

# THE LAST GENERATION

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Rev. 3:20-21<sup>1</sup>

How can God's people hasten or delay Christ's second coming? Has God limited Himself to human beings to complete His plan? Won't Jesus come whether a certain number of people "get it together" or not? He promised, "I will come again." We'll all be prisoners to death forever if God's people can delay the second coming!"

Yes, it is Christ who promised "I will come again!" and He will. All the glory will be His and the Father's.

But He loves His people! Unless they are ready to meet Him in person, He who is Himself "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29) will not come because of that divine love. If they have not overcome "even as [He] also overcame" (Rev. 3:21), He dares not come, for He is a consuming fire to sin. Those firmly attached to their sin will be consumed.

Thus the cleansing of the sanctuary comes into focus—a truth never clearly understood by either the Roman Catholic or the Protestant churches—"an atonement . . . to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins [conscious and unconscious] before the Lord" (Lev. 16:30). Yes, there's a "final atonement."

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<sup>1</sup> "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty of Creation;" "Stand Up for Jesus."

It is thought that Christ will come whether anybody is ready or not. This is a popular idea among us; but is it biblical? Can He come if nobody is ready?

Those who say "Yes" unconsciously violate the Day of Atonement truth. What they overlook is the great controversy between Christ and Satan which cannot be concluded by mere brute force, satanic or divine. God will win only by love revealed and demonstrated. He must have—at last—the full cooperation of His people, for they are called to "give glory to Him" (Rev. 14:7), that is, to demonstrate something important before the world and the universe. They must become one with Christ, in heart-union with Him totally, as a Bride with her Bridegroom. Atonement is reconciliation, and the "final atonement" will therefore be their final and complete reconciliation with Him. This is more than legal imputation of righteousness (*dikaiousune*) that "covers" continued selfishness and worldliness; it has to be fully imparted righteousness (*dikaiomata*), or the great controversy can never be concluded.

A few thoughts that may be helpful:

(1) The time of the second coming does not depend on a people doing the impossible, but on their faith growing up "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (see Eph. 4:13).

(2) The great High Priest is working day and night to prepare a people for His coming. They do not cleanse the heavenly sanctuary; that's His work (typified in the ancient Levitical sanctuary), for they do not save themselves even 1%. But they do let the Savior do His work; they stop resisting and

hindering Him; they surrender to His love; they cooperate with Him. Their spiritual growth is not in terms of works, but of faith (which works! Gal. 5:6). Their love affair with worldliness comes to an end, and they become serious in their attachment with Christ. If such growth is impossible, if there is never a full cooperation with Him in His closing work of atonement, then He must for all eternity be embarrassed.

(3) The real issue is Christ's honor and the final victory of preparing a people whose intimate closeness to Him is typified as a Bride prepared for the wedding (Rev. 19:6-8). A Bridegroom who is jilted at the altar is shamed forever after.

(4) "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." The Greek word used by Peter means God's people can "hasten" the coming of the day of God (2 Pet. 3:12).

(5) Jesus correlates His second Advent with proclaiming the gospel "in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). There is no hint of a prearranged, fixed "day and hour."

(6) But more important than any physical activity is the "ripening" of the grain preparatory to the "harvest." In Mark 4:26 Jesus describes the time for the "kingdom of God" as dependent on the growing process: "When the fruit is brought forth, immediately [the farmer] putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come [ripe]" (verse 29). The "because" is not some time clock in heaven striking a predestination gong.

(7) This thought is repeated in Revelation 14:15 where an angel says "the harvest of the earth is ripe." Another angel proclaims that at the same time "her grapes [Babylon's] are fully ripe" (verse 18). Thus in both the righteous and the wicked, a development process seems evident.

(8) Jesus dares not return while there is sin, known or unknown, still cherished in the hearts of His people, for they would be "consumed." Hence He is forced to wait until they reach the place described in Revelation 3:21 where they overcome "even as [He] also overcame."

