

Appendix 1

Definitions of Terms

We must know what we mean by such terms as "Christian," "regeneration," "perfection," "sin," "obedience," and "example" if we are to draw useful conclusions about perfect obedience, or ceasing to sin, or following Christ's example, or enjoying Christian perfection.

What does it mean to be
a Christian?

If we could agree that being a perfect Christian means being a Christian perfectly, then it becomes very important to know what it means to be a Christian--at all, in any degree.

We could start with a discussion of high moral standards of personal conduct, but sharing those standards is not enough to make one a Christian. If that were the case then Buddhists would have to be called Christians.¹ Similarly, Christianity is more than a belief that one God created the heavens and the earth. Otherwise both Moslems and Jews would qualify as Christians². There is more involved than believing that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure or even that He died to atone for our sins. Satan believes that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure and that He died to atone for our sins. But he is not a Christian.

What we are dealing with is not primarily a standard for behavior, although certain types of behavior are implied, nor is it primarily a system of belief, as important as it is to believe the right things. One can act good and think well and still be quite lonely. But one cannot be a Christian and be alone in the fullest sense of the word because the one essential, irreducible, minimum qualification for being a Christian is that a sinner has entered a saving relationship of love and trust with Jesus Christ. Such things are said frequently, but if this is really what we believe a Christian is, it will dramatically affect our views on Christian perfection.

What does it mean to be
born again?

Rebirth is not optional. I am aware that the sinful mind is hostile to God, as Paul points out in Rom 8:7. But the natural hostility toward God that we all inherit at birth is not the only factor to bear in mind. It is one thing, but not the only thing. Another is the spiritual rebirth by which we become sons and daughters of God. Christ was very pointed in His remarks on this topic with Nicodemus.

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? (11) I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. (12) I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" (John 3:10-12)

In all of this I am writing as a Christian, not as a person who is unconverted. It is irrelevant to keep reminding ourselves of the conditions under which an alien to Christ would have to live in order to be perfect before the law. In Christ I am no longer an alien, but an heir (Gal 3:26-4:7). Living a perfect life before the law of a holy God in a state of alienation from the

One whose character it reflects would be a radical impossibility. But that is not the context for my remarks. The topic being discussed is specifically Christian perfection and not some philosophical or humanistic concept of perfection in the abstract. I submit that if we really are sons and daughters of God, it is no longer unnatural to love Him. What would be unnatural under such circumstances is failing to do so.³

On the other hand being born into Christ does not allow us to dismiss the topic of Christian perfection as something to be taken for granted. The point when one experiences rebirth is precisely the point at which he or she can hope to raise the question of Christian perfection in a meaningful way.

Rebirth is a form of birth. There are two things about birth that must be kept in mind. First, who we are born to determines what our natural relationships are. If we have been born again by the Spirit of God into a spiritual relationship with our heavenly Father, it follows that our spiritual relationships are different from what they were before. The new birth is an opposite counterpart to our fleshly birthright from fallen Adam. In one sense the two are incompatible (1 Cor 15:42-49), and yet Christ has personally spanned the gulf between them.

A person's attitudes change when he is born again and not his physical characteristics. The body remains what it always was--a product of physical birth. But the thoughts undergo a transformation. Here is precisely the reason why Rom 7 must refer to the experience of a converted Christian. Before conversion there is no basis for the type of inner conflict Paul describes between the flesh he inherited from Adam and the mind he has more recently inherited from Christ through spiritual rebirth.⁴

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (Gal 5:17)

The second point referred to above is that birth is only a starting point. A person newly born into Christ has an experience that is both similar to and different from a person who is fully mature. The relationships are right, but within that context he is just starting to develop. A young heir is a real heir but must grow before he can inherit.

