

George Knight and the Sin Problem

George R. Knight is a professor of Church History at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

He also writes extensively on topics of interest to church members. We can respect his writing skill and ability to quote non-Adventist philosophers and theologians, but we should be aware of the fact that he uses standard new theology techniques to present those concepts:

1 - Redefining concepts, so that they no longer mean what they originally meant in the Word of God.

2 - Downgrading essential concepts, especially obedience by faith in Christ to the law of God, and the principles outlined in the Inspired Writings.

3 - Condemning good practices by assigning bad motives to them.

4 - Splitting concepts apart in order to more easily repudiate them.

5 - Using either-or logic: Either this is right or that is right; they cannot both be right.

In this study, we will briefly overview two of his books:

The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness, 1992, Pacific Press. (**Pharisee**)

I Used to be Perfect, 1994, Pacific Press. (**Perfect**)

The names, within parentheses, are the working titles we will use in reference citations in this present study.

The Pharisee's Guide and *I Used to Be Perfect* continually repeat one another. *Pharisee* is the more comprehensive of the two, but those topics which are discussed in *Perfect* are more logically arranged.

THE NATURE OF SIN

In chapter 1 of *I Used to Be Perfect*, Knight correctly states that "different views of sin lead to radically different roads to salvation" (pp. 17-18); but he then presents an incorrect definition of sin, **declaring that sin is not really acts of wrongdoing. But, instead, sin is a wrong attitude.**

"Eating rats, snakes, and snails, or even hogs

In all quotations from Knight's book, *I Used to Be Perfect*, words which he wrote in full caps have been rendered in italics.

is not *sin*. Sabbath breaking is not *sin*. Murder is not *sin*. Theft is not *sin* . . . They may be sins—maybe—but they are not *sin*. *Sin* is love."—*Perfect*, 9.

Knight concludes this chapter by again stating that "*sin* is love" (p. 20). **His position is that disobeying God's law or any other commandment or principle given in Scripture is not sin. He repeatedly states that it is only self-love and separation from Christ which is sinful.** According to him, eating the fruit was not the sin which got our first parents in trouble; for that was an act of behavior; and wrongful behavior is not sin. Only self-love and a wrong relationship with God is sin.

Such a concept can appear confusing, for it seems to have some truth to it while denying other truths. What is the key to this maze? It is the realization that, in this book, Knight is redefining terms, splitting terms, and rejecting portions which are split off.

As new theology advocates generally do, Knight downgrades the importance of obeying God's Inspired Writings. He does this by telling us that "sin" is not disobedience or wrongful behavior, but it is liking ourselves more than we like God. So Knight is essentially saying that sin is not wrongful behavior, but something more intangible, an attitude of mind. As he explains elsewhere in these two books, it is not so important whether or not you violate Scriptural principles—as long as your heart is right with God. It is liking God which counts, not the behavior.

The truth is that we should obey God's Word, AND we should remain in right relation to Him! Both are vital. Without the help of Christ, we cannot obey the law of God.

The Bible and Spirit of Prophecy clearly define sin. In fact, God's Word declares there is only one clear definition of sin in the Bible. That definition is not "self-love" or "separation from God"; it is breaking God's law.

"Our only definition of sin is that given in the Word of God; it is 'the transgression of the law'; it is the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government."—*Great Controversy*, 493.

In chapter two of his book, *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness*, Knight again states his position that resisting sin is not the solution to the problem.

"They [the Pharisees] thought that they could overcome sin through overcoming sins *a*, *b*, and *c*

. . . Nothing has been solved by our external tinkering, in spite of all the effort we may have expended.”—*Pharisee*, 35.

This brings us to another major device used by new theology advocates: **applying the either-or technique to obedience**. New theology preachers and writers present it this way: “Either we trust wholly to Christ and do not try to obey His law, or we try to obey His law in our own strength. There is no other alternative, and only the first is acceptable to God.”

