

Two Adamic Responses

(The Humanity of the Saviour in the Light of the Cross)

By K. Mark Duncan

Introduction

The human nature of Christ has been called one of Adventism's "hot potatoes"¹. A perusal of some of the writings of Elliot J. Waggoner and G. I. Butler², suggests that issues related to this subject were controversial issues long before the publication of what has been called "the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history",³ *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. Speaking of the human nature of Christ:

Dr. Woodrow Whidden II calls it our "most explosive and divisive issue."⁴
Dr. A. Leroy Moore says it is among the issues that threaten "to tear the church apart."⁵
Dr. William Johnsson adds: "The stakes in this debate are high. This isn't some abstract theological discussion; it's about our salvation. It's about the very gospel God calls us to proclaim."⁶

Because of the divisive controversy that has surrounded the subject, it has been suggested that we should cease discussion of this issue.⁷ But the servant of the Lord has suggested a different course of action.

The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden linked chain which binds our souls to Christ and through Christ to God. This is to be our study.⁸

¹ Martin Weber, *More Adventist Hot Potatoes*, pg 65, Pacific Press, 1992

² See *The Law in Galatians* by G. I. Butler and *The Gospel in Galatians* by Elliot J. Waggoner

³ George R. Knight, *Questions on Doctrine* (Annotated Edition), pg. xiii Andrews University Press, 2003

⁴ Woodrow Whidden II, *Ellen White on the Humanity of Christ*, pg. 11

⁵ Leroy Moore, *Adventism in Conflict*, back cover

⁶ William Johnsson, *Adventist Review*, July 22, 1993

⁷ Donald Karr Short, "Made Like . . . His Brethren" pg. ix, 1991, Biblical Research Institute, "An Appeal for Church Unity" p. 5, August 1989; *Adventist Review*, November 1, 1990, p. 4

Again she wrote:

When we want a deep problem to study, let us fix our minds on the most marvelous thing that ever took place in earth or heaven--the incarnation of the Son of God.⁹

The importance of striving for a correct understanding of this “study” becomes apparent, when one considers the following:

Christ's overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, *we destroy the completeness of His humanity*.¹⁰ (Emphasis supplied)

This is a very important topic! Perhaps *the* most important study in which we can ever engage. Heaven forbid that we should give heed to the counsel to cease discussion of this topic.

Yet, as we enter upon this study, or any discussion of it, we should be cognizant of this caution:

When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5). We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And the study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth.¹¹

This is a very “fruitful field”. I can say from personal experience that there is great blessing associated with the study of this topic. But if the blessing is to be realized, we must “come to this study with the humility of a learner”. We must prayerfully seek to lay aside our preconceived opinions and accept truth wherever it may lead.

[We] need to study the word of God with a purpose, not to confirm [our] own ideas, but to bring them to be trimmed, to be condemned or approved as they are or are not in harmony with the word of God.¹²

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, p. 904

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, p. 929

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 244

¹² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 467

Irrespective of the viewpoint, with which we come to the study of this subject, these words should be taken to heart. We dare not approach it with a “rich and increased with goods”¹³ attitude. He who thinks he has “need of nothing” “knows not” his/her true condition. “And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.”¹⁴ There is precious truth here for each of us.

This subject stands at the heart of the gospel. As such, it is a subject that we instinctively feel passionate about. One can understand the history of controversy and stormy contention over the topic and almost sympathize with the heated participants. The good news is controversy is not the conclusion of this discussion, nor is division the final state of Adventist opinions on the matter. The Spirit of prophecy contains a glorious promise for the people of God, which shall be realized, before the end shall come.

Although possessing different temperaments and dispositions, they will see eye to eye in all matters of religious belief. They will speak the same things; they will have the same judgment; they will be one in Christ Jesus”¹⁵

This unity will become a reality as we study the prayer of Christ and seek to be united with Him.