Rebirth transcends natural relationships. We have spoken of natural relationships, both physical and spiritual. The responsibilities of a Christian go beyond these. We are to love not only our earthly friends and relatives, and not only our heavenly Father, but also our enemies.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' (44) But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (45) that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (46) If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? (47) And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" (Matt 5:43-47)

If as Christians we ever reach the point of actually loving our enemies--following Christ's example in loving us (Rom 5:10)--then why should it be so difficult to love our best Friend? Is Jesus really so hard to love? What must it make Him feel like to hear us rehearse the philosophical reasons why it is unlikely or impossible that we should ever love Him fully? There is nothing more natural than responding with love to those who have loved us. This is one

reason for the fifth commandment. To withhold love from our parents is an unnatural act comparable to gross idolatry. But if this is true under any circumstances, how much more with Jesus when we realize what was involved in showing us the extent of His love on the cross. If a heart response to those who love us is impossible for converted Christians, how is possible for the pagans and tax collectors in the same passage? We should not speak of being drawn by the great love of Christ as something that is difficult to do or as an accomplishment of any sort.

What does it mean to be
a perfect Christian?

The terms "perfect" and "perfection" have a wide range of meanings. Using the same word that another writer uses is no guarantee that one intends what the other has in view. I use the term "Christian perfection" as a technical term in order to isolate one facet of what "perfection" can mean. It would be possible, however, for someone else to use a different term and mean the same thing by it. In such a case one should be willing to look past the syllables and see the underlying similarity of intent. And by the same token, if another writer uses the same term but means something different by it, one should be ready to make any necessary distinctions. I would be content to avoid introducing a special term if there were not so much potential for misunderstanding.

Heppenstall's concept of sinless perfection. Edward Heppenstall, in an essay entitled, "Let Us Go on to Perfection,"⁵ argues that perfection implies having an unblemished capacity for obedience and that after Adam's fall mankind has lacked that capacity. Therefore, until the change of the body at glorification the process by which the saints are perfected cannot be considered full and complete. The term Heppenstall uses for this ultimate state of restoration from sin is "sinless perfection."

Where reference is made to man's restoration to this original state as God made him, complete harmony with God, the fulfillment of God's design for man, "sinless perfection" is the term used in this section.⁶

In my opinion "sinless perfection" is an unfortunate term for the concept Heppenstall has in mind. A better one would be "untainted perfection" because within it he includes freedom from more than actual sin. For Heppenstall "sinless perfection" means freedom from sin and also being free from all the hereditary effects of past sin--whether our own or that of our ancestors before us.

We do not know the extent of the truth of the scripture, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). To the degree that man has a darkened understanding, be it ever so slight, a will even minutely perverted in its operation, a conscience lacking the least bit in its discernment to understand the razor's edge where right passes over into wrong, to that extent man cannot cooperate perfectly with the Holy Spirit. He cannot claim sinlessness. This means that we can exercise our faculties in cooperation with the Holy Spirit only to the point where those faculties and abilities are set free from sin and its results.⁷

What I mean by saying that the above concept goes too far is that it threatens the conclusions Heppenstall himself wishes to support with it. Not even Christ qualifies as perfect under the last phrase, "and its results." His heart was not deceitful, His understanding was not darkened, His will was not perverse, His conscience did not lack discernment, and He did

cooperate perfectly with the Holy Spirit. He could claim sinlessness. His faculties and abilities were free from sin and the results of sin in the sense that He Himself had no sin, but they were not free from the results of His ancestors' sins. Paul says that Christ "as to his human nature was a descendant of David" (Rom 1:3). David was not sinless. Thus, Christ bore in His body the effects of other men's sins despite the fact that He Himself did not sin.

Elsewhere Heppenstall states that, "The ideal toward which we strive is Jesus Christ. Everything about Him is perfect."⁸ Even this statement--as true as it is in the sense he intends--is too brittle. If Christ had come into the world insulated from His environment in every way, we would expect Him to be not only as sinless as Adam was before the fall but as tall and physically robust as Adam also. There is no indication that Christ was unusual in stature.