Obviously, the truth of the matter is combining the two: “We can obey God’s law when we rely on Christ’s enabling grace to help us do it. Apart from His merits, we cannot do any good thing; but, in His enabling strength, we can do all things that He asks of us in His Inspired Word. It requires both a connection with Christ and a determination to live right.”

Knight’s position is partially based on the Catholic Original Sin error.

“The concept of original or initial sin helps us understand both ourselves and the world around us, even though we cannot fully understand the mechanics of its transmission. Without some idea of original sin, wrote Blaise Pascal, ‘we remain incomprehensible to ourselves.’”—*Pharisee*, 37.

Pascal may have understood many mathematical concepts, but he did not have a clear understanding of why we are prompted to sin. **We are tempted by the devil, not by original sin within us.**

But Knight believes that inherent sin within us causes us to sin, as we note in this statement he quotes from Edward Vick:

“To recognize that we are sinners means that we recognize there is a power that lords it over us and prevents us from being what God intends us to be. That power is the power of sin.”—*Pharisee*, 34.

On page 45, **Knight acknowledges the existence of the Spirit of Prophecy definition of sin** (the *Great Controversy*, 493, statement, quoted earlier).

“I know the Bible says that ‘sin is the transgression of the law’ (1 John 3:4) and that Ellen White said that ‘the only definition of sin is that it is the transgression of the law.’”—*Pharisee*, 45.

But elsewhere in the same book, he negates that *Great Controversy* statement.

“At this juncture, it is important to recognize that the most comprehensive definition of sin is not sin as transgression of the law.”—*Pharisee*, 53.

Knight then quotes Romans 14:23: “Whatever is not from faith is sin.” Ellen White knew that verse, yet maintained that 1 John 3:4 was the only clear-cut definition of sin. (Another Bible verse is James 4:17. “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” But that is not a clear-cut definition of

sin either.)

Knight goes on to explain that sin is a wrong relationship to God.

“Sin is a relational concept . . . Sin is not a broken relationship to a code of law, but a rebellious and broken relationship to the Lord of the law.”—*Pharisee*, 47.

Is sin a wrong relationship to God or is it the transgression of the law? Once again, we are presented with a seemingly mystifying question. The reason it appears mystifying is the way it is presented—as an either-or choice, either this or that. The correct answer is both, because both are in the law.

Someone will say, “How can a correct relationship with God be part of the law?” The answer is to read the First Commandment. Ellen White was right, as usual. 1 John 3:4 is the only clear definition of sin. The Ten Commandments cover our thoughts, decisions, words, and actions—and also our relationship with our Creator. “By the law comes the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20; cf. 4:15; 7:7). **But make no mistake, Knight is wrong; correct relationship alone is not enough. In Christ’s strength, we must also make constant behavioral choices. We must perseveringly choose the right and reject the wrong. If we do not do so, we stray from faith into presumption, and soon we are separated from Christ.** If we are lax in being guarded, soon we lose the relationship. Christ will not partner with sin.

Do not mistake Knight’s objective. It is the same soul-deadening approach all the new theology advocates use: lessen the importance of obedience to the law of God. Liberals continually downplay practical obedience to Scriptural principles.

“Once sin is defined in terms of such things as wearing costume jewelry or certain dietary habits, it is essentially ‘contained’ in that definition, and one can go about his or her life without worrying about it. In other words, once ‘sin’ is contained in the concept of wearing jewelry, I can then feel good about driving any type of car I like or wearing the finest suits.”—*Pharisee*, 51.

Sounds ridiculous and it is: the thinking that, because you practice not wearing jewelry, therefore you will like to purchase expensive automobiles. This type of logically disconnected exaggeration is common to new theology preaching. Truth marches down a straight path; error likes to be circuitous.

Repeatedly, Knight tells the reader that attention to details is not essential. Merely love God, and do not concern yourself about what you eat or how you live. In order to establish this point, he tortures logic in a variety of ways. Here is one example:

“Unfortunately, the qualitative approach [obeying God’s law] is beyond mere human effort. It depends on God’s grace in ways that are not needed in the smaller-and-smaller-units approach. For ex-

ample, I can stop eating granola between meals on my own steam.”—*Pharisee*, 52.

