

## PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, Part 2: “The Problem and the Solution” (Outline)

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When we speak of the plan of salvation as taught in the Bible, the question invariably arises, What are we being saved from? The very assumption behind the notion of salvation is that those needing to be saved have a problem, from which they need to be rescued.

Sometimes I get the feeling that some folks think of salvation as merely adding God to their list of friends on Facebook. But that isn't the Biblical message so far as salvation is concerned.

This weekend's revival series, for those who weren't with us last evening, is titled, “Prepare to Meet Thy God.”

Last evening we spoke of our supreme authority in matters spiritual, how the written counsel of God, both Scripture and the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy—must be supreme above all else.

Our first message this morning will be titled, “The Problem and the Solution.”

Humanity's ultimate problem is described by the angel Gabriel in the first reference to salvation in the New Testament:

Matt. 1:21:

“Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.”

So it's sin from which Biblical salvation is designed to save us.

### *The Two Primary Gospels in Contemporary Adventism*

Now let's look briefly at the following summary of the two most prominent belief systems in contemporary Adventism regarding sin and salvation:

#### The Two Primary Gospels in Contemporary Adventism

	<b>Classic Adventism</b>	<b>Evangelical Adventism</b>
<b>Nature of Sin</b>	By Choice	By Birth
<b>Humanity of Christ</b>	Post-Fall	Pre-Fall
<b>Ground of Salvation</b>	Justification and Sanctification	Justification Only
<b>Justification</b>	Declarative and Transformative	Declarative Only
<b>Sanctification</b>	Perfect in This Life	Never Perfect in This Life

And the past several decades of Adventist history, along with simple logic, have demonstrated that where we stand so far as the above issues are concerned, has a direct impact on our thinking

concerning such key doctrinal issues as the sanctuary, the Sabbath, the remnant church theology, as well as standards of Christian living.

Gillian Ford, wife of the late Dr. Desmond Ford, clearly identified the reason for her husband's challenge to classic Adventist prophetic interpretation in the following statement, in a book co-authored with her husband in 2008:

“It was Ford's emphasis on righteousness by faith that led him to see the necessity for reinterpretation of the SDA scheme of prophecy.”

Desmond and Gillian Ford, *For the Sake of the Gospel: Throw out the bathwater, but keep the Baby* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc, 2008), p. 153.

A new biography of the late Edward Heppenstall likewise affirms the direct link between Desmond Ford's righteousness by faith theology and his denial of our classic sanctuary doctrine:

“The theme that seeded the 1980 conflagration (over the sanctuary) that swept over the church was righteousness by faith, the subject of Heppenstall's correspondence with Brinsmead and Ford in the first days of 1978, and occasioned the Colorado (Glacier View) meeting.”

Gilbert M. Valentine, *Edward Heppenstall: Reforming Theologian of Twentieth-Century Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 2025), p. 394.

### *The Nature of the Sin Problem*

Some years ago (April 21, 1997) we saw this cover story in an issue of *U.S. News & World Report*: “Born Bad?”

More recently, in a cover article from the *Smithsonian* magazine (January 2013), we saw a similar headline: “Born to be Bad?”

So when you hear people saying that the issues of sin and salvation being debated just now in contemporary Adventism are supposedly irrelevant to the rest of the world, think again. Thoughtful men and women of many backgrounds, religious and otherwise, are wondering about these questions.

As violent crime and other destructive behaviors tear at society's fabric, people are asking whether nature or nurture—destiny or choice—is the determining factor in human conduct.

Regarding sin, the Bible is clear as to its voluntary nature:

Eze. 18:20:

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.”

Now folks, if in fact Adam's sin has been transmitted to the whole world because of what he did, totally apart from any choice of our own, this verse would be wrong. Because it says that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.

Some will say, Wait a minute. Doesn't Romans chapter 5 teach that all are sinners because of Adam?

Yes it does. But that's because all have *chosen* to follow Adam's example. Listen to what Paul says in this passage:

Rom. 5:12:

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

In other words, death (eternal death, that is) has passed upon all humanity because "all have sinned," not because Adam sinned. Ellen White is clear that the spiritual consequences described in Romans chapter 5 are a matter of personal choice on the part of human beings:

ST June 27, 1900:

"Human beings have degenerated. One after another they fall under the curse, because sin has entered into the world, and death by sin. . . . We may choose God's way and live; we may choose our own way, and know that sin has entered into the world, and death by sin."