We should not shrink from accepting the implications of Christ's physical heredity. The ultimate physical weakness is death. We do not try to protect Christian theology from the fact that our Savior died. On the contrary, that is the basis for our faith. And yet we feel uneasy in saying that He bore the results of lesser physical weaknesses. On the one hand Christ became a man at a time in history much later than Adam, on the other hand He did not sin. Taken separately both of these facts are clear and undeniable. It is when we put them together that they become difficult to understand. There is a synergy involved in acknowledging that the Christ who did not sin was genuinely human, just as He was truly God. It is not until these two facts are combined that the issues latent within them are directly joined and they become ultimately instructive. In my view Heppenstall's model cannot adequately account for these facts.

Douglass' concept of exemplary perfection. For Herbert E. Douglass a major consideration is that by perfecting the saints God makes a point about His own character for all to see.⁹ This concept makes Douglass' discussion intensely goal oriented. The saints' present lack of perfection delays Christ's return. In fact the second coming cannot take place until they are finally perfected. Thus, we find section headings in his paper such as, "Jesus Has Proved It Can Be Done,"¹⁰ and, "What Jesus Achieved Will Be Reproduced in the Last Generation."¹¹

I agree with Douglass that God will finish what He sets about to do for His people and that when He has done it the results will honor Him. But agreeing on these major points, and accepting the sources he cites, is not the same as agreeing that the model he proposes is the best synthesis available. In any model there is a direction of emphasis as well as a set of factual propositions. Every writer has a point of view that in some way is uniquely his own.

A major feature of Douglass' model is that the church is responsible for the delay in Christ's return. It is his purpose to develop a system which can account for the delay without blaming God for something that in reality is our own fault.

How would Seventh-day Adventists charge God with the consequences of "their own wrong course of action"? Surely not directly. Yet, could it be possible that by forgetting that Jesus is waiting for something glorious to happen in His people who purport to "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus," we have come up with reasons that indeed transfer the responsibility for the delay from God's professed people to God Himself!¹²

If the church is where responsibility rests, then we must say so candidly. But Douglass has done his work too well. The burden of responsibility that he places on the church is immense; one could say it is infinite. If the Jews' external regulations of conduct prompted Christ

to say, "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matt 23:4), what can we say in the present case? The Jewish leaders imposed difficult standards, it is true, but not infinite ones. And the longer we wait to achieve perfection, the longer Jesus waits to return.

What Douglass says has a certain logical consistency, but having said that I must confess I am unable to bear the load he puts on my shoulders and no one in the pew beside me can do any better. Douglass is at his best when demonstrating that it is both possible and necessary to avoid sin. But there is more to learn about this particular topic than the fact that sin can and must be avoided.

What does it mean to sin?

In the English of the King James Version John says that, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4; KJV). The phrase, "the transgression of the law," with its five English words, however, translates only one Greek word. There is a compactness to the original that is obscured by the above rendering. It would be better to translate, as in NIV, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4).

The Greek word used in 1 John 3:4 is anomia "lawlessness." It is important to realize what is and is not implied by this term. To say "transgression," going across, implies something active and open. There is no provision for apathy in the KJV rendering ("transgression"). But anomia does not require that there be an active will to disobey. The word is not antinomia. High handed rebellion is one form that anomia can take, but so is blank indifference. These two attitudes are widely different in themselves but have something in common. In both cases there is a failure to respond. For whatever reason, the rightful demands of the law are set aside. Allowing this to happen knowingly is sin. Thus, Paul does not disagree with John in the least when he says, "everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). The person who sins does so because he has not exercised faith in the one who is able to keep him from falling (Jude 24).

Sin in relation to guilt. If a failure to respond to God's expressed will becomes part of our definition of sin, that fact brings with it a good deal of insight. We could say that sin is repugnant to God because it is unlike Him, although if there were no creatures involved perhaps even this fact could be approached philosophically. In fact there are creatures involved, however, and sin brings about a separation between them and the Creator. This is the heart of the matter and the reason why sin is so totally unacceptable. God's purpose in the plan of salvation is to separate people from sin so that sin can no longer separate them from Him.