Ellen White repeatedly declares that we are on “enemy ground.” This life is a battlefield, and people are being taken by the enemy everyday. Let us not make light of the devil or of sin. We need God’s help everyday.

Thus we find that Knight has changed the definition of sin to something else. In so doing, he weakens the necessity of obeying the Written Word.

THE NATURE OF LAW

Let us now consider what he has to say about the law. We will find he has changed that definition also!

In chapter 2 of his book, *I Used to be Perfect*, Knight tells us we no longer need concern ourselves with the Ten Commandments, for all we need is the law of love.

If that is so, why did the Lord give us the Ten Commandments? I ask you: **Is it not better to submit to God’s plans for our lives rather than Knight’s redefinition of those plans?**

“As Seventh-day Adventists, we love God’s laws, and many of us get quite excited about such things as commandments and rules and regulations. Beyond that, we are justifiably exuberant when we glimpse ourselves in end-time prophecy in relationship to the commandments of God.”—*Perfect*, 21.

After quoting Revelation 12:17 and 14:12, Knight tells us we have the wrong definition of “law.”

“I will never forget the shock I experienced when I discovered that the Ten Commandments were not the real *law*. In fact, . . . the Ten Commandments might be viewed as a late development . . . The law expressed in the Ten Commandments is neither eternal nor universal when we think in galactic terms.”—*Perfect*, 22.

So we can set aside God’s ten rules for our lives, now that we are thinking in “galactic terms”? He then quotes a passage which we are all well-acquainted with:

“The law of God existed before man was created. The angels were governed by it . . . After Adam’s sin and fall nothing was taken from the law of God. The principles of the ten commandments existed before the fall, and were of a character suited to the condition of a holy order of beings.”—*3 Spiritual Gifts*, 295.

There is nothing shocking about the above statement, and there is nothing in it which Knight should twist into a belittling of the Ten Commandments! **It is true that the angels did not need the Seventh Commandment, since they did not marry. But we need it. Are we to imagine that we can now rise to a “galactic view” and ignore it?**

Knight is determined that we underrate the law

and obedience to it.

“One of the foundational problems of New Testament Pharisaism was the atomization of *sin* into a series of actions. The atomization of *sin* is directly related to the atomization of *law* and *righteousness*.”—*Perfect*, 27.

As do all new theology enthusiasts, Knight labels as “legalists” those who stand firmly in defense of God’s law and obedience to it.

“Legalists love to talk about negative and minute behaviors.”—*Perfect*, 30.

What is all this about “atomization” and “negative and minute [tiny] behaviors”? Throughout these two books, Knight is directing the reader toward generalizing Christian living into a mushy syrup. In effect, he says, “Do not stand for anything, do not do anything; just love. There are no distinctive sins and no tangible law, just nice platitudes and galactic views.”

If you believe in reading the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, you are considered a legalist who dwells on the negative side and engages in minute behaviors. You are said to have atomized Christianity into particles of obedience.

—Yet when we read the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, we find both are filled with principles and particles. **Gems of truth, principles of eternity, specific requirements—all designed to mold us into the image of God as we take hold of them by faith in Christ, our enabling righteousness.**

“But we like to define sin as some small negative action, because anybody can overcome a habit if he or she tries hard enough . . . I can get the victory over cheese, peanut butter, or granola between meals.”—*Perfect*, 31.

New theology experts love to belittle obedience. When they win over a student or church member to their shiftless pattern of living, they imagine that they have accomplished some great thing.

All the woes of mankind, at least those of Christians, Knight attributes to living a clean, obedient life.

“The negative approach to religion stems from a negative approach to law. The world has seen too much negative religion.”—*Perfect*, 31.

He even goes so far as to claim that those who try to obey God’s Word—are only doing it so they won’t have to fully obey it!