In view of this objective, we have been told to:

Read and study carefully the prayer that Christ offered just before His trial, recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John. Follow its teachings, and you will be brought into unity. Our only hope of reaching heaven is to be one with Christ, and then, in and through Christ, we shall be one with one another.¹⁶

From Volunteer to Reluctant Substitute

Before Christ came to earth He knew all things. He understood the *facts* of all that He would endure in order to redeem mankind. Yes. There were things that He did not know from

¹³ Revelation 3:17

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:2

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Historical Sketches*, p. 124

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 141

experience. And there were feelings that He had never experienced, and thus did not “know”. But He knew that He would experience terrible feelings and terrible emotional distress and terrible pain. He knew the *fact* that He would die of a broken heart under the sense of the Father's condemnation and wrath. And knowing all of this, He willingly volunteered to save mankind.

The Spirit of prophecy describes Christ going to His Father, the day that Adam and Eve sinned.

Sorrow filled heaven as it was realized that man was lost and that the world which God had created was to be filled with mortals doomed to misery, sickness, and death, and that there was no way of escape for the offender. The whole family of Adam must die. I then saw the lovely Jesus and beheld an expression of sympathy and sorrow upon His countenance. Soon I saw Him approach the exceeding bright light which enshrouded the Father. Said my accompanying angel, "He is in close converse with His Father." The anxiety of the angels seemed to be intense while Jesus was communing with His Father. Three times He was shut in by the glorious light about the Father, and the third time He came from the Father we could see His person. His countenance was calm, free from all perplexity and trouble, and shone with a loveliness which words cannot describe. He then made known to the angelic choir that a way of escape had been made for lost man; that He had been pleading with His Father, and had obtained permission to give His own life as a ransom for the race, to bear their sins, and take the sentence of death upon Himself, thus opening a way whereby they might, through the merits of His blood, find pardon for past transgressions, and by obedience be brought back to the garden from which they were driven. Then they could again have access to the glorious, immortal fruit of the tree of life to which they had now forfeited all right.¹⁷

Jesus went to the Father “three times” and pled with Him for the right to die for fallen mankind. What an amazing contrast with His later response to the crisis of human destiny in the garden. In the Garden of Gethsemane He would again go to the Father “three times”. But this time He would plead not for the right to die for mankind. On the contrary, He would plead that He be released from the responsibility of dying for mankind. Before the incarnation He was willing to die. Before the incarnation He volunteered to be our Savior.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 126

He chose to bear the wrath of God, which man had incurred.... He chose to endure the cruel mockings, the deridings, the scourging, and the crucifixion. . .¹⁸

Evidently there was no hesitation on the part of the pre-incarnate Christ.

As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew that He would have to suffer, yet He became man's substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary.¹⁹

Christ was as truly a Saviour before as after His incarnation. *At the very moment* of transgression and apostasy, He entered upon His work, laboring for the salvation of man with an activity equal to the activity of God.²⁰ (Emphasis supplied.)

In heaven, as He looked upon the condemned pair, Christ immediately volunteered to endure “cruel mockings,” “deridings,” “scourging,” “crucifixion” and death via “the wrath of God”. Yet after He came to earth everything was different. As He stood in the shadow of the cross, instead of manifesting an eagerness to enter upon the final steps which required for the redemption of mankind, He was perplexed.

A mysterious cloud seemed to enshroud the Son of God. Its gloom was felt by those near Him. He sat rapt in thought. At last the silence was broken by His mournful voice, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour?" In anticipation Christ was already drinking the cup of bitterness. *His humanity shrank from the hour of abandonment*, when to all appearance He would be deserted even by God, when all would see Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. *He shrank from public exposure, from being treated as the worst of criminals, from a shameful and dishonored death.* A foreboding of His conflict with the powers of darkness, a sense of the awful burden of human transgression, and the Father's wrath because of sin caused the spirit of Jesus to faint, and the pallor of death to overspread His countenance.²¹ (Emphasis supplied.)

