

## **Humanity and Divinity Combined**

Larry Kirkpatrick, March 23, 2019

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### **Introduction**

“Humanity and Divinity Combined” should be a stimulating hope. Man on his own can accomplish nothing. Man cooperating with God can experience a changed heart. God always intended the closest connection between Himself and the creatures He made in His image.

Humans are not left dangling helpless and hopeless on the battlefield between Christ and Satan. Humans are not intended to be the recipients of infinite “get out of jail free” cards. Humans will never enter heaven because they claim a loose verbal affiliation with Jesus.

My thesis is simple:

The gospel is the power of God to salvation (Romans 1:16); divinity works in the human believer. God has a part. Man has a part. Man may become a partaker of the divine nature.

### **To Will and to Do**

Consider Philippians 2:12-13 NKJV:

Therefore, my beloved,  
as you have always obeyed,  
not as in my presence only, but now  
much more in my absence,  
work out your own salvation  
with fear and trembling;  
for it is God who works  
in you  
both  
to will and  
to do  
for His good pleasure.

We know Philippians two. The fifth verse urges the believer, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Verses 6-11 present Jesus as the ultimate example of divinity humbling Himself to humanity, victorious in humanity, and restored at last on high! Finally, verses 12-13 show the combination of human and divine work.

In light of Jesus humbling Himself, then being exalted, the believer is admonished, “work out your own salvation.” He is to fear and tremble. Salvation is only possible because his activity is conducted in

league with God. He cooperates with God. It is God who works in him. God wills and does in him according to God's pleasure.

Securing our salvation is an extreme project. The thought even, that God  
—could take a fallen human who has developed a self-serving character in deranged humanity,  
—respect the free choice of that person,  
—then persuade him to abandon his chosen selfishness, and  
—then transform him so that he embraces life with the Holy Spirit indwelling him,  
is remarkable. But no more remarkable than the New Testament command to “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5)!

The willing and the doing are God's, not man's, work. The human part is to cooperate, to permit God to accomplish that which God only can accomplish. Inspired writings highlight this cooperative element. Jesus says in John 15:15, “without Me you can do nothing,” yet in Philippians 4:13, the believer rejoices that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

We look right at it but we do not see it:

God works so we can work. John Wesley understood: “No man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace he has.” Were it really true that you could do nothing, it would mean that you didn't have faith. But God gives to every man the measure of faith (Romans 12:3).

Why would I have become a Christian, had someone told me that, now that I better understood the sin problem, the best experience I could hope for, for for the rest of this life, was the same bondage as before, and that Jesus came only to save His people from their sins at some later, indefinite time? I need help *now*. I need to overcome *now*. I'm desperate, and that's just where others are. They look for a living Savior and a remedy from Him *now*.

Jesus is the Great Physician. There is a remedy! God's Word shows us how in the present to experience victory. God must work in me. There is no other way.

In Philippians 12 and 13, Paul reminds the beloved disciples in Philippi how diligent they've been in serving God. They are to work out their own salvation; they are to be engaged with divinity. This is life or death work! Yet they are not alone. As they submit to Him He works in them. His will, His desire for good for them, is operating, and victories are made real in their experience by the power of God.

### **Sin Entanglement and Corrupt Channels**

In my previous presentation we noticed that half of the Pacific Press book *God's Character and the Last Generation* authors refer to Ellen White's *Selected Messages*, book 1, 344 “corrupt channels” statement:

The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary; but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor who is at God's right hand presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God.

In *God's Character and the Last Generation* this is what we are told:

Even our very best is tainted by sin. . . . The truly tragic person is the 'good' person who finds it hard to acknowledge that even our good deeds need forgiveness because of what Ellen G. White terms our 'corrupt channels of humanity.' . . . We need to understand that we are not just those who commit a little error here and a minor mistake there. No; all of us are fully embedded in a world of ungodliness. . . . every person is embedded and entangled in the deadly condition of sin. . . . Sin is the universal human condition. . . . Nor is the great Second Coming dependent upon our perfection or we would never be saved, because there is no such thing as human righteousness (262, 263, 264, 266).