In this context disobeying the law takes on less abstract proportions and guilt is no longer seen as the most fundamental issue facing the sinner. In Rom 6:23 Paul does not say, "the wages of guilt is death," but "the wages of sin is death." Any concept of salvation that addresses only the matter of guilt without first addressing the sin that causes guilt is crucially incomplete. Salvation in the biblical sense is salvation from sin (Matt 1:21).

Sin in relation to death. Christ was the spotless and holy Lamb of God, but there is a sense in which His death gives us insight into the nature of our own fallen condition. Christ told Nicodemus that, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). Similarly

Paul says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).¹³

The question is how Christ could be sinless and yet embody sin for us, as in the illustration that He Himself gave concerning the snake Moses lifted up in the desert. It is not wrong to die, but if sin is defined as including a lack of response to God, then there is no better illustration of it than death. This is precisely the context of Christ's remarks to Nicodemus. In saying what He did He was predicting His death.

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (15) that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14-15)

By submitting to death on our behalf Christ placed Himself where for a time it would be impossible for Him to respond to His Father. In the garden just before being crucified Christ had prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt 26:39). What lay before Him was the severest of ordeals from any point of view, but the one thing more than any other that made Him recoil from going through with it was the fact that to die meant being separated from His Father. Christ did not endure the natural sleep of death vicariously for mankind. Mortals by definition endure that for themselves. His agony of separation from His Father was the death that will be finally experienced by the unrepentant sinner. He did undergo this vicariously for everyone who will accept His sacrifice by faith. Since the death He died on our behalf was the second death--the one with spiritual and not merely physical implications--we need not endure the same experience of utter separation from God that He did. For the Christian death is only a temporary sleep (Luke 8:52-53; John 11:11-14). But the reason why this is the case is that for Christ it was more than a temporary sleep.

We have no way to appreciate how bitter the prospect of being separated from the Father was for Christ, because we are born into the world quite willing to live our entire lives independently of God's will and even His love. Sin, which Christ bore vicariously and not in any way on His own account, was repulsive to Him because sin meant death and death meant separation from the Father. Here is the sense in which Christ not only bore sin for us, but became sin for us. Once we understand that sin involves a withholding of ourselves from God, a lack of response to His love and will, it is clear that nothing short of death could completely illustrate the enormity of what sin is like. A larger point to draw from this same set of facts is that separation involves two parties. Ultimately sin involves the breaking of a relationship and not only of a law code.

Sin in relation to worship. The present comparison might seem unusual. The associations of "worship" and "sin" lie in opposite directions semantically. But the connection is not remote after all. I stated earlier that sin is lawlessness--living without reference to God's expressed will. If the figure of a shepherd is one of the Bible's most appropriate descriptions of Christ, the figure of a sheep is one of the Bible's most appropriate descriptions of us. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray" (Isa 53:6). Going astray is not the same as walking here and there--if the shepherd walks here and there. It is a concept that becomes meaningful only in relation to the shepherd. If sinfulness is our inherent willingness to go astray, then sin is any act that follows from that willingness. Independence from God is nowhere more evident than in our dealings with God.

Being sinful does not necessarily make us irreligious. Secularity is just one form that independence from God can take. It is entirely natural, even for the unregenerate sinner, to want to worship something. We have not strayed from worship, but from God. For this reason

especially, we must be aware of the need to inform our worship by God's self-revelation in Christ and in all the Scriptures or we run the risk of idolatry. If we do not worship on the basis of what God has revealed, we will worship on some other basis and the result, though unpredictable, will be something God never commanded--something that never entered His mind (Jer 32:35). Right worship must be constantly responsive to the distinction between what God has and has not revealed.

Summary. Notice two things in particular. First, eliminating sin from the life is not the same as eliminating the capacity for sin. Even Christ had the capacity to sin, if He had chosen to do so. In fact when we understand sin as independence from God, it follows that He is the only child of humanity who ever really had that capacity in the fullest sense. We only think we do. Having His own divine powers He could have used them in preference to what the Father supplied for Him day by day and if He had done so this would have been sin for Him, just like our futile attempts to be independent of God are sin for us. Christ was the only person ever born who could have succeeded in being independent of the Father because He had life in Himself (John 1:4). It is instructive that the only one who was ever truly able to be independent of God is also the only one who never in any way wanted to be. Christ was far enough from home as it was and had no reason to add to that distance by making it spiritual as well as physical. He could be tempted and was. He could die and did. He could have sinned, but did not. In the same way ours is not a temptation problem, or a death problem, or even a guilt problem. Christ shared our temptations, died in our place, and bore our guilt. What we have is a sin problem. Christ never took part in our sin.