In heaven it seems that it had been the Father who was slow to agree to pay the cost of our redemption. Now it is Jesus who shrinks from paying the cost, “from the hour of

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 339

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 75

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 03-05-01

²¹ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 624

abandonment” from “public exposure”, from “a shameful and dishonored death”. In heaven He knew what was coming and He volunteered to endure it. Now everything is different. Behold His struggle in the garden.

Turning away, Jesus sought again His retreat, and fell prostrate, overcome by the horror of a great darkness. The *humanity of the Son of God trembled* in that trying hour. He prayed not now for His disciples that their faith might not fail, but for His own tempted, agonized soul. The awful moment had come--that moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. Christ might even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man. It was not yet too late. He might wipe the bloody sweat from His brow, and leave man to perish in his iniquity. He might say, Let the transgressor receive the penalty of his sin, and I will go back to My Father. Will the Son of God drink the bitter cup of humiliation and agony? Will the innocent suffer the consequences of the curse of sin, to save the guilty? The words fall tremblingly from the pale lips of Jesus, "O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done."

Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has *humanity shrunk* from the last, crowning sacrifice. (Emphasis supplied)²²

In heaven, Christ seemed almost eager, to give His life as a sacrifice for mankind. But now, in the Garden of Gethsemane, it appears He wants nothing more than to escape that same sacrifice.

Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.²³

What precipitated this drastic change of attitude? What caused the “gloom”, the pregnant “silence”, and the “mournful voice” that came from the Son of God? What caused Jesus to fall “prostrate” to the ground? What caused His agony? What caused the Son of God to “tremble”? It was His *humanity*! That same humanity, which is “everything to us”, constituted Christ’s great liability, His point of greatest vulnerability. Before the incarnation, it had been His supreme and unhesitating will to save *mankind*. But now, He is tempted, with a great temptation, to save *Himself*. Before, He had been willing to die for others, but now He prays “with

²² Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 690

²³ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 686

vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save *Him* from death.”²⁴ (Emphasis supplied)

Again we ask: What has made the difference? The only explanation, for this dramatic change of attitude, must be the influence of His humanity!

Two “Wills” in Conflict

As Jesus approached the cross, and His death upon the cross, increasingly, there were two “wills” struggling for the mastery, His will and the will of His Father. Throughout His life, He had denied His will, and done the will of His Father. This is why He could say:

"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”²⁵

Jesus had a “will” of His own. But He did not seek His own will. He was committed to doing the will of His Father. What was the Father’s will?

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”²⁶

The Father’s will was to save mankind. To this mission Christ was committed. He came to do the Father’s will, not His own will. His human will, and the Father’s will were not identical.

But His purpose was to deny His will and live in harmony with the Father’s will. Notice how Christ’s human will is described.

The one absorbing aim of the life of Christ was to do the will of his heavenly Father. He did not become offended with God; for he lived not to please himself. The *human will of Christ* would not have led him to the wilderness of temptation, to fast, and to be tempted of the devil. It would not have led him to endure

²⁴ Hebrews 5:7

²⁵ John 5:30

²⁶ John 6:37-40

humiliation, scorn, reproach, suffering, and death. *His human nature* shrank from all these things as decidedly as ours shrinks from them.²⁷ (Emphasis supplied.)

Notice that Christ's will and the Father's will were *not* one and the same. He did not want to go to the cross. It was not His will. Just as we are at times convicted of God's will for us and find it a struggle to comply, Christ endured the same struggle. Yet He prayed "not my will, but Yours be done".²⁸ This prayer must be ours. In this Christ is our example. Yet, we must consider the question: When did this conflict emerge between the will of God the Father, and the will of God the Son? What influenced and radically altered the will of Christ. Clearly in heaven it had been His will to save the human race, even though He knew it would cost the death of the cross. And the salvation of mankind had been and continued to be the Father's will also, even though it would cost the death of His only begotten Son. But in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ's will and the Father's will were no longer the same. Christ had taken fallen human nature. And His will was strongly influenced, by the nature which He had assumed.