Other Bible verses also affirm the voluntary nature of human sin:

James 4:17:

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

James 1:14-15:

"Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

"Then lust, when it hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin."

"Lust," of course, is the New Testament word for "desire." What this verse is telling us is that to be tempted through the desires of one's fleshly nature is not the same as sin. Lust has to conceive—the desire must be cherished—in order for sin to take place.

Ellen White agrees:

KH 140:

"There are thoughts and feelings suggested and aroused by Satan that annoy even the best of men; but if they are not cherished, if they are repulsed as hateful, the soul is not contaminated with guilt and no other is defiled by their influence."

5T 177:

"No man can be forced to transgress. His own consent must be first gained, the soul must purpose the sinful act, before passion can dominate over reason, or iniquity triumph over conscience."

Folks, if we're born sinners, we're forced to transgress simply by being born! But this statement says no one can be forced to transgress.

Here's another statement:

ST Dec. 18, 1893:

"It is not in the power of Satan to force anyone to sin. Sin is the sinner's individual act. Before sin exists in the heart, the consent of the will must be given, and as soon as it is given, sin is triumphant, and hell rejoices."

This is an important statement to remember. Because if you believe babies are born sinners, sin exists in that child's heart long before the consent of the will is ever given. No newborn baby could possibly qualify as a sinner based on this statement.

Listen to the following statement from Ellen White:

FH 151 (ST March 9, 1882):

“The light of life is freely proffered to all. Every one who will may be guided by the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Christ is the great remedy for sin. None can plead their circumstances, their education, or their temperament as an excuse for living in rebellion against God. Sinners are such by their own deliberate choice.”

Now some will ask, What about King David's declaration in the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm?

Psalm 51:5:

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

Notice, though, that David doesn't say, “*As a sinner* did my mother conceive me.” David is simply stating here that he was born into a sinful world, like all of us. Neither he nor any other Bible writer teaches that men and women become sinners apart from an act of the will.

Ellen White under divine inspiration tells us there is only one definition of sin in the Bible. And it is found in First John chapter 3, verse 4:

I John 3:4:

“Sin is the transgression of the law.”

A number of times Ellen White identifies this verse as the only definition of sin found in the Bible:

7BC 951:

“‘Sin is the transgression of the law.’ This is the only definition of sin.”

1SM 320:

“The only definition we find in the Bible for sin is that ‘sin is the transgression of the law’ (I John 3:4).”

GC 493:

“Our only definition of sin is that given in the word of God: it is ‘the transgression of the law;’ it is the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government.”

FW 56:

“Now we want to understand what sin is, that it is the transgression of God's law. This is the only definition given in the Scriptures.”

I have found at least seven other statements from the Spirit of Prophecy which say the same thing (GCB March 2, 1897; OHC 141; RH June 10, 1890; July 15, 1890; 1SAT 228; ST Nov. 24, 1887; March 3, 1890). And there are likely many more. So when we hear scholars and theologians and others giving other, more nuanced and complicated definitions for sin, we need to be very careful.

Prophets have veto power over scholars, theologians, pastors, and spiritual counselors of all kinds.

Some will then ask, Does a newborn baby need a Savior? And the answer is Yes. But then we have to clarify, What does the work of a Savior involve? Once again, the first reference to salvation in the New Testament tells us:

Matt. 1:21:

“Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.”

And according to the Bible, the work of saving human beings from sin involves two phases:

Forgiveness (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7).

Empowerment (II Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5).

Jesus obviously didn't need the saving work of forgiveness, because He never sinned. But did He need the saving work of empowerment? The inspired writings are clear that He did. Look at these references:

John 5:30:

“I can of Mine own self do nothing.”

DA 123:

“He (Christ) was fitted for the conflict by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”

DA 664:

“Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.”