(9) To say that such "overcoming" is unnecessary because God's people enjoy the status of legally imputed righteousness (*dikaioisune*) that "covers" continued sinning, will not fly. There is imparted righteousness (*dikaomata*) which God's people will receive who consent for their faith to "[grow up] unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." That *dikaiomata* is used in Romans 8:4 and in Revelation 19:8! In other words, legally imputed righteousness at last becomes experientially imparted righteousness. The time will come when God's people live the truth, not merely profess it. That's what Christ died to achieve!

(10) The marriage of the Lamb takes place in the Most Holy Apartment, in the time of the Day of

Atonement—the cleansing of the sanctuary.<sup>2</sup> But the marriage cannot be consummated until the Bride “makes herself ready.” The idea seems clear: the Bridegroom is ready; the Bride is not ready. But sometime she will “make herself ready.”<sup>3</sup>

(11) The frequently quoted passage “Like the stars in . . . their appointed path, God’s purposes know no haste and no delay,”<sup>4</sup> has been twisted from its context to support a predestination timing for the second Advent. But it is speaking of the first Advent, the timing of which was indeed pre-appointed by the prophecy of Daniel 9:25, 26. From 1844 on, all depends on the repentance of God’s people, or the Bride making herself ready.<sup>5</sup>

(12) God’s people do have a serious responsibility. The “overcomers” are invited to “sit” with Christ in His “throne” as members of His parliament or of His

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<sup>2</sup> “I saw that while Jesus was in the most holy place He would be *married* to the New Jerusalem; and after His work should be accomplished in the holiest, He would descend to the earth in kingly power and take to Himself the precious ones who had patiently waited His return” *Early Writings*, pp. 55, 251. “Every case had been decided for life or death. While Jesus had been ministering in the sanctuary, the judgment had been going on for the righteous dead, and then for the righteous living. Christ had received His kingdom, having made the atonement for His people and blotted out their sins. . . . The *marriage* of the Lamb was consummated” *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> There is a linguistic link between Revelation 3:20 in the Greek with the LXX version of Song of Solomon 5:1-6 (it’s not evident in the Hebrew text, but John was quoting the LXX). Christ must not, will not “knock” in vain forever.

<sup>4</sup> *The Desire of Ages*, page 31.

<sup>5</sup> “. . . There should be time no longer” (Rev. 10:6).

“cabinet” (Rev. 3:21).<sup>6</sup> That is, they share with Him executive authority. In bringing to an end the final issues of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Thus they are said to be important. And they will be gloriously happy forever!

Why must the last generation become totally surrendered in order to be translated? Why can previous generations enter heaven without their experience of total victory required of those who will be translated?

“Required” implies an idea foreign to this “preparation.” A bridegroom doesn’t require the surrender of his bride; he wins it. The marriage of the Lamb does not take place because God rigidly demands a self-sacrificial devotion that is finally forced; overcoming “even as [Christ] overcame” is a joyous character development that takes place as faith grows to a heart-union with the divine Bridegroom. It’s not a point-of-the-gun demand. It is the fruit of justification by faith at last clearly understood.

(1) Why is the last generation the “first fruits unto God and to the Lamb” (Rev. 14:4)? Sounds backward! There will be a generation, a corporate body, not merely a handful of scattered, unrelated individuals, like the “some few” of every age. Christ must have a Bride, a corporate body of believers, who will be the first to demonstrate the overcoming that Christ accomplished in His life. They will “reflect” His character, like so many broken scraps

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<sup>6</sup> “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.”

of worthless mirror, ever so unworthy, not shining on their own, but each perfectly reflecting a different facet of His righteous character like a huge diamond. This corporate body who “overcometh” judges all previous generations.

(2) Satan’s charge for 6000 years has been that it is impossible for fallen, sinful human beings to overcome sin truly.<sup>7</sup> He claims he has invented something that proves that God is wrong (sin). Judged by the dismal record of Laodicea, it appears that he has won the argument. The fact that the Son of God overcame and “condemned sin in the flesh” is not the final issue, although popular “Reformationism” would love to consider it so—thus excusing “us” from overcoming truly (Luther can malign the Jews, drink his beer on his deathbed, and still be in God’s kingdom, hopefully).

But something else is needed. Christ’s victory was indeed a setback for Satan, and proved him wrong; but Satan’s charge still stands so far as the human race is concerned: “It is impossible for us to obey.” The reason the 1888 message is so vigorously opposed is because it teaches the possibility, yes certainty, that God will have a people who do overcome fully. There will be a demonstration of Christ’s righteousness in sinful flesh.