“We want to know the limits of love and Christian living, so that we can know when we have arrived. Human perverseness loves the merely negative approach to law because it limits the scope of righteousness. It makes it humanly achievable.”—*Perfect*, 31.

Knight then further impugns the motives of those who, by faith, obey God’s law, by declaring that, by so doing, they reveal that they do not really love their neighbors.

“It is a relatively simple thing for me to avoid

theft, murder, or adultery compared to the unending challenge of caring for all my neighbors as myself.”—*Perfect*, 31-32.

Where in the Spirit of Prophecy do you find its author downgrading obedience to the Ten Commandments? Why does Knight not tell us to be sure to obey the moral code, AND ALSO be sure to love our neighbor? No, he must content himself with throwing stones at the moral tables, using any excuse he can for so doing.

“Most legalists are normal humans. In fact, it is their emphasis on human accomplishment that proves their normality. They have merely shifted their pride from human accomplishment in worldly endeavors to human accomplishment in spiritual things.”—*Perfect*, 32.

“One can never be saved or become perfect by not working on Sabbath or avoiding theft. In fact, no one will ever be saved because of what they have not done.”—*Perfect*, 32.

Knight is frightened to death, lest he obey God! In his desperate state of mind, he fears he might be classified as a perfectionist, if he keeps the Bible Sabbath or avoids stealing.

Truly, this is strange thinking: If one can never be saved, because during his life he kept the Sabbath and did not steal from others,—can he then be saved because he doesn’t?

Knight uses the excuse that he is trying to direct our thoughts to higher objectives, such as loving God and others. —But no one can reach such objectives by making light of obedience to the Ten Commandments.

It is because of such thinking as this that fewer of the faithful are attending the yearly camp meetings. They know they will encounter preachers trying to pound such fallacies into their minds and into the minds of their youth. This is a tragedy, yet separation is gradually occurring because the faithful are determined to live pure, clean lives that are uncontaminated by the “sin and be saved” heresies which are being increasingly taught in our pulpits.

“What we often fail to realize is that we can be quite zealous in keeping God’s laws while utterly and totally failing in keeping God’s law.”—*Perfect*, 33.

By this, Knight means that some are obeying the Decalogue while not obeying the “law of love.” We agree that we are to love God and the brethren (indeed, only those who love God can truly keep His law),—**but where in Knight’s writings do we find that it is right to obey the Ten Commandments. Where does he commend us for so doing? Instead, everything**

connected with those sacred commands is bad, bad, bad. Such a spirit is not genuine Christianity. It is antinomian heresy.

Chapter 3 of *The Pharisee’s Guide to Perfect Holiness* also deals with the law of God. In another of his mystifying statements, Knight says this:

“One of the greatest and most serious confusions of religious history is the failure to make a clear distinction between what one must do to be moral and what one must do to be saved. That was the deadly mistake of the Pharisees. Not realizing the depth of the sin problem, they believed that they could become righteous by keeping the law.”—*Pharisee*, 65.

We are told that there is a difference between being moral and being saved. We simple Christians thought they were somehow connected. So we learn we must separate the two, or we will become Pharisees.

This is the kind of foolishness which Knight is teaching to the future ministers of Adventism, who journey to Andrews from all over the world to attend its Seminary.

Such strange logic: **Did you know that it is dangerous to keep the law? You might become righteous! Then people will call you a Pharisee. And Pharisees are bad because they were interested in promoting morality!**

The truth is that, regardless of what the Andrews’ history professor tells us, the Pharisees in Christ’s time were not promoting morality, and they were not promoting obedience to God’s Law or the Old Testament writings; they were urging senseless regulations which had nothing to do with Scripture nor with godliness. Theirs was a counterfeit religion.

If you want to know the truth about the Pharisees, read the four Gospels and *Desire of Ages*. You will not learn the truth about those men from Knight’s handbook on Pharisees.