Finally, the following Ellen White statement moves us directly from the subject of the nature of sin into our next topic—the human nature of Christ:

9MR 238:

“As we see the condition of mankind today, the question arises in the minds of some, “Is man by nature totally and wholly depraved?” Is he hopelessly ruined? No, he is not. The Lord Jesus left the royal courts and, taking our human nature, lived such a life as everyone may live in humanity, through following His example. We may perfect a life in this world which is an example of righteousness, and overcome as Christ has given us an example in His life, revealing that humanity may conquer as He, the great Pattern conquered.”

Notice *why* Ellen White says humanity is not *by nature* totally and hopelessly depraved. Not—at least not according to this statement—because we can be born again. But because Jesus came in *our nature* and lived a perfect life, through the same power available to you and to me.

### *The Human Nature of Christ*

Which brings us to our next topic: Jesus' inherited humanity. Many people don't realize that the very first doctrine found in the New Testament is that of the human nature of Christ. It's in the very first verse:

Matt. 1:1:

“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.”

And what kind of people were David and Abraham? Fallen? Or unfallen? This is why the apostle Paul writes in the book of Romans:

Rom. 1:3:

“Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh.”

Let’s turn to the book of Hebrews.

Heb. 2:14:

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same.”

Now this verse reminds us of another passage from Paul’s writings.

I Cor. 15:50:

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”

Now let me ask you, When Paul says flesh and blood can’t inherit the kingdom of God, is he talking about physical tissue?

Is Paul saying those with resurrected bodies will not have physical flesh and blood? Obviously not, since Jesus said something very different to His disciples after His resurrection:

Luke 24:39:

“Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; handle Me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have.”

So it isn’t physical tissue which Paul says isn’t going to heaven. Let’s turn to Romans 8, and we’ll get a clearer picture of the “flesh” Jesus partook of, and why Paul says this “flesh” isn’t going to inherit God’s kingdom:

Rom. 8:3-4:

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,

“That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

But now let’s go, and look further at what “flesh” in this passage is all about:

Rom. 8:5,8-9:

“For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. . . .

“So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.”

Rom. 8:12-13:

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”

Now quite clearly, the “flesh” in these verses isn’t talking about what covers our bones. It’s talking about a human nature which encourages us to disobey God. And it is in this human nature that Jesus condemned sin, according to verse 3. He “condemned sin in the flesh.”

Turning back to Hebrews, chapter 2, we see further evidence as to the kind of human nature Jesus took.

Heb. 2:16-17:

“For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels, but took on Him the seed of Abraham.

“Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

In other words, what qualifies Jesus to be our High Priest in heaven, is the fact that He has been where we are in the struggle with evil.

Heb. 4:15:

“For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

Ellen White echoes the clarity of the Bible on this point in such statements as the following:

DA 49:

“It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man’s nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life.”

Notice very carefully, folks, the reason Jesus took our heredity. Not merely so He wouldn’t be as physically tall or as strong as the sinless Adam in Eden. Not merely so He could experience such benign weaknesses as hunger, thirst, weariness, and pain.

What did the statement say?

DA 49:

“He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life.”

In other words, He took the same heredity we inherit at birth, so He could be tempted like we are tempted. And folks, I don’t believe God gave us an impossible example. We’re going to talk more about that this afternoon.

Let’s consider some other statements:

DA 112:

“Notwithstanding that the sins of a guilty world were laid upon Christ, notwithstanding the humiliation of taking upon Himself our fallen nature, the voice from heaven declared Him to be the Son of the Eternal.”

1SG 25:

“Jesus also told them (the angels) that they should have a part to act, to be with Him, and at different times to strengthen Him. That He should take man’s fallen nature, and His strength would not even be equal with theirs.”

RH Dec. 15, 1896:

“Clad in the vestments of humanity, the Son of God came down to the level of those He wished to save. In Him was no guile or sinfulness; He was ever pure and undefiled; yet He took upon Him our sinful nature.”

RH July 17, 1900:

“Christ did in reality unite the offending nature of man with His own sinless nature, because by this act of condescension He would be enabled to pour out His blessings on behalf of the fallen race.”

From where do humanity’s strongest temptations come? Ellen White tells us:

BE & ST Dec. 1, 1892:

“His (the Christian’s) strongest temptations will come from within, for he must battle against the inclinations of the natural heart. The Lord knows our weaknesses.”

