

PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, Part 4: “Impossible Till It Happens” (Outline)

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Welcome to number 4 in our series, “Prepare to Meet Thy God.” This one will be titled, “Impossible Till It Happens.”

Clergy sex scandals have become ubiquitous in recent decades in the United States, and indeed in other parts of the world as well. And while moral tragedies of this kind can happen to any of us if we lower our guard and take our eyes off Jesus, it becomes especially disturbing when bad theology is used to undergird such misconduct.

Who can possibly forget the most recent of these examples?

Few non-Adventist authors have exerted more influence within our denomination in recent times than one Philip Yancey. I remember when I first read his book, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*

It should have been titled, *Only Half of Grace*. Because the book teaches a gospel of forgiveness only, with no power promised for victory over sin. At one point in his book Yancey writes that there are only two categories of sinners: “sinners who admit,” and “sinners who deny” (*What’s So Amazing About Grace?*, p. 182).

Unlike the book of Revelation (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5;12,21; 12:11; 21:7), he includes no category for sinners who overcome.

At a later point in his book, Yancey writes:

“It is our human destiny on earth to remain imperfect, incomplete, weak, and mortal, and only by accepting that destiny can we escape the force of gravity and receive grace.”
What’s So Amazing About Grace?, p. 273.

Can anyone be truly surprised that one teaching this theology could get caught in an extramarital affair with a married woman, lasting eight long years? This can hardly be written off as some momentary lapse!

For those of you who are interested, let me recommend my own online editorial written after Yancey’s confession, titled:

“Reflections on the Fall of Philip Yancey”
<https://advindicate.com/articles/2025/6/26/the-unerring-lodestar-xrycl-k57yw-4ekg8-pvls4-2x2w6-xx7nm-bknde-gygis-harg3-gt9r7-p75a9-37srg-2zc2g-zsi9d-sjnf9-wfkmj-nhwcp-w4gZR-8pbmz-vwedx-s3mla>

Some may remember the recent resignation of a Baptist music minister in Kentucky, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison for sexually abusing a teenage boy. Listen to what this man said when he was caught in his sin:

“All of my sins, past, present, future, all of them were covered by [the] blood that day of Jesus Christ, all of them. These too.”

Leonardo Blair, “Ex-Ark Encounter, Creation Museum band member gets 15 years for abusing teenage boy,” *Christian Post*, Jan. 16, 2026 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/ex-creation-museum-band-member-gets-15-years-for-abusing-teen.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawPbLxVleHRuA2FlbOixMABicmlkETFaTmMwMw9WMkNRd1ZjMnI3c3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHtxTObd22Zkh2JlWt94mgfD4OeFeeAWSZwCjX3bB2mxKqGKmdlj1HZ4Twy2O aem VqJDOZF1jTiQaq5uyu-oFA>

We saw this same tragedy conspicuously displayed a number of years ago, when one of the most prominent voices in the evangelical Christian movement, the president of a prominent evangelical university and son of the founder of the so-called “Moral Majority,” was caught, with his wife, in a sordid sex scandal.

But it really shouldn’t have surprised anyone, because when Jerry Falwell Jr. was asked about the moral failings of his most recent political champion, this is what he said:

“Our whole faith is based upon the theology of forgiveness, on the fact that we believe that Jesus taught us that all of us are sinners and we all sin every day.”

Jerry Falwell, Jr, quoted by Kyra Phillips, Evan Pereira, and Jon Haworth, “Jerry Falwell Jr. officially resigns from Liberty University,” ABC News, Aug. 24, 2020 https://abcnews.go.com/US/jerry-falwell-jr-officially-resigns-liberty-university/story?id=72587982&cid=clicksource_4380645_3_heads_hero_live_headlines_hed

Now the mixture of truth and error in this statement is really quite remarkable.

Yes, the Bible tells us that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). All of us, therefore, stand in need of God’s forgiveness.

But where did Jesus ever say that we all sin every day, and that sin is somehow inevitable even in the life of a converted Christian? I seem to remember Jesus told the woman caught in adultery:

John 8:11:

“Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.”

Naturally, Mr. Falwell quoted no Bible texts in support of his theory that sin is inevitable even for Christians. In fact, the Bible is clear, as we noted in our last message, that sin must be confessed and forsaken in order to be forgiven:

II Chron. 7:14:

“If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land.”

Prov. 28:13:

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth, and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

Isa. 55:7:

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

I John 1:9:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Jesus even said that we need to forgive the wrongs that others have done to us if we expect God to forgive our sins:

Matt. 6:14-15:

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. “But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Despite what some believe, folks, Biblical forgiveness is not unconditional. No wonder Ellen White defines repentance as follows:

SC 23:

“Repentance includes sorrow for sin, and a turning away from it.”