How can the believer be "fully embedded" and yet our Lord in John 17:14 can boldly say, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." And, in John 14:16, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." How can Jesus ask His Father to "sanctify them by Your truth" (John 17:17) if they cannot be sanctified by truth? If the truth of God can't sanctify you, what can sanctify you?

And here is a fact: no *God's Character and the Last Generation* author offers even a rudimentary discussion of 1SM 344, although supposedly it teaches that even believers are fully embedded in a world of ungodliness? Interestingly, it turns out that this very Ellen White document has a great deal to tell us about the operation of humanity and divinity combined! Ellen White will always agree with Ellen White. She also writes,

The Son of man is fully qualified to be the originator of a humanity that will blend with divinity by partaking of the divine nature. He offers to make us golden threads in the web of humanity. He would have us act our part by co-operating with Him in healing the springs of life which have been perverted, and setting them flowing in sanctified channels (*Signs of the Times*, March 8, 1899, par. 10).

Let's see if we can gather some bits to help us understand 1SM 340-344.

Some background will help us understand how Ellen White is using these phrases. An analysis of Ellen White's writings suggests that her references to the "natural heart" show it to be initially neither totally evil nor totally righteous. The natural heart isn't neutral but trends downward (e.g. COL 56; Cch 162; CG 302; DA 649). In White's writings, the "natural heart" and the "carnal mind" are equivalent terms (CH 570; EW 273; 1T 440; RH Mar 8, 1892). The natural heart must be daily converted, continuously subdued. It is a persistent feature of the human experience (OFC 229; LP 125).

God gives the believer a new nature. There is power in the divine nature to withstand evil, and God's grace subdues the natural heart (DA 678; LP 125). Jesus works in the natural heart to arouse enmity against sin, and through exercising faith in God, enmity against sin and Satan is created in the heart (RH April 1, 1890). Human effort is necessary to overcome the tendencies of the natural heart (2MCP 666).

Another phrase Ellen White uses is "springs of life." In *Signs of the Times*, March 8, 1899, Ellen White says the "springs of life" can be healed, and in *Steps to Christ* 18, that God's power working inside a

person can change his heart. To this she adds in *Selected Messages*, book 1, 341, that through Christ the springs of life can vitalize man's nature, transform his tastes, and set his affections flowing toward heaven. Through the union of the divine with the human nature, Christ could enlighten the understanding and infuse his life-giving properties through the soul dead in trespasses and sins.

God has to get into the heart. The work must be accomplished from within. Humans have no power or goodness of their own. God has given us faculties; certain capacities are designed into us. Yet through the effects of sin these have been palsied, blunted, even deadened. In 1SM 340, Ellen White says "All the ingenious subterfuges the devil can suggest are presented to his mind [man's mind] to prevent every good impulse." Something important continues to function in the fallen human nature. The devil acts intentionally to suppress impulses toward the good in us, however dim they may be. God calls forth these impulses, which make at least limited human response possible. Remember, *Steps to Christ* 47: "The power of choice God has given to men."

The "natural heart" then, as spoken of in 1SM 340, is that baseline humanity we are born with, and, it includes the character we develop on top of that humanity. That character trends downward to self-service. The only way back from this is for divinity and humanity to be combined.

Hear again the results which occur when humans act out their faith:

When He [Jesus] came to the world the first time, divinity and humanity were blended. This is our only hope. The Son of man is fully qualified to be the originator of a humanity that will blend with divinity by partaking of the divine nature. He offers to make us golden threads in the web of humanity. He would have us act our part by co-operating with Him in healing the springs of life which have been perverted, and setting them flowing in sanctified channels (*Signs of the Times*, March 8, 1899, par. 10.).

Throughout our life we retain the natural heart; it must be daily subdued. But as day by day we join in fellowship with God, as we consent to His working, we train ourselves to cooperate with divinity. We receive God's grace, we invite His Holy Spirit inside. Not power innate to us but power external to us enables our cooperation. Jesus took "the human form and nature" (1SM 340.3) to show the way. He did not wear our humanity as a costume; He took a humanity like our own, and, just as we need the Holy Spirit, so He needed the continuous influence of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' life-giving properties are transmitted moment by moment to the receptive believer. There is an actual change in the person. "Christ on the cross not only draws men to repentance toward God for the transgression of His law—for whom God pardons He first makes penitent. . ." (341.3). God's drawing us and making us penitent are not forensic actions.