(3) “The honor of God” is involved in the character perfection of His people. If they at last support Satan’s charge, He must be forever embarrassed.

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<sup>7</sup> “Satan represents God’s law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 24.

(4) God loves all the vast hosts of the redeemed who still “sleep in Jesus.” He longs to bring them from their tomb. But they must remain there as prisoners until the first resurrection (the Bible does not teach natural immortality; saints do not go to heaven at death). But the resurrection in turn cannot take place until the second coming of Jesus (no angel can resurrect them). But He dares not come so long as there is cherished or unknown sin still in the characters of His people, else His coming should “consume” them. Hence God’s love for “the dead in Christ” requires that a living last generation overcome totally, for otherwise He is stymied.<sup>8</sup>

(5) “He that is dead is freed from sin” (Rom 6:7), and each saint who comes up in the resurrection will have left all such sin-slavery in the grave. But apparently the 144,000, the last generation, so appreciate “the blood of the Lamb,” so clearly comprehend the length, breadth, depth, and height of *agape*, that self is truly “crucified with Christ.” They have died to sin, and thus, says Revelation 14:4, are the “first fruits unto God and to the Lamb” to demonstrate it.

The last generation of those who wait for Him just before the return of Jesus will be the happiest of all time because the “marriage of the Lamb has come and His wife has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7).

A man and a woman who are in love want the wedding day to come because they want to be united as one. It was God who made them thus,

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<sup>8</sup> Popular “Reformationism” denies this, because it does not understand the Day of Atonement cleansing of the sanctuary.

and who built in to them this attraction for each other. Each feels incomplete without the other; the woman is made to be a “help meet” as the KJV puts Genesis 2:18. She wants to be what she was “made” to be—and it’s her greatest joy. She has tasted “love.”

He feels empty and alone until he finds her, no matter how wonderful a man he has been (“no rose in all the world until you came”). No man is complete of himself. The “marriage of the Lamb” comes only in “the last generation.” Those who are ready for the second coming of Christ are not happy because they anticipate palaces in the New Jerusalem, but because they are soon to be united in “marriage” with the Lamb. Their pent-up love can hardly wait fulfillment.

A bride who loves is happy only to be with her bridegroom. I remember reading of a woman from California who loved a man, married him, and went where he wanted to go—study lions on the Serengeti plains. She slept happily on the ground only to feel a lion nibbling at her toes through her sleeping blanket. She had married this man for love and was happy to be where he was. That’s what this kind of love does to two who love with it.

The love of His people for Christ as a wife loves a husband is the mystery of mysteries; it’s been talked about and written in the Bible all these thousands of years, but now in the final generation it becomes Reality.

All of eschatological theology that fills the library tomes can be distilled into a drop of this divine-human conjugal love. Read from Genesis to

Revelation with this insight and the Bible becomes new to you.

The Bridegroom is so eager that He can hardly wait; but something has cooled His bride-to-be. Could it be an inner infidelity? Is that Laodicea’s real “lukewarm” problem? Thought through it becomes an overpowering motivation for repentance.

#### **Jesus and His Last Generation of Saints on Earth**

“Victory over sin, character perfection, lifestyle changes, power for witnessing, come only as the sinner beholds Christ lifted up on the cross as the only perfect sacrifice. . . . What Christ does for us, and what He does in us form an indissoluble union. However, the success of Christ working in us is always predicated on our focusing and emphasizing what He has done for us. The way to character perfection is through the cross. . . . Ellen White defines character perfection as the spontaneous acting out of God’s love. . . .

“I thus appeal to all my fellow church leaders: Will you listen to the divine call, ‘Be earnest, therefore, and repent’? If we will repent, then Christ promises to ‘come in and eat with us.’ The greatest proof that we have not repented as a church is the fact that we are still here. After almost 150 years we are still here. The church that was raised up by God to announce the coming of Jesus with great power in a single generation is still here. It takes only one generation to finish the work that God has given. He is not short on power. . . . Are we willing to pay the price to re-order our priorities?”