“The Ten Commandments are not the ‘real law.’ In fact, in the context of universal history throughout eternity, they might be termed a late development . . . The law as expressed in the Ten Commandments is neither eternal nor universal. Take the fourth commandment, for example. It plainly states that the Sabbath was given as a memorial of the creation of the planet Earth.”—*Pharisee*, 65.

What is his point? The same which we find throughout his books: Belittle the law, push down the need to sacredly observe its precepts, set those statutes aside and come up to a higher plane of living. The liberals tell us that the Sabbath is only for our world, and it is

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only Pharisees who keep it well. So do not be too strict about observing it.

In earlier studies, we noted how other new theology books, published by the denomination, declare that obedience to God's law is actually sinful. (Helmut Ott's book was especially full of that concept.) Knight brings out this thought also.

"Richard Rice notes that 'legalism is incredibly naive' because it 'drastically underestimates the effects of sin on human beings' . . . 'But legalism,' claims Rice, 'is more than naive; it is downright sinful. It arises from the proud assumption that fallen human beings can do something on their own to merit divine favor, when nothing could be farther from the truth.'"—*Pharisee*, 71.

THE NATURE OF TEMPTATION

Chapter 4 in Knight's book, *I Used to Be Perfect*, is entitled *Temptation is not Temptation*. And that is the subject. Did you know that, according to the liberals, temptation is not really temptation? Just as sin is not sin, and law is not law, so temptation is not temptation.

"*Temptation* is not temptation. To hear some people talk, one would guess that *temptation* has to do with whether one should steal a car, go to a movie, eat too much sugar, or play golf too often. Those things may be temptations, but they are not temptation."—*Perfect*, 53-54.

Sound confusing? It is. **Why do people even buy such books, when they have thousands of pages of pure, unwinnowed wheat in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy? God's Word is a rich treat, a feast,—and it is not confusing.**

Anyone reading the above paragraph, and halfheartedly considering it, will be confused enough that he will be ready for the error which follows. **Although Knight may not know it, he is employing one of the techniques used by counselors and pastors trained in Ericksonian hypnosis (acquired through LEAD and NLP training courses). Muddle the mind and then infuse new thoughts.** (See my *Hypnotism Tractbook* for more on this.)

Knight relies on a favorite device of new theology writers and speakers: He maintains that Jesus was tempted differently than we are, in ways we cannot be tempted.

His objective here is to make Jesus different

than us. It is part of the overall plan to make the nature and life of Christ so different and supernatural that He cannot be our example. Sure, Jesus resisted sin, they say, but He was divine and had special abilities we lack. He resisted different sins.

"Jesus had been without food for more than a month when the temptation concerning the bread came to Him. Certainly it must have been an attractive suggestion, but we miss the point if we see it merely as a temptation to satisfy His appetite. That was a temptation with a small *t*, not a *Temptation* with a capital *T*. The real *temptation* was to reverse the self-emptying of Philippians 2 by using His divine power to satisfy His personal needs. That, of course, would have meant that He was not facing the world like other people. Underlying the temptation was the subtle insinuation that 'if' He were truly God He could use His special powers for Himself instead of relying on the Father."—*Perfect*, 55-56.

For the truth of the matter, read God's Word—for that is the only place you will ever find truth with certainty. You will not find it in my writings or anyone else's! Only in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy will you find correct statements on any religious, personal, historic, or scientific matter. In making such a statement, do I exalt God's Word too highly? No I do not! You cannot exalt Scripture too highly! **We are told by Inspiration that the Word of God is unerring. Read it, trust it, and throw out the books by the skeptics, who tell you they have advanced light which is a step above that found in God's own written revelations.**

For a true statement regarding the temptation of Christ in the wilderness, read Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. For a much more detailed (and equally inspired) understanding of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, read chapters 12 and 13 in *Desire of Ages* (pages 114-131). **Nowhere in the Inspired Writings will you find one hint that Christ's temptation in the wilderness was not an example for us or that His temptations were not the kind we experience. Jesus won the victory right where we are—and "we" means everyone in the human race who has ever lived, or ever will live on Planet Earth. He won it in our flesh.**

He conquered on the very points on which we fail; he did not overcome on the points on which a God can fail! It is the Catholics and the new theology advocates who make Christ different than us.