The Father's Dilemma

The validity of this conclusion becomes more evident as we understand three related events:

- 1) The reaction of God the Father to the prospect of the death of Christ.
- 2) The reaction of the unfallen angels to the prospect of mankind's death.
- 3) The reaction of the unfallen Adam to the prospect of his own demise.

One might challenge the conclusion, that it was the humanity of Christ that influenced His willingness to sacrifice Himself, when one considers the fact that the Father had also hesitated.

²⁷ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Time*, 10-29-94

²⁸ Luke 22:42

We are told that Jesus had pleaded with the Father “three times” for the right to die for mankind. Evidently there was considerable reluctance on the part of God the Father, when the time came to initiate the plan of redemption. Does this observation undermine the conclusion that it was Christ’s humanity which caused Him to shrink back as He approached the cross? The Father was not encumbered with human nature, much less fallen human nature. Yet, even He hesitated on the eve of the inauguration of the plan of redemption. Does this nullify the “humanity factor”? I think not.

The dilemma which confronted the Father was vastly different from that which Jesus endured. When Christ initiated the process of implementing the plan, in which He would die in man’s place, the Father’s choice was between the loss of His son and the loss of His Son. He had to choose between the loss of the first Adam and the sacrifice of the second Adam. For God the Father, there was no easy option. He loved His Son Jesus, with an infinite everlasting love, but He also loved His son Adam, with that same incomprehensible love. God the Father was forced to choose between two terrible options. Who can fathom making a choice as to which of His sons will die? Sin placed God in an unenviable position.

Said the angel, "Think ye that the Father yielded up His dearly beloved Son without a struggle? No, no." It was even a struggle with the God of heaven, whether to let guilty man perish, or to give His darling Son to die for them.²⁹

By comparison, the choice placed before the pre-incarnate Son of God required little thought. His options were to sacrifice Himself or face losing Adam and Eve. Unencumbered with the liabilities and vulnerabilities of fallen human nature, that choice was easy. He would sacrifice Himself. “Jesus did not count heaven a place to be desired while we were lost.”³⁰ Were the Father in the position of Christ, His choice would have also been easy. He would have

²⁹ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 127

³⁰ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 416

immediately chosen to sacrifice Himself to save mankind. Evidently, this was not an option for Him.³¹ Therefore, He hesitated. Therefore, there was a terrible struggle. Therefore, Christ entered into “close converse with His Father” and pleaded with Him, “three times”. God the Father faced His “Garden of Gethsemane” four thousand years before Christ.

The Angelic Response

When the angels were informed of the plan to rescue mankind, they also volunteered to die in man’s place.

Angels were so interested for man's salvation that there could be found among them those who would yield their glory and give their life for perishing man. "But," said my accompanying angel, "that would avail nothing." The transgression was so great that an angel's life would not pay the debt.³²

Self-sacrifice came natural to the unfallen angels of heaven. When they understood that Christ would have to sacrifice His life to save the human race, they volunteered to do the same. Unencumbered by the self-interest, which is inherent only in fallen nature, they naturally put the interests of others before self. However, this was not the case with the fallen angels. Instead of sacrificing himself to save others, Satan plotted to ruin others, in a vain attempt to save himself.

[Satan’s] followers were seeking him; and he aroused himself and, assuming a look of defiance, informed them of his plans to wrest from God the noble Adam and his companion Eve. If he could, in any way, beguile them to disobedience, God would make some provision whereby they might be pardoned, and then himself and all the fallen angels would be in a fair way to share with them of God's mercy. If this should fail, they could unite with Adam and Eve; for when once they should transgress the law of God, they would be subjects of God's wrath, like themselves. Their transgression would place them also, in a state of rebellion; and they could unite with Adam and Eve, take possession of Eden, and hold it as their home. And if they could gain access to the tree of life in the midst

³¹ “There was no other way by which man could be brought into harmony with his unchangeable law, save by the death of Christ.” Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, 09-02-89

“It was because there was no other way in which man could be saved, because without this sacrifice it was impossible for the human race to escape from the defiling power of sin, and be restored to communion with holy beings--impossible for them again to become partakers of spiritual life--it was because of this that Christ took upon Himself the guilt of the disobedient, and suffered in the sinner's stead.” Ellen G. White, *Faith I Live By*, p. 60

³² Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 127

of the garden, their strength would, they thought, be equal to that of the holy angels, and even God himself could not expel them.³³

What a contrast with the attitude of the unfallen angels. Their inclination was to sacrifice self to save others. The determination of the fallen angel is to ruin others in a vain attempt to save self. The law of heaven and the law of the fallen realm are opposites. Heaven's law is the law of self sacrifice. But the law of the fallen realm is the law of self preservation. The governing principles, of the two kingdoms, are poles apart. We may also observe this polar shift in perspectives, in the reaction of the unfallen versus the fallen Adam. His actions before and after the fall are described in stark contrast.

Two Adamic Responses

Before the fall, Adam loved Eve more than life itself. And because of this, he could not bear the thought of life without her. When Eve came to Adam with the forbidden fruit, he was not deceived into sin, as she had been. He understood what he was doing when he ate of the forbidden fruit. Yet, he *willingly* took sin and death upon himself, because of his love for his bride. Ellen White describes the events in these words:

Adam quite well understood that his companion had transgressed the only prohibition laid upon them as a test of their fidelity and love. . . Adam regretted that Eve had left his side; but now the deed was done. He must be separated from her whose society he had loved so well. How could he have it thus? His love for Eve was strong. And in utter discouragement he resolved to share her fate. He reasoned that Eve was a part of himself; and if she must die, he would die with her; for he could not bear the thought of separation from her. . . . He seized the fruit and quickly ate it . . .³⁴

Before the fall, Adam possessed a selfless love for his wife. He had been made “in the image of God”³⁵. This “image” included God’s self-sacrificing agape as the source of his motivations.

³³ Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 30

³⁴ Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 39

³⁵ Genesis 1:27

Therefore, He chose to willingly share Eve's terrible fate. What a contrast with his attitude after the fall.

Their crime is now before them in its true light. Their transgression of God's express command assumes a clearer character. Adam censured Eve's folly in leaving his side, and being deceived by the serpent.³⁶

Before the fall there was no "censorship", no thoughts of Eve's "folly". There was only "regret" and "discouragement". But after the fall Adam "censured" Eve and that was only the beginning. Things would get worse.

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where *are* you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you *were* naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."³⁷

Thus began the "blame game" so common in human experience today. "It's not my fault Lord. It's that woman that You gave me." Gone is the resolution to die with Eve. Gone is the love that could not bear the thought of separation from her. Gone is the grief and regret. Adam had been made in the image of God. The law of heaven had been operating in his being. But the moment he sinned a dramatic change had taken place.

Through disobedience man's powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love.³⁸

The significance of this change in the nature of humanity can hardly be over-stated, especially when one considers the fact that "Selfishness is the root of all evil".³⁹ When Adam sinned, the self-sacrificing love of God was replaced with "the root of all evil". It was at that

³⁶ Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 41

³⁷ Genesis 3:9-12 NKJV

³⁸ Ellen G. White, *Mind Character and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 205

³⁹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 633

point that the “law of sin”⁴⁰ took up residence in human nature. Could it be that this is the principle against which Christ was struggling as He approached the cross? Could it be that it is in this sense that He was made “to be sin for us”? He certainly never committed a sin, in word or thought or deed.

"The prince of this world cometh," said Jesus, "and hath nothing in Me." John 14:30. There was in Him nothing that responded to Satan's sophistry. He did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. So it may be with us.⁴¹

Please take note that this statement is a description of Christ's *actions*, not His *nature*. “Nothing responded.” “He did not consent.” He did not “yield to temptation”. Yet the contrast between the divine response of Christ in heaven, and the human response of Christ on earth, must not be overlooked. Speaking of His act of condescension in taking human nature the Bible says:

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.⁴² (Emphasis supplied.)