But Mr. Falwell and other evangelicals apparently don't believe that. Many of us, I'm sure, have followed the exposure of the widespread sexual abuse scandal in the Southern Baptist Convention that was uncovered several years ago. One pastor caught in such behavior effectively excused his sins by saying:

“The flesh will do what the flesh will do.”

Robert Downen, Lise Olsen, John Tedesco, & John Shapley, “Abuse of Faith: 20 years, 700 victims: Southern Baptist sexual abuse spreads as leaders resist reform,” *Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 10, 2019

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/Southern-Baptist-sexual-abuse-spreads-as-leaders-13588038.php>

Now folks, that's what happens when you embrace a theology that says sin can't be overcome, even through God's power. What a pathetic betrayal of the Biblical assurance “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4).

A recent statement by evangelicals on the subject of social justice likewise leaves Christians helpless against sin, even the worst kind. Listen to what this statement says:

“Because of original sin everyone is born under the curse of God’s law and all break his commandments through sin.”

“We also deny that salvation renders any Christian free from all remaining sin or immune from even grievous sin in this life.”

“The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel” <https://statementonsocialjustice.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SSJG-FINAL.pdf>

With these kinds of doctrinal statements from so-called conservative Christians, can we honestly expect the disciples of these false shepherds not to live accordingly?

Now once again, there isn’t one of us who isn’t vulnerable to sin if we take our eyes from the Savior. But when you teach Christians that such failure is inevitable, even grievous failure, what else can you rightly expect?

But we can praise God that His written counsel, in the Bible as well as the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy, offers a better way. Let’s look first at what the Bible teaches on the subject of victory over sin through God’s power, on this earth. Most of us are familiar with Jesus’ statement in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matt. 5:48:

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Now some folks believe that the word “perfect” in this passage doesn’t refer to the total absence of sin. Of course it’s true that at times this word is used in the Bible to mean something other than the complete absence of sin. Ellen White tells us with regard to inspired language:

1SM 20:

“Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea.”

Like we said last evening, content, context, and consensus within the inspired text, enable us to distinguish the various definitions of inspired words. But there certainly are Bible passages which define the word “perfect” as meaning sinless behavior. Let’s look at several of them:

Job 1:1,8:

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. . . .

“And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?”

This equating of Job’s perfection with sinless obedience is demonstrated further in passages to come, in which—despite the trials brought upon him—it is declared:

Job 1:22 (see also Job 2:10):

“In all this Job sinned not, neither charged God foolishly.”

Regarding Lucifer, the book of Ezekiel declares:

Eze. 28:15:

“Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.”

The New Testament likewise uses the word “perfect” to describe the total absence of sin, in such verses as the following:

II Cor. 7:1:

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

In short, Ellen White stands on firm Biblical ground when she interprets the perfection enjoined in Matthew 5:48 as sinless obedience. Let’s look at perhaps her strongest statement on this verse:

DA 311:

“God’s ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ This command is a promise. The plan of salvation contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning.

“The temper’s agency is not to be accounted an excuse for one wrong act. Satan is jubilant when he hears the professed followers of Christ making excuses for their deformity of character. It is these excuses that lead to sin. There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God.”

Now a popular theory in the perfection debate in contemporary Adventism is that the doctrine of sinless obedience in this life is based primarily on Ellen White rather than the Bible. But quite to the contrary, the Bible is absolutely clear that sinless obedience is possible on this earth through heaven’s power:

Psalm 4:4:

“Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.”

Psalm 119:1-3,11:

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.

“Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart.

“They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways. . . .

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.”

Zeph. 3:13:

“The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”

I Cor. 15:34:

“Awake to righteousness, and sin not.”

II Cor. 10:4-5:

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.

“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Eph. 5:25-27 (see also Song of Sol. 4:7):

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it.

“That He might sanctify and cleanse it through the washing of water by the Word.

“That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

I Thess. 5:23:

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I Peter 2:21-22:

“For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in His steps.

“Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.”

II Peter 3:10-12,14:

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

“Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, in the which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? . .

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

I John 3:2-3:

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

“And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

Rev. 3:21:

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.”

Rev. 14:5:

“And in their (the saints’) mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God.”

When we consider the above passages, we confront the remarkable reality that regardless of how controversial this issue continues to be in certain circles of contemporary Adventism, there are in fact more Bible verses which speak of the possibility of sinless living through God’s power here on earth than verses which uphold the binding claims of the seventh-day Sabbath!

So, contrary to what some folks believe, the possibility of sinless obedience through heaven’s power here on earth is not merely an Ellen White doctrine. It is a Bible doctrine, first and foremost.