The second point is similar to the first. By the same token that eliminating sin is not the same as rising above the capacity for sin, it does not mean removing the cumulative effects of past sin either. Heppenstall writes, "We may praise God for our conscious deliverance from known sin, but this is not a witness to sinless perfection."¹⁴ It is a witness to perfection without sin, if that is what we mean by perfection. What it is not a witness to is perfection without weakness. Sinfulness is something we inherit from our ancestors. We cannot do anything about that. But sin is an act of the will. "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17). I submit that the perfection required of Christians does not go beyond the human will in order to discover the obvious fact that we have weaknesses which work against us and make obedience difficult. God knows very well that we are weak. Christian perfection is precisely a relationship of love and trust with Jesus Christ based on the knowledge that our weakness requires His help in every way. It is not incumbent on us to change our heredity. It is incumbent on us not to sin.

It was pointed out earlier that there is more than one biblical definition of sin. According to Paul, "everything that is not of faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). This concept of sin follows from a corresponding concept that the law is spiritual.

The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (13) Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Heb 4:12-13)

Sin might be endemic among mankind, but it does not reside in the joints and marrow. It resides in the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. The law, therefore, must deal with our inmost desires, with the conscience and will. One of the most fundamental needs of the human heart is the need not to be alone. The corollary to this is that any faith which encourages disregard for

what God has clearly revealed His will to be, i.e., which encourages the sheep to go farther astray, is not faith at all but presumption. Here, in realizing that sin separates us from God, is the last recess to which the law penetrates and the point at which faith joins the will to produce active choices.

What does it mean to obey God?

Perfect law keeping, defined narrowly, and what I mean by Christian perfection are two different things. They accompany each other but are not the same. It is not that a fine distinction of some sort separates them. They are widely different. One function of the law of God is to point out and condemn sin. Thus, keeping the law perfectly implies avoiding sin completely. This much should be noncontroversial. The question is what we have left when we start with a person who is by nature sinful and remove all the bad things condemned by the law. If we follow this process of refining through to completion, what do we have left at the end? Paul says, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature" (Rom 7:18). If we take this statement seriously, what we have left is nothing at all. Eliminating the bad is no guarantee that something good will be left over. There is more involved in keeping the law than failing to break it. The latter condition is not in itself a virtue, but merely the absence of vice.

This is why Christ comments as He does on the righteousness of "the Pharisees and the teachers of the law" (Matt 5:20). He does not criticize them for doing too much--for being overly scrupulous in their observances--but for doing too little. He criticizes them for being lax in regard to the spiritual implications of the law. The men He was speaking to were pious beyond our imagination. They even tithed the seeds in their containers of table spices. This is what they did do and by doing it they avoided theft (Mal 3:8). "But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matt 23:23). This is what they did not do and in not doing it they had broadly missed an entire dimension of the problem. The result was they did not attain righteousness in any significant sense of the word.

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; (31) but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. (32) Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." (33) As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (Rom 9:30-33)

Righteousness is not merely the absence of badness but the positive presence of goodness. We have nothing good within ourselves that could possibly remain after we have finished avoiding or eliminating from our inmost hearts all the bad things condemned by the law. This knowledge must drive us to a source of goodness outside ourselves; it must drive us to Christ. Here is the point at which real obedience to the law of God begins, and not where it can be dismissed as no longer relevant.

