

When we allow Jesus to be our Lord, He changes us. Grace, God's saving love, transforms us as we walk with Jesus every day.

Wrote the apostle Paul: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14).

This passage sets out the nature of a life lived by the grace of God. Everything changes—our *choices*, our *hope*, and our *motivation*.

Day by day we are confronted with choices. The world is ever with us with its "lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16, KJV), but grace teaches us to say "No!" and to choose the noble way, the way of Jesus. Further, grace sustains us as we wait for Jesus to come back. We don't know when He will come, but we know that He will because He promised: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself" (John 14:3, KJV). Already in this life He fills our hearts with joy and peace, but the best is yet to be when we shall see Him face to face. Further, His grace motivates us to be all that He wants us to be—a purified "people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

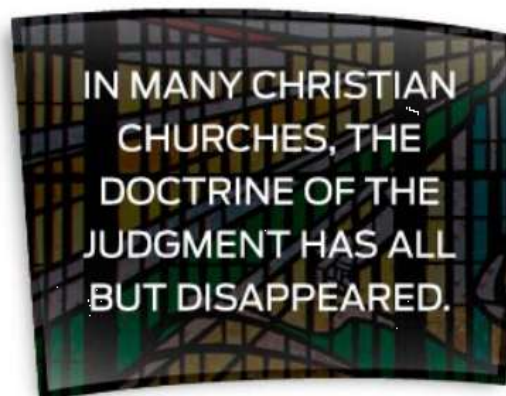
To the people of Israel in the wilderness, God commanded: "Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). His Shekinah glory between the cherubim in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle demonstrated that He had kept His promise: He did indeed dwell among them.

God's Desire

God still wants to dwell among His people. We have no wilderness sanctuary, no beautiful Temple in Jerusalem, but we have a more wonderful way of knowing that God is with us. The great I AM, Creator of the universe, now condescends to dwell within us! No longer a tent, no longer a temple of gold, silver and precious stones, but a body! "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" asks the apostle Paul. And he goes on: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

How God can dwell in us is a mystery, the mystery of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27, KJV). But every man or woman, boy or girl who has accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord knows it to be fact. Jesus is as real as our best friend; He is our best friend.

Therefore, we seek to honor God in all we do. Our bodies aren't just living temples; they are living sacrifices offered up in praise and worship to the Lord whose grace has saved us. "In view of God's mercy . . . offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:1, 2).



Not only are we temples of the Holy

Spirit individually, but God designs that His people collectively be a holy dwelling place where His presence is manifested. “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple,” writes Paul (1 Cor. 3:16).

God wants the church to reflect His holiness. It is to be a cosmic display of the love, wisdom, and grace of God. What a high ideal!

Peter elaborates on the theme: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Anciently, the Temple in Jerusalem was a wonder that amazed people from near and far. That is the sort of witness that God wants His church to be in these last days of earth’s history—something that will draw people to Jesus.

The glory of the church doesn’t consist in magnificent buildings and expensive facilities. Our houses of worship should be attractive and representative of the Lord who dwells within, but never let us fall into the trap of worldly display and pride. The glory of the church consists in the *people* who gather there, in the sincerity of our devotion and praise to the Lord, and in the love and acceptance we show to one another.

Moving Humbly Forward

Although our church started in a most humble way, born out of disappointment with few believers, we have spread to the ends of the earth. We now number more than 17 million baptized members, and every year another 1 million or more people swell our ranks. We operate more than 100 universities and colleges, plus many hospitals, clinics, and publishing houses.

I praise God for what He has done and continues to do in our midst. Let us pause to give all glory and praise to Him. Let us beware, however, lest, even while mouthing pious phrases, in our hearts we begin to think like Nebuchadnezzar: “Is not this the great Babylon I have built” (Dan. 4:30)?

When someone steps into an Adventist church, what do they find? Do they immediately sense that God is in this place? Do they feel warmth, care, and friendliness from welcoming saints? Do they hear the Word of God preached from the pulpit? Is Christ uplifted for grace, salvation, and hope?

My heart trembles at how far short we often fall in what we demonstrate by our actions. We make fine prayers and sing fine hymns, but too often pride of display, a desire to impress others, and ugly feelings toward those who are different from us—in race, gender, education, or social status—turns on its head our profession to be the remnant people of God.

The church is precious in God’s sight. It is the theater of His activity where living grace is demonstrated to the world through a body of believers. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:25-27).

Ellen White likewise gave much counsel about God’s ideal for the church: “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men [and women]. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into

Thursday WOP

Saturday, November 05, 2011

8:32 AM

His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to 'the principalities and powers in heavenly places,' the final and full display of the love of God" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9).

"Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts" (*ibid.*, p. 12).

Elsewhere Ellen White writes that the church is carried on Christ's heart (*Christian Service*, p. 243), is a case that contains God's jewels (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 261), is Christ's fortress in a revolted world (*Medical Ministry*, p. 89), is Christ's representative on earth (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 122), is the dearest object on the earth to God (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 166), and is God's property (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 19).

What a privilege to be part of God's family on earth! Let us never treat membership in the church lightly as though the church were a club that we choose to join or drop at will.

Jesus, our great high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, is Lord of the church. As He ministers in heaven above in our behalf, let us yield moment by moment to His transforming grace, glorifying Him in our body temple and building up "the church, which is His body" (Eph. 1:22, 23).