

THE LAST GENERATION¹

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“The Last Generation” idea has caught the interest of thoughtful Bible-lovers worldwide, which for many has become a new book.

All the grand salvation themes come together to constitute a crescendo of Bible truth like:

A choir singing a “new song” that has never struck such a high note: “They sang as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the [twenty four] elders. And no one could learn that song except the 144,000, who were redeemed from the earth” (Rev. 14:3).

Imagine the excitement that would thrill the musical world if someone were to discover the manuscript of Beethoven’s Tenth Symphony (the world has never heard more than those famous “nine”). But nothing like that has ever happened. The “Last Generation” Bible idea is of far greater impact for it will thrill seekers of truth from “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” Deep convictions in hearts come together in unison.

Another biblical image of the last generation movement is a forest fire in people’s hearts. No church hierarchy can put it out. Although the “elders” of 120 years ago did quench the flame then, now the Holy Spirit is unmistakably in charge, and honest-hearted people will make their way through every obstacle to grab it. The quiet, even

painful ministry of gospel-lovers worldwide has at last borne fruit.

Nobody has to study psychological tricks to induce people against their will. “The LORD has kindled a fire in Zion” (Lam. 4:11). The Holy Spirit will motivate them to forsake all that has held them back; the last generation idea punctuates soul-winning ministry; there is no time-setting, but there is seen the final significance of the Daniel and Revelation teaching since the commencement of “the time of the end” in 1798 (Dan. 11:35; 12:4). There is awareness that God does have a time schedule.

The light that shines so brightly is the accumulated rays from millennia of growth in grace, “the path of the just” that “like the shining sun . . . shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18). It’s the brightest light in 6000+ years; it cannot pass unrecognized. Christ will be honored.

The primary purpose of the Advent movement has always been to develop the Christ-like character of a remnant which vindicates His sacrifice. No other community of saints in all history have welcomed such a maturity of experience, symbolized in Scripture as the Bride making “herself ready” (Rev. 19:7). This last remnant will become the population of a “New Jerusalem,” having overcome the backslidings of all previous generations. In their character will be seen the practical results of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. The plan of salvation is to reach its culmination, and the doubts and objections of Satan and his hosts are to be forever answered. The unfallen universe itself is to

¹ 2 Peter 3:11, 12. 71, 316.

be reassured by watching a grand demonstration of the complete success of the plan of salvation in its final hour. The gospel is to be demonstrated as “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

Bound up with the attainment of this primary objective is the realization of a secondary one: finishing the gospel program of world mission. *The attainment of the secondary goal is represented in Scripture as virtually assured once the primary one is realized* (Mark 4:26-29; Rev. 14:15; John 13:35).

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!”²

² Editor David Newman under the title “Laodicea and Corporate Repentance” in the February issue of *Ministry*. Following up his “Open Letter to the General Conference President” in the October issue, Elder Newman has courageously addressed the Laodicean message, which he quotes in full, to the leadership of the Adventist Church. Because many of our readers do not have access to *Ministry*, we will quote from the article extensively. Let us read in a spirit of humility, free of any trace of an “us and them” attitude. However clearly we may have seen the faults of “the brethren,” let us acknowledge that we are Laodicea.

“Ever since the 1850’s,” Elder Newman writes, “we as individual Adventists have acknowledged our Laodicean condition, but is there a difference between individual recognition of this fact and corporate recognition? Some have tried to educate us in this area, but we have ignored their pleas. Could it be that before this message can really take hold on the individual level that there needs to be a

corporate recognition of our need as well? We as church leaders need to spend much more time studying and applying this passage. . . .

“Ellen White asserts that God expects corporate responsibility as well as individual responsibility: ‘The same disobedience and failure that were seen in the Jewish church have characterized in a greater degree the people who have had this great light from heaven in the last messages of warning. Shall we, like them, squander {D} our opportunities and privileges until God shall permit oppression and persecution to come upon us?’ When the Jewish nation rejected Christ, the leaders made a corporate decision endorsed by the people. . . .

“The last generation, the generation that witnesses to Christ’s coming, will be a special generation. Because of the unprecedented trials the church will have gone through, it will emerge blameless (Rev. 14:5). It will perfectly reflect the character of Christ (COL 69, 415, 416).

“God reveals that the main problem is self-satisfaction. . . . [He] is telling us that we need to redefine our measurement for success—gold; admit that we are naked and need white clothes; recognize our blindness—quit pretending that everything is fine. . . .

What the Message Is

“The Laodicean message is a call to the exaltation of the most precious substance in the universe, the spilt blood of God Himself. This means that Jesus Christ, His life, His death, His coming again, needs our passionate embrace and commitment. Thus God says ‘buy’ the gold. The only thing we have to trade is our own miserable selves, our selfish hearts. . . .

“If you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, the proposition would be rejected as treason” (*Faith and Works*, p. 24).