And how, according to Ellen White, does Jesus know our weaknesses?

DA 329:

“He knows by experience what are the weaknesses of humanity, what are our wants, and where lies the strength of our temptations, for He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

DA 117:

“For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth, and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity.”

Notice the three levels of Jesus’ condescension:

Physical strength  
Mental power  
Moral worth

In contemporary Adventism, there is no argument about the first two. Everyone agrees Jesus was not as physically or mentally strong as the sinless Adam in Eden. It is the last of these three that is controversial among us.

Did Jesus take a degenerate moral nature, as well as a degenerate mental and physical one? Well quite obviously, in the above statement from *Desire of Ages*, Jesus took degenerate human nature at all three levels.

Let’s look at it again:

DA 117:

“For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth, and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity.”

### *The Lower and Higher Natures*

But then, of course, the question arises, What about those other Ellen White statements which appear, at least on the surface, to teach something different?

Remember what we said in our last meeting: The inspired writings explain themselves. In Ellen White’s words:

1SM 42:

“The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture.”

Both Scripture and Ellen White make a distinction between lower and higher forces within human nature.

Matt. 26:41:

“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

I Cor. 9:27:

“I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.”

Now, from Ellen White:

5T 513:

“The will is not the taste or the inclination, but it is the deciding power.”

Now we’re going to look at some Ellen White statements which speak of the need to *control* sinful passions and propensities:

MH 130:

“The body is to be brought into subjection. The higher powers of the being are to rule. The passions are to be controlled by the will, which is itself to be under the control of God.”

4T 235:

“Our natural propensities must be controlled, or we can never overcome as Christ overcame.”

AH 127:

“The lower passions have their seat in the body and work through it. The words ‘flesh’ or ‘fleshly’ or ‘carnal lusts’ embrace the lower, corrupt nature; the flesh of itself cannot act contrary to the will of God.”

These references to passions and propensities to sin have to do with the lower, fleshly nature. But now we’re going to look at some Ellen White statements, which speak of passions and propensities to sin taking possession of the higher nature—which is another way of talking about the will and the character:

DA 305:

“The only power that can create or perpetuate true peace is the grace of Christ. When this is implanted in the heart, it will cast out the evil passions that cause strife and dissension.”

TM 171-172:

“But although their evil propensities may seem to them as precious as the right hand or the right eye, they must be separated from the worker, or he cannot be acceptable before God.”

MYP 42:

”Nonsense and amusement-loving propensities should be discarded, as out of place in the life and experience of those who are living by faith in the Son of God, eating His flesh and drinking His blood.”

7BC 943:

“We must realize that through belief in Him it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin, all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity.

“As we partake of the divine nature, hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good.”

What are these propensities to sin cut away from? The character. Not from the flesh. These statements aren't teaching holy flesh. They're teaching that we can have holy characters. None of these statements are talking about what happens when Jesus comes. They're talking about what happens in the Christian life here and now, through repentance and sanctification.

Here's another Ellen White statement that helps us understand even better what she means when she says Jesus had no propensities to sin:

16MR 182:

“We must not become in our ideas common and earthly, and in our perverted ideas we must not think that the liability of Christ to Satan's temptations degraded His humanity and that He possessed the same sinful, corrupt propensities as man.”

Now if we stopped there, we might get the wrong idea. But she goes on to explain what sort of corruption she's talking about. In the very next paragraph she writes:

16MR 182:

“Christ took our nature, fallen but not corrupted, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in place of the words of God.”

Notice she doesn't say, His nature wouldn't be corrupted unless He had been born with the same nature as the rest of humanity. The corruption she is describing in this passage is the result of choice, not birth. In the light of what we've found in the inspired writings about the lower and higher natures, we're going to look at two key statements which many believe support the theory that Jesus took Adam's nature as it was before the Fall:

5BC 1128:

“Be careful, exceedingly careful, as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin. . . . He could have sinned, He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.”

2T 201-202:

“He (Christ) is a brother in our infirmities, but not in possessing like passions. As the sinless one, His nature recoiled from evil.”