If I could introduce a prosaic illustration of this point, the rocks in the paving material I drive to work on every morning have never, for however long they have existed, ever done anything wrong. They have never killed, or stolen, or coveted. But although they lack badness there is another dimension they lack as well. They have never done anything bad, but they have never done anything good. They have never broken the law, but they have never kept it either. They lack badness, but they also lack goodness. In the same way, if we have no goodness within ourselves (Rom 7:18), and start eliminating what is bad from our characters, what we

have as a result of the process is nothing at all. If we start with nothing good and eliminate what is bad, the result is not perfect righteousness in any useful sense of the term. When the law says, "You shall not murder" (Exod 20:13), all we can do to obey this command is not murder. This is law keeping on one level, but it can never be a source of righteousness to us. And so Paul could write,

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (Gal 2:21)

It is not that obeying the law is bad. We do not displease God by obeying Him. He wants us to keep His law and to keep it carefully. But keeping the law is not a source of righteousness. It does not produce what is good, but only condemns what is bad.

It would be possible to imagine someone who, by a supreme exertion of will power, fails to break the law over an extended period of time. Paul was such a person--"in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Phil 3:5-6). But even if one could do this, as Paul in fact did, the point that God was trying to make in giving us the law is profoundly missed in the process. By pointing out the depth of our inadequacy the law should drive us to Christ as a source of the goodness we lack. That goodness must come from an outside source. It cannot derive from within ourselves or be produced by behavior of any sort. No one should realize this more clearly than one who believes and accepts the claims of the law. Indeed until we do accept those claims we have no basis for understanding our need with respect to it. In all of this God is trying to draw us to Himself and close the distance between divine Father and human child.

If the human problem is seen as law breaking, the solution will be seen as law keeping. But law breaking is merely one manifestation of our natural willingness to ignore God and law keeping in the best and fullest sense is merely one manifestation of a deeply felt need, implanted by the Holy Spirit, to be one with God in thought, deed, and purpose.

In emphasizing the relational aspects of law keeping I am not trying to sidestep the matter of direct and explicit obedience. Instead what I am trying to do is place that obedience in context. My readership consists for the most part of those who know the law. The very most direct way to get at the problem of generating acceptable behavior, however, is to address the source of that behavior, which lies in the mind and will. Right doing can only follow from right thinking. There is no shortcut. The process cannot be abbreviated in some way that allows right doing to emerge directly without reference to what the mind and heart are like. If we pretend that it can, then our discussion of man's relationship to the law must remain superficial in the sense of being confined to results rather than causes.

There can be no question how Christians are saved. The free grace of God through Christ, appropriated by faith, is clearly the only possible basis for salvation. There does seem to be a question, though, how a person who has been saved in this manner lives a truly Christian life. Specifically, do those who have been saved by grace keep on breaking the law? Does salvation from sin mean impunity to continue living as before, but now without fear of condemnation? That is a shallow concept of salvation and the thought itself is inherently contradictory. But is a Christian's law keeping a source of righteousness to him? That also cannot be and by an equally wide margin. Righteousness is not a function of law keeping--not even perfect law keeping. The law can never outgrow its original purpose as something "put in charge to lead us to Christ" (Gal 3:24).

To obey or keep the law, therefore, is not just to avoid breaking it, but to fulfill the purpose for which the law was given. The purpose of the law, as Paul says above, is to lead us to Christ. And so keeping the law perfectly must involve being led to Christ completely by the sense of need it creates. When the law is allowed to do this it has been truly kept and its purpose has been fulfilled. In view of the prevailing antinomianism let me add, however, that keeping the law in this deeply spiritual manner is not compatible with ignoring the law in its more practical aspects. Keeping the law in any sense must include doing what it says.

What does it mean to imitate
the example of Christ?

Christ is our Example as well as our Substitute and as such we must ask what it means to imitate Him. To start with, Christ was a descendant of David as regards His human nature (Rom 1:3). Must we therefore not only be Jewish by descent but of the royal line in order to follow His example? We could go farther. Christ was divine. Does following His example therefore mean that we also must be divine? The answer to these questions and to others along the same line is of course no. We do not have to be Christ in order to be Christians. But what does it mean to follow the example of Christ? Of what does that example consist in the sense that concerns us most directly as His followers? I have attempted to show above that the concept of imitating Christ can be distorted, but what does it mean when the distortions are taken away?