What is “sinful flesh”? Did Christ actually take it? Why did Paul use the expression “likeness of sinful flesh” rather than simply “sinful flesh”? Does this (the existence of the “law of sin”⁴³ in His “flesh”) explain the two Adamic responses, both in the case of the first and the second Adam?

What is “Sinful Flesh”?

The expression “sinful flesh”⁴⁴ appears only once in the scriptures (Romans 8:3).

Romans chapter seven constitutes the near context of this verse and must inform our

⁴⁰ Romans 7:23

⁴¹ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 123

⁴² Romans 8:3, Emphasis supplied.

⁴³ Romans 7:25

⁴⁴ Romans 8:3

interpretation of it. In chapter seven, the apostle describes the struggle between the “mind” and the “flesh”.

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.⁴⁵

In light of this description, it is apparent that “sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3) is flesh which contains “the law of sin”. Or as Romans 8:3 put it, there is “sin in the flesh”. It (i.e. sin) had to be there, *in* the flesh which Christ had taken, or God could not have “condemned sin in the flesh”.⁴⁶ If it was not “sinful flesh”, that Jesus took then Peter could never have written that He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree”,⁴⁷ nor could Paul have written that God “made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us”.⁴⁸ But the question remains: What does the expression “sin in the flesh” mean?

The “law of sin” has been described as “the first law of life”, the axiom which says “Save thyself”. “Look out for number one”. It has also been called “The law of self-preservation”. But this principle is not usually recognized as the “law of sin” until it is manifested as “selfishness”, “the root of all evil”⁴⁹. This principle is opposite of the principle of “self-denial” and “self-sacrifice”. It did not exist, until sin entered the universe. Now, it is manifested by all fallen beings, both human and angelic. It is actually a counterfeit of the true law of “self-preservation”. That is why the Spirit of prophecy says:

Self-renunciation is the great law of self-preservation, and self-preservation is the law of self-destruction.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Romans 7:21-23

⁴⁶ Some would argue that it is “sinfulness” that is in the flesh and not “sin” itself. But if that were the case then God could not have “condemned sin in the flesh”. He could only condemn “sinfulness”. Yet, over and over Paul refers to that which dwells in the flesh as “sin” and never “sinfulness”. See Romans 7:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17, 20.

⁴⁷ 1 Peter 2:24

⁴⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁴⁹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 633

⁵⁰ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 1, 1897

So with all who bring forth fruit as workers together with Christ: self-love, self-interest, must perish; the life must be cast into the furrow of the world's need. But the law of self-sacrifice is the law of self-preservation.⁵¹

Jesus put it this way:

Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.⁵²

These two principles, self-renunciation and self-exaltation or self-sacrifice and self-preservation are opposites. They are incompatible and mutually exclusive principles. It is when one is confronted with the mutually exclusive options to save others or to save self that the contrast between the law of the unfallen and the fallen realm is most clearly revealed.

Jesus came to the fallen realm to save fallen mankind. The Servant of the Lord says the Father gave Jesus “to the fallen race”.⁵³ Thus, when He came to the fallen realm, to save the fallen race, He took that same “fallen nature”, with “the law of sin” residing in it. The Spirit of Prophecy describes His coming in these words:

Satan had pointed to Adam's sin as proof that God's law was unjust, and could not be obeyed. In *our humanity*, Christ was to redeem Adam's failure. But when Adam was assailed by the tempter, none of the effects of sin were upon him. He stood in the strength of perfect manhood, possessing the full vigor of mind and body. He was surrounded with the glories of Eden, and was in daily communion with heavenly beings. *It was not thus with Jesus* when He entered the wilderness to cope with Satan. 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. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation.⁵⁴ (Emphasis supplied)

Note the words “our humanity”. Our humanity consists of three dimensions, the physical, mental and moral. And “our humanity” is fallen in all three dimensions, physical,

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 110

⁵² Luke 17:33

⁵³ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 25

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 117 (Emphasis supplied)

mental and moral. Physically we are not nearly the equal of Adam. He was more than twice our height.

