their hearts and minds. Principles motivate daily actions. Thus she writes that "love can no more exist without revealing itself in outward acts than fire can be kept alive without fuel" (1T 695). Who we are in our inmost being we will carry out into the practical experiences of daily life.

The transition from a life built on Satan's principle to one founded on Christ's principle takes place when a person surrenders his or her life to Jesus. "When a man is converted to God," we read, "a new moral taste is supplied, a new motive power is given, and he loves the things that God loves" (1SM 336). That new motive power will lead individuals to desire to be "as holy in our sphere as God is holy in His sphere. To the extent of our ability, we are to make manifest the truth and love and excellence of the divine character" (1SM 337).

In short, Christians are, through God's empowering grace, to aim at being like Jesus in their daily life. They are to emulate His character. But, she is careful to assert, "we can never equal the pattern" of Christ's character, even though "we may imitate and resemble [p. 125] it" (RH, Feb 5, 1895). God supplies His forgiving grace when we "fail. . . in our efforts to copy the divine pattern" (1SM 337).

And just as love is the central characteristic of God and the core issue in the great controversy, so it is also at the heart of what it means to develop a Christlike character that finds expression in the practical affairs of daily life. Ellen White points out that "wherever there is union with Christ there is love. Whatever other fruits we may bear, if love be missing, they profit nothing. Love to God and our neighbors is the very essence of our religion. No one can love Christ and not love His children. When we are united to Christ, we have the mind of Christ. Purity and love shine forth in the character, meekness and truth control the life." She goes on to say that even "the very expression of the countenance is changed. Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to the peace and joy that reign within" (1SM 337).

Being a child of God, Ellen White repeatedly asserts in a multitude of contexts, means a change in every part of daily life. It means dropping harmful habits and destructive ways of relating. But the Christian life involves much more than that. In fact, discarding activities, attitudes, and habits means nothing in itself. For the genuine Christian, abandoning less than Christian attitudes and activities is certainly important, but it is only the prelude to the incorporation of Christ's active, positive characteristics. It is the adding on, not merely the dropping off, that lies at the center of what it means to live like Jesus.

And what was Jesus like? Ellen White puts it nicely in the opening words of *The Ministry of Healing* when she writes that "our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man's necessity" (MH 17). He came to serve others, to help them, and to give them the words of truth. In that He is our example.

She repeatedly exhorts us to be like Jesus in servanthood. A Christian's labor of love for others, she points out, is an "individual responsibility" that "cannot be done by proxy" (MH 147). Too many Christians, she adds, fail to become involved in sharing God's love. Instead, they leave the actual work of witnessing [p. 126] and helping others to organizations and professionals.

It is no accident that the book *Education* begins and ends with a discussion of service to others. Lives devoted to service rather than to self-centered living have passed from Satan's kingdom to Christ's. As a result, Ellen White can write of those who finally enter the heavenly kingdom that they not only found their "greatest joy" in service while on earth, but that their "greatest joy" in the earth made new will also be found in serving others, in being like Jesus (Ed 309).

Mrs. White even ties her discussion of Christian perfection to the internalization of God's loving character in daily life. In *Christ's Object Lessons* she notes that "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (COL 69).

Too many people have read that statement without carefully reading its context. As a result, they have imputed meanings to it that one does not find in the passage itself. The two previous pages make her intent clear. She plainly states that Christ is seeking to reproduce Himself in the hearts of others, and that those who have accepted Him will have put away the self-centered living of Satan's kingdom. Instead, they will be serving others, telling others of God's goodness, and doing good. They will be becoming more like Christ because they have received "the Spirit of Christ--the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others." As a result, she says to her readers, "your love [will] be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely" (COL 67, 68). Thus to reproduce the character of Christ perfectly is to let Him live out His love in our daily lives.

With that thought we have come full circle in our discussion of the integrative themes in the writings of Ellen White. We began with a discussion of the love of God and the challenge to that love in the great controversy. Now we will end with the thought that "the last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of [p. 127] love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them" (COL 415, 416). They will be a demonstration that God is truly love and that His saving grace transforms both character and action.

The great controversy, the love of God, and the other great themes in the writings of Ellen White are not points for abstract discussion. Far from it. They affect our daily lives. Each of us must daily choose to live in the real world by accepting either God's principles or Satan's. God has provided the writings of Ellen White to guide us in those daily choices. Their purpose is to help us in making earthly decisions that have eternal consequences.

PRAISE GOD FOR ALL HIS BLESSINGS!