"All that was possible for man to endure in the conflict with Satan, Christ endured in His human and divine nature combined. Obedient, sinless to the last, He died for man, his substitute and surety, enduring all that men ever endure from the deceiving tempter, that man may overcome by being a partaker of the divine nature" (342.2). Jesus endured the maximum that we endure. His example of endurance is exactly applicable to your own case. His method of overcoming is exactly applicable to your own case.

“The righteousness of Christ is presented as a free gift to the sinner if he will accept it” (342.4). The sinner “has nothing of his own but what is tainted and corrupted, polluted with sin, utterly repulsive to a pure and holy God. Only through the righteous character of Jesus Christ can man come nigh to God” (342.4). By choosing to sin, man’s works were made valueless. Jesus never chose to sin; Jesus is God; His works are meritorious.

Two intercede for us: “Christ, our Mediator, and the Holy Spirit are constantly interceding in man’s behalf” (344.1). Christ “presents His blood, shed from the foundation of the world.” His spotless character stands in the place of our spotted character. His merits save us in a judicial sense. But “the Spirit works upon our hearts, drawing out prayers and penitence, praise and thanksgiving. The gratitude which flows from our lips is the result of the Spirit’s striking the cords of the soul in holy memories, awakening the music of the heart” (344.1).

Mark the action language: the Holy Spirit *strikes the cords* of the soul, He *draws out*, He *awakens*. None of this is forensic or accounted. At the same time none of it is meritorious. Christ’s sacrificial death for us on Calvary has provided the meritorious component. But divinity and humanity must be combined. The heart is to be transformed. *The Great Controversy*, 506, 508:

It is the grace that Christ implants in the soul which creates in man enmity against Satan. Without this converting grace and renewing power, man would continue the captive of Satan, a servant ever ready to do his bidding. But the new principle in the soul creates conflict where hitherto had been peace. The power which Christ imparts enables man to resist the tyrant and usurper. . . . In the unregenerate heart there is love for sin and a disposition to cherish and excuse it. In the renewed heart there is hatred for sin and determined resistance against it.

God must implant grace. Implanted grace creates enmity. This is converting grace, renewing power, power imparted. God changes the believer.

We have two Intercessors, Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26-27, 34; Hebrews 7:25) and one Mediator (Galatians 3:19 ; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:15; 12:24). Their work is to restore us. Jesus as Mediator comes between and reconciles us. He secured the gift of the Holy Spirit for us, who intercedes for us to repairs the image of God in humanity. We should not lose sight of God’s goal: that humanity and divinity be combined. “The atonement,” “the great controversy,” “the plan of redemption,” is God’s description of that process. Common views of the gospel lead us to set our sights too low. God is able “to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Now let’s come to the section quoted so many times in the 2018 books: *Selected Messages*, book 1, 344:2-3:

The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor, who is at God’s right hand, presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censor of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers

into this censor the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ's propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. The gracious answers are returned. Oh, that all may see that everything in obedience, in penitence, in praise and thanksgiving, must be placed on the glowing fire of the righteousness of Christ. The fragrance of this righteousness ascends like a cloud around the mercy seat.

According to *God's Character and the Last Generation*, White's 1SM 344 statement somehow constitutes evidence that "All are in bondage to the power of sin" "there is nothing we can do about our sinful nature" "even our very best is tainted by sin" "even our good deeds need forgiveness" (*God's Character and the Last Generation* 261-262).