As Adam came forth from the hand of his Creator he was of noble height and of beautiful symmetry. He was more than twice as tall as men now living upon the earth, and was well proportioned. His features were perfect and beautiful. . . . Eve was not quite as tall as Adam. Her head reached a little above his shoulders. She, too, was noble, perfect in symmetry, and very beautiful.⁵⁵

Mentally we are not the equal of Adam. His early descendents were far superior in mental strength and vigor.

Notwithstanding the wickedness of the antediluvian world, that age was not, as has often been supposed, an era of ignorance and barbarism. The people were granted the opportunity of reaching a high standard of moral and intellectual attainment. They possessed great physical and mental strength, and their advantages for acquiring both religious and scientific knowledge were unrivaled. . . . Could illustrious scholars of our time be placed in contrast with men of the same age who lived before the Flood, they would appear as greatly inferior in mental as in physical strength. As the years of man have decreased, and his physical strength has diminished, so his mental capacities have lessened.

The antediluvians were without books, they had no written records; but with their great physical and mental vigor, they had strong memories, able to grasp and to retain that which was communicated to them, and in turn to transmit it unimpaired to their posterity.⁵⁶

Those who lived before the flood were only a few steps from God, the Creator of the world and its inhabitants. The long life and *large intellect* given to these men might have been used in God's service. But their intellectual strength, that mighty power, was perverted to dishonor God. . . .⁵⁷

Note the terms “large intellect”, “intellectual strength” of “mighty power”. The Bible calls the antediluvians “men of renown”⁵⁸. They were geniuses compared with the brightest of our generation. Even Einstein would be considered a “mental midget” in their day.

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 47

⁵⁶ Ellen G. White, *Patriarch and Prophets*, p. 83

⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 34 (Emphasis supplied.)

⁵⁸ Genesis 6:4

Moral Infirmary Inherited

Yet, as significant as they are, physical and mental degeneration and weakness do not describe the full extent of mankind's inherited weakness. The moral nature of man was also impacted by the fall. The "law of sin" was encoded in the nature of Adam, in his very DNA, the moment that he sinned. This law of self-seeking, self-centeredness, selfishness and self-glorification, has been strengthening from generation to generation. It is becoming more and more evident in our society today.

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.⁵⁹

Licentiousness, disease, and imbecility are transmitted as an inheritance of woe from father to son and from generation to generation, and this brings anguish and suffering into the world and is no less than a repetition of the fall of man. . . .⁶⁰

Parents may have transmitted to their children tendencies to appetite and passion, which will make more difficult the work of educating and training these children to be strictly temperate and to have pure and virtuous habits.⁶¹

And yet with scarcely a thought or care, men and women of the present generation indulge intemperance by surfeiting and drunkenness, and thereby leave, as a legacy for the next generation, disease, enfeebled intellects, and *polluted morals*.⁶² (Emphasis supplied.)

Every woman about to become a mother, whatever may be her surroundings, should encourage constantly a happy, contented disposition, knowing that for all her efforts in this direction she will be repaid tenfold in the physical, *as well as in the moral*, character of her offspring.⁶³ (Emphasis supplied.)

Both parents transmit their own characteristics, mental and physical, their dispositions and appetites, to their children. As the result of parental intemperance, children often lack physical strength and mental and *moral power*.⁶⁴ (Emphasis supplied.)

⁵⁹ 2 Timothy 3:13

⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home*, p. 173

⁶¹ Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 174

⁶² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 30

⁶³ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 25, 1899

⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 173

If men would practice the attributes of God, they would not have the painful consciousness of transmitting wrong tendencies and traits of character to their children, to be reproduced in their children, thus communicating the evils that might have been repressed.--Letter 65, 1895.⁶⁵

It is not merely physical and mental weakness which is inherited, but the moral nature of our offspring is impacted by inheritance. As with the physical and mental degeneration and weakness, which has accumulated over the ages, moral weakness and degeneration has also been accumulating. And Jesus was subject to “the great law of heredity”.⁶⁶ This may sound like terrible news indeed, yet there is hope through the Gospel of Christ: “A genuine conversion changes hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong”.⁶⁷ The “law of sin” is still present in the flesh after conversion. But there is introduced into the human experience a power from above to militate against the flesh. It is called the “law of the Spirit”. This is a part of the secret of Christ’s victory in “sinful flesh”.⁶⁸ He was born into the world “converted”. Before the incarnation, He submitted His will to the will of the Father. As a result, when He was born He was born with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and a “sanctified human will”.