“If we seek the true remedies, then as church leaders we will make the burden of our committees, our councils, our

gatherings, a study of and a seeking for the righteousness of Christ rather than a push for church growth. . . . The burden of our gatherings should be to seek the remedies for our Laodicean condition. Let us convene a world gathering of leaders and pastors whose only agenda is to study the message to Laodicea. If this proves impossible let us do it division by division, conference by conference. the kind of church growth most of us are longing for will never happen until we admit our need of Christ's righteousness. So how do we tell what our priorities are? . . . All we have to look at are our reporting procedures and what we give the major amount of time to at committees and workers' meetings. When we gather as leaders for union, division, and General Conference meetings, what is the focal point of our discussion?

"I long to see us give much more time to prayer, fasting, and Bible study, with the emphasis on knowing Jesus better. We need the latter rain, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But when we pray for the Holy Spirit we need to make sure that we are not just praying for victory over sin or greater success in evangelism, but that we pray for the Holy Spirit to help us lift up the cross more, to preach Jesus Christ better, to witness to Him better.

"The message of Laodicea is not primarily a message to individuals, but to a church, to a corporate body. Therefore, while it is true that individuals make up the body, the church, it is the body as a whole that needs to recognize its need and change its emphasis. This is what the church failed to do after the 1888 General Conference. . .

Lifting up Jesus

"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

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."

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

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?"

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 (*dikaiosisune*) that “covers” continued selfishness and worldliness; it has to be *fully imparted* righteousness (*dikaionmata*), or the great controversy can never be concluded.

A few thoughts that may be helpful:

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).

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.

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.

“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).

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.”

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]” (vs. 29). The “because” is not some time clock in heaven striking a predestination gong.

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” (vs. 18). Thus in both the righteous and the wicked, a development process seems evident.

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.”

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 *dikaomata* 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!

The Bible truth of the “last generation” tells a great story of success in God’s work. It will include the outpouring of the gift of the Holy Spirit in a full measure the world has not seen since the Day of Pentecost when Christ was ushered into His ministry as the world’s High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

What did the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost include?

Jesus has said that if He goes away, He will not leave us “orphans,” but He will send us “another Comforter,” whose first work will be to “convict of sin” (John 14:16;16:8).

What sin did the Holy Spirit convict the people of, at Pentecost? Answer: the awful, the terrible sin of crucifying the Son of God (Acts 2:36). There is no sin deeper, more horrible.

To the last generation of people on earth, the Lord will send the same Gift in His fullness—bringing a conviction of sin that goes deeper than He has ever gone with a “body” of God’s people, since Pentecost.

This outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be a fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10-14:

The call to repentance will come first to the leadership of the church “the house of David, . . . the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”

It will be “the spirit of grace and of supplications.” No high-pressure “professional” calls for superficial responses; this will be “grass-roots” in that it will go directly to the lowest layers of consciousness.

It will be New Covenant in its spirit for it will be the “spirit of grace.”

This means that it will be an exaltation of “Christ and Him crucified,” not just beautiful Power Point pictures, but by a clear heart-conviction of how contrary our character has been to that of Jesus.

Repentance will be the direct result.

But the fruit will bring glory to Christ which will be the most glorious in all time.

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.³ 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.” 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.

The frequently quoted passage from *The Desire of Ages*, page 31 (“Like the stars in . . . their appointed path, God’s purposes know no haste and no delay”), 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 (see Rev. 10:6).

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 “cabinet” (Rev. 3:20). That is, they share with Him

³ “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.” “While Jesus had been ministering in the sanctuary, the judgment had been going on for the righteous dead, and then for the righteous living. . . . The subjects of the kingdom were made up. The marriage of the Lamb was consummated.” *Early Writings*, pp. 55, 251, 280.

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 *demand*s 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.

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 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.

Satan’s charge for 6000 years has been that it is impossible for fallen, sinful human beings to overcome sin truly.⁴ 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.

⁴ “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 fall of our first parents, with all the woe that has resulted, he charges upon the Creator, leading men to look upon God as the author of sin, and suffering, and death. Jesus was to unveil this deception.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 24.

“The honor of God” is involved in the character perfection of His people.⁵ If they at last support Satan’s charge, He must be forever embarrassed.

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. (Again, popular “Reformationism” denies this, because it does not understand the Day of Atonement cleansing of the sanctuary.)

“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

⁵ “You may say that you believe in Jesus, when you have an appreciation of the cost of salvation. You may make this claim, when you feel that Jesus died for you on the cruel cross of Calvary; when you have an intelligent, understanding faith that his death makes it possible for you to cease from sin, and to perfect a righteous character through the grace of God, bestowed upon you as the purchase of Christ’s blood.” Ellen G. White, “How Do We Stand?” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (July 24, 1888).

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.

JESUS AND THE LAST GENERATION

The phrase “absolute sinless perfection” is not found in the “most precious 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.

“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.

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.”

“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.

Some unique Bible truths are: the 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. These truths probe 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” (Eph. 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.”

MEETING JESUS FACE-TO-FACE

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. The last generation of those who wait for Him just before the return of Jesus will be the happiest of all time.