Specifically, is the example of Christ primarily and most significantly that He never sinned? If this is His example, then no one can follow it because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). While it is true that Christ never sinned, I submit that this fact alone is not the best sense in which it can be said that He gave us an example. Taken in and of itself Christ's sinlessness makes a mockery of human weakness. An example, by contrast, is something one can follow, something to do, but the result of His way of life cannot be imitated without going through the same steps that He used to produce it initially. The example of Christ is not primarily His sinless results, but the daily process by which they were obtained. It is not merely the historical fact that He succeeded in keeping the law but the practical method by which He did so.

The one greatest and most practical fact to be learned from the earthly life of Christ is not that He failed to sin, but that He relied on His Father. Perhaps the best example He used to illustrate this relationship is that of a vine with its supporting rock or hedge.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 5:15)

Christ would not have had to rely on His Father for power to resist sin, to work miracles, or to do anything else. He had divine goodness and power in Himself. Just here is the key to understanding how it makes sense to say that Christ was "tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin" (Heb 4:15). The part about being without sin is clear enough, but how could Christ be tempted? Who else but Christ could feel the full force of a temptation to be independent of the Father, which is the root of all temptation. We are tempted in the same way and fall into the trap despite the fact that what we are tempted to do is both impossible and irrational for us to think about. Every breath we draw is a gift from the One we are tempted to separate ourselves from. But for Christ it was not impossible at all. He had life in Himself (John 1:4; 5:26). As such He is the only child of humanity for whom such a temptation could make any

reasonable sense. Understanding sin as a form of independence clarifies the problem of how Christ could be tempted. He alone could have accepted the challenge to be independent of the Father and succeeded in doing so. Satan presented the temptation in every form it could take, but Christ would have none of it. He and His Father were one (John 10:30).

Understanding the messianic purpose of Christ in coming to this earth also helps to clarify the nature of His example. He did not come in order to resist sin, or work miracles, or do anything else on His own behalf. There was no question about His loyalties. It was already clear that sin was repugnant to Him and as for miracles He had been exercising His mighty power on behalf of Israel for centuries. What He did come to do was give us an undistorted view of what God is like and bring salvation to His people by becoming their Substitute. Resisting sin was not an issue for Him but He knew that it was for us. For that reason it was especially important for Him to show us not just a life in which the right results were obtained, but one that would illustrate the principles involved in living it.

Christ taught His disciples to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). "'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work'" (John 4:34). "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). And at the end, in His agonizing prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, the same thought that He had earlier commanded us to express appears again: "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'" (Matt 26:39). He was far enough from His Father already just by being on planet earth instead of in heaven. He had no desire to be separated in the additional sense of being independent from Him while here.

Understanding sin as independence, therefore, gives insight not only into how it could make sense to speak of Christ being "tempted by the devil" (Matt 4:1) but also into how temptation could have no power over Him: "I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me" (John 14:30). He alone had the capacity to be independent from God and yet He alone had no desire to exercise it. When we have the same attitudes they will manifest themselves in similar behavior by the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹"'Religion' is perhaps not a very good term to use in connection with Buddhism since it recognizes no God or godhead, no *isvara* or Brahman in the Upanishadic sense. Life here is not regarded as a preparation for eternity, but as a discipline for governing man's attitude to the here and now, the present conditions, and, if properly and diligently carried out, will lead on gradually but surely to the highest good" (I. B. Horner, "Buddhism: the Theravada," in R. C. Zaehner, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1959], p. 267.

²The elaboration of doctrine and a scholastic theology was a relatively late development in Islam. Simple unspeculative piety and fear of God (*taqwa*), together with the performance of the ritual obligations, sufficed the earlier generations, and even through later centuries a succession of influential religious teachers continued to disapprove of and to discourage all speculative and scholastic theology. What is explicitly stated in the Koran is to be accepted 'without asking "How?"' (*bila kayf*). The themes which it stresses again and again are the Oneness of God, the sole divinity in relation to man, one in his nature, the only Real and Eternal, his unlimited sovereignty over his entire creation, especially the human creation, his omniscience and omnipotence, his mercy, forgiveness and beneficence, and the imminence of the Day of Judgment on which God, as Judge, will assign, in his sovereign will, mankind to

Heaven or Hell, the joys and pains of which are portrayed in vivid imagery" (H. A. R. Gibb, "Islam," *ibid.*, p. 189).