He began life, passed through its experiences, and ended its record, with a sanctified human will. He was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet because He kept His will surrendered and sanctified, He never bent in the slightest degree toward the doing of evil, or toward manifesting rebellion against God.⁶⁹

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me.
In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said,
'Behold, I have come -- In the volume of the book it is written of Me -- To do
Your will, O God.' "⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 3, p. 363

⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 48

⁶⁷ Ellen G. White, *Mind Character and Personality*, p. 145

⁶⁸ A full understanding of Christ’s victory in sinful flesh has not been revealed. “It is a mystery that is left unexplained to mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin. The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain, a mystery.” *Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, pg. 448

⁶⁹ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, October 29, 1894

⁷⁰ Hebrews 10:5-7

Conclusion

When Christ stepped into the stream of human heredity, we are told that “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.”⁷¹ (Emphasis supplied.) “He took upon His sinless nature, our sinful nature”.⁷² That must mean that He took all three dimensions of our “feeble faculties”⁷³. Because Jesus took “sinful flesh”, He struggled with the “law of sin” just as any other earth-bound child of Adam. He knows by experience what we go through. He understands, not only the fact of our temptations, but He is “touched with the feelings of our infirmities”⁷⁴. He took the same “infirmities”. This explains His terrible struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane. It explains how He experienced the strongest temptations which always “come from within”,⁷⁵ as well as the lesser temptations from without. It explains His prayer, “not my will but yours be done”⁷⁶. This explains why His sweat became as “great drops of blood”⁷⁷. It makes real the “consternation”⁷⁸, perplexity⁷⁹ and “despair”⁸⁰ which He experienced on the cross. And it reveals the reality of the cross and the depths of the love of God as nothing else can do.

⁷¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117

⁷² Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, p. 181

⁷³ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 11, 1888

⁷⁴ Hebrews 4:15

⁷⁵ “The Christian is to realize that he is not his own, but that he has been bought with a price. His strongest temptations will come from within; for he must battle against the inclinations of the natural heart. The Lord knows our weaknesses;” Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, December 1, 1892

⁷⁶ Luke 22:42

⁷⁷ Luke 22:44

⁷⁸ “As man's substitute and surety, the iniquity of men was laid upon Christ; he was counted a transgressor that he might redeem them from the curse of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam of every age was pressing upon his heart; and the wrath of God, and the terrible manifestation of his displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of his Son with consternation.” Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 162

⁷⁹ Matthew 27:46

⁸⁰ “Christ was the prince of sufferers; but it was not bodily anguish that filled him with horror and despair;” Ellen G. White, *The Present Truth*, 02-04-86

If we fail to grasp the meaning of the expression, God “made Him to be sin for us”⁸¹, a detail which is essential to the plan of redemption, we not only emasculate the Saviors “matchless charms”⁸² in the minds of many struggling Christians, but we inadvertently render the atonement impotent and the gospel null and void.

Christ is the ladder that Jacob saw, the base resting on the earth, and the topmost round reaching to the gate of heaven, to the very threshold of glory. If that ladder had failed by a single step of reaching the earth, we should have been lost. But Christ reaches us *where we are*. He took *our nature* and overcame, that we through taking His nature might overcome. Made "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3), He lived a sinless life.⁸³ (Emphasis supplied.)

“The humanity of Christ is [indeed] everything to us.”⁸⁴ It is the key which explains the *Two Adamic Responses*, and it is the secret of the power of the gospel.

⁸¹ II Corinthians 5:21

⁸² Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, p. 142

⁸³ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 311

⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, p. 904