But:

1. None of us have ever suggested, or probably ever had the thought, that our deeds might be personally salvifically meritorious. Christ's merits alone save.
2. Perfumed with the righteousness of Christ, deeds rise before God "entirely acceptable." No one who teaches Last Generation Theology, or maybe a better term, basic Adventism, is teaching that we ever abandon Christ. Then we would have no righteousness!
3. Those who believe in "original sin" make the idea "corrupt channels of humanity" represent our humanity which they say is infected with sin. Neither Ellen White nor the Bible speaks of our being "infected by sin." Let's be careful; let's use the inspired terminology on this and not the terminology dreamed up by contemporary theologians.
4. Ellen White describes the "how" of how humanity becomes corrupted differently from those who teach original sin: "Christ took our nature, fallen but not corrupted, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in the place of the words of God" (Manuscript 57, 1890). Jesus' humanity was fallen but not corrupted. Our nature is fallen and corrupted, for we "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).
5. True holiness is possible in fallen humanity. "The affections, perverted by sin, become degenerated and depraved; but through a connection with Christ they are brought into a higher, holier channel; and, aided by divine grace, man may be an overcomer. The faculties, warped in a wrong direction through the influence of sin, need no longer be misused and perverted, need no longer be wasted on accomplishing selfish purposes, or fastened upon the perishing things of earth. When the soul has been convicted of sin, has accepted of Christ, the character becomes transformed, and there is an elevation and purification of all the powers of the being. They are no longer debased by selfish aims and unholy actions. What may not man become through the grace given him of God! Through the sanctification of the truth, he may become a partaker of the divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. He may show forth an example of righteousness, of true holiness" (*Signs of the Times*, Oct. 6, 1890). God's working in the believer effects "the elevation and purification of all the powers of the being. They are no longer debased by selfish aims and unholy actions." Our own works do not become salvifically meritorious. And yet, our faculties, although previously warped, in the transformed Christian *can* be rightly used. Even in 1SM 344, Ellen White calls for us to become "partakers": "Obedient, sinless to the last, He [Jesus] died for man, his substitute and surety, enduring all that men ever endure from the deceiving tempter, that man may overcome by being a partaker of the divine nature" (1SM 342.2).
6. The believer forever needs Jesus. Our works are not acceptable to God for salvation and never will be. God's forgiveness is forever necessary for sins we have committed. Were His forgiveness ever

withdrawn we would be destroyed. Nevertheless, the believer will draw close to God such that he will stop sinning in the power provided Him by God. No glory accrues for the sinner, but all glory accrues to Jesus!

What can we make of the notion in *God's Character and the Last Generation* that our tainted nature needs continual forgiveness?

The idea is wrong.

We need to make a distinction between evil and guilt. Trees and animals display distortion caused by the effects of sin in the world, but they have no capacity to choose; they are not condemned by God. The atonement deals with guilt by forgiving it and with evil results by recreating and restoring what the curse of sin has damaged. It is a category error to teach that even when we are not willfully sinning, our human nature itself needs forgiveness.

When does condemnation arise? Condemnation arises from intentional, morally wrong personal choices—not from the human organism into which one is born. Our best deeds do not need forgiveness; they need healing. Forgiveness is for acts of sin. The atonement does not apply forgiveness to situational aspects of our lives to which we are subjected apart from our choice.

Are we born with a sinful nature? Yes. Do we experience infirmities like faulty memory and the making of unintentional misjudgments? Yes. Are we guilty when we drink tainted water and are unintentionally exposed to carcinogens? Or what about gospel workers responding to God's call who intentionally leave the relatively clean air of the west in order to labor for souls while breathing severely polluted air in the Orient? Need they daily pray for forgiveness for breathing the air where God has sent them to work?

To compare God's infinite perfection to our human imperfection, and to say that anything less than our making decisions as infinitely perfect as God is, is sin, is to create a philosophical trap. Such a teaching leaves all our obedience tainted by sin in some respect, and introduces a hopeless fatalism into Christian experience.

*God's Character and the Last Generation* repeatedly expresses the opinion that Last Generation Theology produces guilt, hopelessness and despair. The reverse is the case. It is actually the powerless, hopeless, victoryless, spiritually empty, non-Adventist, non-sanctuary-informed viewpoint, that increases guilt and despair.

Ellen White is not trapped in 1580 Book of Concord Lutheran salvation understanding. She does not portray believers as being at the same time saints and sinners. She does not speak of our best deeds needing forgiveness.