³This is not a Pelagian concept. Pelagius developed his entire anthropology without reference to personal and thoughtful regeneration. It was not a careless omission. The fact is there was no room for such a concept in his system because he felt there was nothing sinful about human infants when born to their natural parents. In his view a person had to sin before becoming sinful and had to be at least a certain age before being able to sin. Thus, there was no need for infant baptism, although in fact he continued to practice it (Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 8 vols. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], vol. 3: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity from Constantine the Great to Gregory the Great: A.D. 311-600, pp. 835). It was Augustine and not Pelagius who emphasized regeneration. For Augustine, however, regeneration was identified with baptism and baptism was to be performed as soon as possible after birth to take away the guilt of original sin and avoid damnation if the infant should die. Thus, in Augustine's system regeneration was something performed for one individual by another and not a change of mind and heart at one's own conversion. I also associate the new birth with baptism, but associate baptism in turn with repentance from sin (Acts 3:38). So if Pelagius held that one must experience the dawn of reason before being able to sin, I hold that one must experience the dawn of conscience before being able to repent. As regards Augustine, the secondary role that personal conversion plays in his theological system and its isolation from rebirth is ironic in view of the importance that this very involving experience played in his own life (*ibid.*, pp. 1005-7).

⁴On the contrast between these two forms of inheritance, Irenaeus "places Christ in the same relation to the regenerate race, which Adam bears to the natural, and regards him as the absolute, universal man, the prototype and summing up of the whole race" (Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. 2: Ante-Nicene Christianity: A.D. 100-325, p. 57). Thus, Christ is the "last Adam" (1 Cor 15:46) not in the sense of having a physical heredity similar to the first Adam, but in the sense of giving life to the church. The point of Paul's comparison is that both the first Adam and the last Adam have a progeny--the one fleshly, the other spiritual. See A. Leroy Moore, "The Humanity of Christ," Historicism No. 9/Jan 87, n. 23, pp. 13-14.

⁵Herbert E. Douglass, et al., Perfection: The Impossible Possibility (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1975), pp. 57-88. The present paper cannot be considered a review of Douglass, et al., but I have occasion in passing to cite each of its four essays. The book is intended as a summary of different viewpoints on this challenging topic within the Seventh-day Adventist church. Authors represented are Herbert E. Douglass, Edward Heppenstall, Hans K. LaRondelle, and C. Mervyn Maxwell.

⁶*ibid.*, p. 63.

⁷*ibid.*, p. 73. One other quotation is germane: "To assume that with conversion and sanctification the Holy Spirit restores man to sinless perfection is also to assert that all the ravages of death have been eradicated. All the evidence proves otherwise. Not until the resurrection is man fully restored and delivered from the ravages of death. 'The last enemy to be destroyed is death' (1 Corinthians 15:26, RSV)" (p. 70).

⁸*ibid.*, p. 72.

⁹Douglass' contribution to the book, Perfection: The Impossible Possibility, referenced above, is entitled, "Men of Faith - The Showcase of God's Grace" (pp. 9-56).

¹⁰*ibid.*, p. 35.

¹¹*ibid.*, p. 46.

¹²Douglass, "Men of Faith," p. 16.

¹³In the original there is a play on words. The Greek word hamartia "sin" translates Hebrew hatta't, which according to Koehler and Baumgartner (Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958]) is almost evenly divided in its 290 occurrences between the meanings "sin" (x155) and "sin offering" (x135). Paul has both meanings simultaneously in view.

Neither facet of the word's meaning can be neglected in the passage quoted without doing violence to his intent.

¹⁴"On to Perfection," p. 77.