And when we look at the following Ellen White statements on this subject, we’re going to find that the case for Ellen White being a plagiarist has been settled beyond dispute. She copied this teaching straight out of the Bible! And here’s the evidence:

Ev 385:

“In our world, we are to remember the way in which Christ worked. He made the world. He made man. Then He came in person to the world to show its inhabitants how to live sinless lives.”

3T 83:

“Paul writes to the Corinthians, ‘Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.’ When you come into this position, the work of consecration will be better understood by you both. Your thoughts will be pure, chaste, and elevated, your actions pure and sinless.”

RH Sept. 27, 1906:

“To everyone who surrenders fully to God is given the privilege of living without sin, in obedience to the law of heaven.”

YI April 16, 1903:

“But it is God’s purpose that man shall stand before Him upright and noble; and God will not be defeated by Satan. He sent His Son to this world to bear the death penalty of man’s transgression, and to show man how to live a sinless life. There is no other way in which man can be saved. ‘Without Me,’ Christ says, ‘ye can do nothing.’ Through Him, and Him alone, can the natural heart be changed, the affections transformed, the affections set flowing heavenward. Christ alone can give life to the soul dead in trespasses and sins.”

ST June 17, 1903:

“Thus He (Christ) placed us on vantage ground, where we could live pure, sinless lives. Repentant sinners stand before God justified and accepted, because the Innocent One has borne their guilt. The undeserving are made deserving, because in their behalf the Deserving became the undeserving.”

ST Aug. 9, 1905:

“Christ bore the sins of the whole world. He was the second Adam. Taking upon Himself human nature, He passed over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell. Having taken humanity, He has an intense interest in human beings. He felt keenly the sinfulness, the shame, of sin. He is our Elder Brother. He came to prove that human beings can, through the power of God, live sinless lives.”

RH April 1, 1902:

“The Saviour is wounded afresh and put to open shame when His people pay no heed to His word. He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness. He desires them by practicing the principles of truth to show to the world that God’s grace has power to sanctify the heart.”

3SM 360:

“In the day of judgment the course of the man who has retained the frailty and imperfection of humanity will not be vindicated. For him there will be no place in heaven. He could not enjoy the perfection of the saints in light. He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God.”

Now many will ask in a conversation like this: What is the difference between what God requires of the Last Generation of Christians, and what He has required of previous generations? Some people say that Last Generation Theology teaches that God has a double standard, and that this is unfair.

But the Bible is clear that greater light on the path of God’s people has always meant greater responsibility.

Prov. 4:18:

“But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

In the parable of the sower Jesus spoke of the seed that fell on good ground:

Matt. 13:8:

“But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.”

And this is all among the saved, mind you!

In another verse Jesus said:

Luke 12:48:

“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”

Acts 17:30:

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at.”

James 4:17:

“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Ellen White speaks of how Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary covers sins of ignorance:

EW 254:

“The minds of all who embrace this message are directed to the most holy place, where Jesus stands before the ark, making His final intercession for all those for whom mercy still lingers and for those who have ignorantly broken the law of God. This atonement is made for the righteous dead as well as for the righteous living. It includes all who died trusting in Christ, but who, not having received the light upon God’s commandments, had sinned ignorantly in transgressing its precepts.”

Here’s another one:

2T 692-693:

“We are accountable for the privileges that we enjoy, and for the light that shines upon our pathway. Those who lived in past generations were accountable for the light which was permitted to shine upon them. Their minds were exercised in regard to different points of Scripture which tested them. But they did not understand the truths which we do. They were not responsible for the light which they did not have. They had the Bible, as we have, but the time for the unfolding of special truth in relation to the closing scenes of this earth’s history, is during the last generations that shall live upon the earth.

“Special truths have been adapted to the conditions of the generations as they have existed. The present truth, which is a test to the people of this generation, was not a test to the people of generations far back. . . .

“We are accountable only for the light that shines upon us.”

So the Baptist Christian who goes to the grave keeping Sunday and eating pork, is accountable only for the light and truth God has revealed in his experience. Listen to this comparison between what was required at Pentecost, and what is required today:

TM 507:

“The work that God has begun in the human heart in giving His light and knowledge must be continually going forward. Every individual must realize his own necessity. The heart must be emptied of every defilement and cleansed for the indwelling of the Spirit. It was by the confession and forsaking of sin, by earnest prayer and consecration of themselves to God, that

the early disciples prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The same work, only in greater degree, must be done now.”

So what’s the difference between the Last Generation of Christians and former generations? Many in former generations will die sinning ignorantly. By contrast, no one in the Last Generation will retain any sins of ignorance once probation ceases. That’s because Jesus is no longer mediating for sin, including sins of ignorance. Thus Ellen White makes the following statement:

3SM 427:

“When our earthly labors are ended, and Christ shall come for His faithful children, we shall then shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father. But before that time shall come, everything that is imperfect in us will have been seen and put away. All envy and jealousy and evil surmising and every selfish plan will have been banished from the life.”