17. The phrase “absolute sinless perfection” is not found in the 1888 message. The true idea is character perfection, overcoming “even as [Christ] overcame.” Sin will not be perpetuated in the human race. It will be conquered in the hearts and lives of a people who believe the pure gospel.

(a) “Does God require of the final generation a certain standard or quality of righteousness not expected of previous generations of believers?” It’s not what God requires, but what His people will want to do to honor Him in the final crisis, and which His blood-bought redeemed will gladly render to Him.

(b) To be truthful, the idea of God “requiring” this or that is rooted in legalism, for it implies on man’s part an egocentric concern which is the opposite of being “under grace.” The true idea is a heart-response to the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of His agape which will finally come to fruition in a generation gathered from “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.”

(c) “When we get to heaven, will members of earth’s last generation be able to claim in the presence of the redeemed of previous generations that their own righteousness was of a higher quality than that of the rest?” The answer is, No.

The Lord hints that He might say something about these people on His own initiative, like maybe, they “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus,” or they sing “a new song,” or they have “no guile in their mouths,” etc. But they won’t say it or claim it, and what He may say is His business, neither yours nor ours.

The following are some of the 1888 concepts that are unique: legal justification and the effectiveness of that which is by faith; the glorious good news of the two covenants; the mighty power of Christ to save from continuing sin; His nearness in taking our fallen sinful nature; the initiative of the Holy Spirit in saving the lost; the Good Shepherd’s initiative in seeking His lost sheep; the possibility of overcoming all sin even as Christ overcame in our behalf; the certainty of a final generation reflecting the perfection of Christ’s character; the practical relation of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary to the cleansing of human hearts; the motivation of concern for Christ’s honor that transcends self-centered seeking of reward or avoiding punishment; the reality of the lost taking the initiative to be lost; and the truth that the sacrifice of Christ accomplished far more than making a mere provision that does nothing unless we do something—He gave His blood for the world, therefore the world owes its present life to Him. The 1888 message probed the depths of the atonement in a way that must yet capture the attention of the world.

The prophetic word, “for two thousand three hundred days, then the sanctuary shall be cleansed” (Dan. 8:14), predicts that during the last era of human history, the faith of God’s people will mature, making possible their full reception of Heaven’s grace. The prophecy of Daniel comprehends their spiritual development “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

God withheld nothing from Adam that arbitrarily barred him from the company of the 144,000. Rather, his own spiritual immaturity made it impossible to appropriate the grace an infinite God would have granted even then. God could have cleansed the sanctuary anciently, if human spiritual development had made it possible. We must not limit God's infinite resources; the deficiency has been ours. Jesus calls every generation to repent, for "all have sinned." "The knowledge of sin" comes through "the law" (Rom. 3:23, 20). The Holy Spirit imparts this wholesome knowledge of his guilt to "every man." Its "light" has passed no one by (John 1:9). But a final generation will receive the gift of repentance, a *metanoia*, an after-perception, a contrite view of the past as history finally reveals it. Then it will be said, "The marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready."

Will it be fun to meet Jesus face to face? Have you ever thought about that?

There is no reason under heaven why you should be the least bit scared to meet Him and to look in His eyes. He has never wanted you to be afraid of Him!

He is your Friend—already is. You don't have to do anything to win Him over to become your Friend. That idea is part of the darkness that good preachers used to preach before that wonderful "latter rain" began to come with better Good News for us. When He gave Himself for you on His cross, He did that to prove to you that He is already your Best Friend forever.

There's already a silent, underground bond that has tied you to Him ever since you first began to respond to His love for you. That means when you finally do see Him and you can meet Him, you will look into His eyes and He will look into your eyes, and the two of you will instantly recognize each other (or course He will have known you all along). There will be a glint shining in His eyes as He looks into your eyes that will tell you that He knows all about you (and still loves you) and you will feel like you have known Him all your life.

You will instantly feel like He is the other half of that "broken stone" that is you. You will tell everybody, "I have never really known until this moment what pure happiness is!" Translation will be a thrill. He will put His arm around you and sweep you up with Him into heaven. And you will at last feel perfectly at home with Him because from this day on you will live with Him here.