For our actions to be of value to God does not necessarily mean they have saving merit. All merit for our salvation comes from Jesus' life and death for us. The basis for our being saved is never, in even the remotest sense, located in ourselves. The "corrupt channels" of humanity are not stronger than Jesus the divine High Priest of humanity! On the contrary: 1SM 341.2: "Christ. . . was hanged upon the cross that He might be able to impart His righteousness to fallen, sinful man and thus present men to His Father in His righteous character."

## **Partakers of the Divine Nature**

Let's turn finally to that extraordinary section of Scripture which continually comes to the front when we think on the prospect of divinity and humanity combined: 2 Peter 1:2-11. We rejoice in verses 2-4:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Through Jesus we are given great promises and through these promises we are made partakers of the divine nature. But exactly how is it that the promises are made effectual in us? Do we experience the power without acting our faith? Read straight on. What does Peter say next? Does he dare suggest spiritual operations in which humanity and divinity are combined? Second Peter 1:5-11:

But also for this very reason [that through these promises we might be partakers of the divine nature], giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

How is virtue added to faith? How is knowledge added to virtue? How is self-control added to knowledge? By our "giving all diligence," by our determination to "do these things." The strength is from God. Even the ability to use the will by which we choose God is a gift from God. Nevertheless, we are to think, we are to do. We've all read this insight:

Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise (SC 47).

And

The tempter can never compel us to do evil. He cannot control minds unless they are yielded to his control (DA 125).

And so Paul tells us, "this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). When the human and the divine are combined, we are not left to the emptiness and powerlessness of our own nature. Our natural heart is not left unsubdued. Rather, the Holy Spirit works in us, we live in communion with Jesus, we have the mind of Christ, our mind lifted up, out of itself, and charged with a heavenly current. *The Desire of Ages* 363:



In Christ the cry of humanity reached the Father of infinite pity. As a man He supplicated the throne of God till His humanity was charged with a heavenly current that should connect humanity with divinity. Through continual communion He received life from God, that He might impart life to the world. His experience is to be ours.

So you see, God's divine power has given to us all that we need to live Christian lives today. Promises are given us, and when we are diligent in embracing the promises, choosing to say, "Yes Lord, work in me, change me," then it happens. All the pieces—faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and finally, love authentic—work in us. A heavenly current, continual communion, charge our humanity so that we have the experience of Jesus. His experience is to be ours.

And by the way, the main Bible passages I have referred to in this talk—Philippians 2:12-13 and 2 Peter 1:3-4—are some of the same passages that thrilled the hearts of AT Jones and EJ Waggoner. But certain Adventist historians of recent decades find these emphases concerning. They look at themes preached by Jones and Waggoner and think that somehow an interest in Christ close at hand, Christ indwelling, the very experience which Paul calls, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), led the 1888 Messengers into panentheism.

But the ideas of cooperating with God and being partaker of the divine nature, are ideas in Paul and Peter. Paul was not led off into panentheism. Peter was not led off into panentheism. We need to watch closely where certain folks are connecting the dots because sometimes their "dots" are wrong, sometimes their connecting "lines," and sometimes both!

## **Conclusion**

Humanity and divinity combined is the experience of the gospel. This is the question upon which this whole symposium is founded: What happens when a generation says Yes to Jesus? What happens when we see beyond the ingenious, power-nullifying explanations men have constructed?

God's character and the final generation meet together. Then Peter can conclude his epistle with the warning,

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God (2 Peter 3:11-12a).

When we know these things, we can agree with one who has said:

To silence forever Satan's charges; to make it evident that His people are serving Him from motives of loyalty and right without reference to reward; to clear His own name and character of the charges of injustice and arbitrariness; and to show to angels and to men that His law can be kept by the weakest of men under the most discouraging and most untoward circumstances, God permits Satan in the last generation to try His people to the utmost. They will be threatened, tortured, persecuted. They will stand face to face with the issuance of the decree to worship the beast and His image. (Rev. 13:15.) But they will not yield. They are willing to die rather than sin (ML Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 317).

That's where Jesus was. On the cross, Jesus was willing to die rather than sin. So He saved us. And now it remains for us to be joined with Him in His crucifixion (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20; 5:24). Humanity and divinity combined are willing to die rather than sin; that is God's character.

Are we the final generation?

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