The Perfecting of the Final Generation

Now, as we close, let’s look at some of Ellen White’s strongest statements on the perfecting of the final generation:

GC 425:

“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 the earth. . . .

“When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing.”

EW 71:

“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. Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully. . . . I saw that none could share the ‘refreshing’ (latter rain) unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action.”

1T 187:

“Those who come up to every point and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation.”

5T 216:

“What are you doing, brethren, in the great work of preparation? Those who are uniting with the world, are receiving the worldly mold, and preparing for the mark of the beast. Those who are distrustful of self, who are humbling themselves before God and purifying their souls by obeying the truth—these are receiving the heavenly mold, and preparing for the seal of God in their foreheads. When the decree goes forth, and the stamp is impressed, their characters will remain pure and spotless for eternity.

“Now is the time to prepare. The seal of God will never be placed upon the forehead of an impure man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of the ambitious, world-loving man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of men or women of false tongues or deceitful hearts. All who receive the seal must be without spot before God—candidates for heaven.”

6BC 1118:

“Are we seeking for His fullness, ever pressing toward the mark set before us—the perfection of His character? When the Lord’s people reach this mark, they will be sealed in their foreheads. Filled with His Spirit, they will be complete in Christ, and the recording angel will declare, ‘It is finished.’”

2T 355:

“When He comes, He is not to cleanse us of our sins, to remove from us the defects in our characters, or to cure us of the infirmities of our tempers and dispositions. If wrought for us at all, this work will be accomplished before that time. When the Lord comes, those who are holy will be holy still. . . . The Refiner does not then sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done in these hours of probation.”

Now some of you may have noticed that one particular Ellen White statement has thus far been left out of this seminar. And that is by design. Because there are those in contemporary Adventism who falsely believe that Last Generation Theology is primarily based on this one statement:

COL 69:

“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.”

But by now it should be obvious that the message of this statement is found throughout the Bible as well as the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy. And what we’ve covered in this seminar is just the tip of the iceberg.

Finally, there are those who insist:

“I’ve never met a sinless person.”

That statement often makes me as curious as anything else, because I tend to wonder if such people would recognize a sinless person if they ever did meet one! But the inspired record is clear that some have in fact gained total victory over sin on this earth, through God’s power:

2T 122:

“Enoch had temptations as well as we. He was surrounded with society no more friendly to righteousness than is that which surrounds us. The atmosphere he breathed was tainted with sin and corruption, the same as ours; yet he lived a life of holiness. He was unsullied with the prevailing sins of the age in which he lived. So may we remain pure and uncorrupted. He was a representative of the saints who live amid the perils and corruptions of the last days.”

TA 68:

“Enoch represents those who shall remain upon the earth and be translated to Heaven without seeing death. He represents that company that are to live amid the perils of the last days, and withstand all the corruption, vileness, sin, and iniquity, and yet be unsullied by it all. We can stand as did Enoch. There has been provision made for us. . . . Angels of God, that excel in strength, are sent to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation.”

And Ellen White assures us:

COL 332:

“And there are Enochs in this our day.”

Joseph and Daniel are two other such characters in the Sacred Story:

5T 43:

“Mark the character of Joseph. Virtue was severely tested, but its triumph was complete. At every point the noble youth endured the test. The same lofty, unbending principle appeared at every trial. The Lord was with him, and His word was law.”

4T 569:

“The case of Daniel was presented before me. Although he was a man of like passions with ourselves, the pen of inspiration presents him as a faultless character. His life is given to us as a bright example of what man may become, even in this life, if he will make God his strength, and wisely improve the opportunities and privileges within his reach.”

But most of all, we have the inspired promise that an entire generation of Christians will in fact achieve sinless obedience through heaven’s power, on this earth. The following statements, one of which we’ve seen already, will close our study:

TM 18-19:

“The church, being endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depository, in which the wealth of His mercy, His love, His grace, is to appear in full and final display. . . . The gift of His Holy Spirit, rich, full, and abundant, is to be to His church as an encompassing wall of fire, which the powers of hell shall not prevail against. In their untainted purity and spotless perfection, Christ looks upon His people as the reward of all His suffering, His humiliation, and His love, and the supplement of His glory.”

And once again:

RH April 1, 1902:

“The Saviour is wounded afresh and put to open shame when His people pay no heed to His word. He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness. He desires them by practicing the principles of truth to show to the world that God’s grace has power to sanctify the heart.”

Finally, in the words of the late Nelson Mandela, from which I borrowed the title of my message this afternoon:

“Everything is impossible until it happens.”