But then, we have these statements:

IHP 155:

“Though He (Christ) had all the strength of passion of humanity, never did He yield to temptation to do one single act which was not pure and elevating and ennobling.”

ST April 9, 1896:

“The words of Christ encourage parents to bring their little ones to Jesus. They may be wayward, and possess passions like those of humanity, but this should not deter us from bringing them to Christ. He blessed children that were possessed of passions like His own.”

4T 216:

“God indicated that you could be educated to act a part in His cause, but it was necessary that your mind should be trained and disciplined to work in harmony with the plan of God. You could gain the required experience if you would; you had the privilege presented before you of denying your inclinations, as your Saviour had given you an example in His life.”

Think about that! Jesus has given us an example of denying our inclinations. Now let’s go back to the Baker letter, and look at one of the statements there, and then compare it to the one we’ve just read:

5BC 1128:

“Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption.”

The key phrase here is “rested upon.” That involves the coddling of such inclinations, which can’t happen without the consent of the will. It’s like the old saying, “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.”

So how do we reconcile these statements? Easily. By understanding the difference between lower and higher forces within human nature. We saw this statement earlier:

5T 513:

“The will is not the taste or the inclination, but it is the deciding power.”

That’s how Ellen White can speak in one statement that “our natural propensities must be controlled” (4T 235), while in another statement she writes: “We need not retain one sinful propensity” (7BC 943). The difference is between the lower nature, which needs to be controlled by our higher powers, and the higher nature, which is where the will and character reside.

The difference is between an evil urge resisted (which Jesus had), and an evil urge exhibited (which Jesus didn’t have, because He never sinned). This is how Ellen White can say in one statement, regarding Christ:

IHP 155:

“Though He had all the strength of passion of humanity, never did He yield to temptation.”

---while in another statement she can say:

2T 201-202:

“He is a brother in our infirmities, but not in possessing like passions.”

The first is talking about the lower nature, the second is talking about the higher nature. Once we understanding this distinction, the modern Adventist Christology debate is effectively settled.

*Conclusion: “Be of Good Cheer”*

The following Ellen White statement identifies both the nature of Jesus’ inherited humanity and the nature of the trials He confronted:

YRP 368:

“But many say that Jesus was not like us, that He was not as we are in the world; that He was divine, and therefore we cannot overcome as He overcame. But this is not true; ‘for verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. . . . For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted’ (Heb. 2:16-18). Christ knows the sinner’s trials; He knows his temptations. He took upon Himself our nature; He was tempted in all points like as we are. He has wept. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

Notice how the human nature Jesus is described as taking, and the temptations He is described as undergoing, are represented by the seed of Abraham, which of course constitutes fallen human nature. Even more pointedly, the above statement says that

YRP 368:

“Christ knows the sinner’s trials; He knows his temptations.”

Here’s another one:

4SG 149-150:

“Christ took not on Him the nature of angels, but the nature of man, that He might acquaint Himself with the temptations with which he was beset, and help man in his fallen state, and by His own humiliation and death elevate men to become heirs with Him to His Father’s kingdom. Christ endured the strongest temptations of Satan, that He might experience in Himself the severest conflict which the children of men would have with the fallen foe, and that He might sustain those who should come to Him for strength in their temptations.”

The temptations of the sinless Adam in Eden are clearly not in focus here. It is the sinner’s trials, the sinner’s temptations, that Jesus is described in this statement as having experienced. Sinners are tempted from within, from the urges of a fallen, fleshly nature. This is how, according to this statement, our Lord proved it is possible for us to overcome.

Finally, the following Ellen White statement describes the ground Jesus covered, and which we ourselves must cover, in denying the urges of our fallen natures:

DA 122-123:

“In our own strength it is impossible to deny the clamors of our fallen nature. Through this channel Satan will bring temptations upon us. Christ knew that the enemy would come to every human being, to take advantage of hereditary weakness, and by his false insinuations to ensnare all whose trust is not in God. And by passing over the ground which man must travel, our Lord has prepared the way for us to overcome. It is not His will that we should be placed at a disadvantage in the conflict with Satan. He

would not have us intimidated and discouraged by the assaults of the serpent. 'Be of good cheer,' He says, 'I have overcome the world.' John 16:33."