By decree of the Council of Trent, Christ was born differently, for He had an immaculate [*i.e.*, sinless] mother, and therefore could not sin. From teachings in the theology departments of outside universities, **our new theology teachers and their protégé pastors teach that Christ was given a different nature at birth which no one else born after the entrance of sin in the Garden of Eden ever had.**

Knight not only ascribes Christ's special *temptation* as being different than ours, he says most of His other temptations were also.

"Most of His temptations are not even temptations to me, because I lack the ability to respond to them successfully."—*Perfect*, 56.

Knight defines Christ's "special *temptation*" as being the fact that He had to be willing to die.

"Christ's special *temptation* throughout His life was to avoid death on the cross. This was the essential power of the bread temptation in the wilderness."—*Perfect*, 56.

That is contrived reasoning, the kind that men with worldly doctorates like to invent. In the total surrender required to enter the Christian life, the soul must accept the fact that he may have to die for his faith. Anyone not willing to pick up his cross and follow after Jesus is not a true disciple. Christ Himself said so (Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23; 14:27). And where is he following Jesus, to the death? How many times must Christ say it before Knight will believe it? In order to enter life, a Christian must expect persecution, imprisonment, and an eventual death at the hands of a cruel mob. Many have received it. **Christ's temptation, as to whether or not He should forego the cross, is for each of us also.**

"He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me."—*Matthew* 10:38.

Indeed, if we do not do so, we cannot be saved!

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"—*Matthew* 16:24-26.

Unfortunately, Knight was trained in the universities, and they were so busy instructing him in the words of Catholic, Protestant, and atheist theologians, they forgot to teach him the words of Christ.

"The cross does not hold much meaning for me in the twentieth century. I've never seen a crucifixion."—*Perfect*, 57.

For Knight, Matthew 16:24-26 is meaningless. He explains why:

"I've never seen a crucifixion. Jesus had. When

He saw a knot of Roman soldiers escorting a man dragging a cross through the streets, He knew it was a one-way trip . . . He had no desire to exit the world by the way of the excruciating death of the cross."—*Perfect*, 57.

Thus Knight declares that Matthew 16:24-26 only applies to those who have witnessed a crucifixion! Therefore, according to Knight, it is not a temptation to people today.

More strange logic acquired in the shallow-brained universities. Really now, must I witness a murder, before I can be tempted to murder someone? Must I view an adultery in progress, before I can be tempted to violate the Seventh Commandment?

Beware of the schools and the schoolmen. They are generally so mixed up in their thinking, they are blind guides groping around for people to lead down the pathway toward the kingdom of God. Soon they all land in the ditch.

In discussing his revised view of the nature of temptation, Knight returns to his revision of the nature of sin. His position is one shared in common with other new theology teachers: Sin is not "the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4; GC 493), but separation from God is.

"Adam and Eve . . . fell when they redirected their love from God to themselves. *Sin* is a rebellious, broken relationship with God that puts my self and my will on the throne of my life. Out of that broken relationship flows a series of sinful actions."—*Perfect*, 59-60.

The new theology bases this strange idea on a verse in Isaiah:

"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear."—*Isaiah* 59:2.

"See," they say, "that proves it!" Far from it, **Isaiah 59:2 explains a cause-effect relationship. The cause is sin (which 1 John 3:4 defines as the transgression of the law), the effect is separation from God.** Sin is the breaking of God's moral code, the result is a separation between us and our God. So it was in the Garden, and so it has been ever since.

What Knight and his associates are trying to do is to separate "sin" from behavior. They want to make it a philosophical essence, which they can link to Augustine's Original Sin error (of inborn sin, inherited from Adam). They want to remove sin from the realm of personal actions—and our responsibility to make sure all our actions are proper.

If you are not responsible for your actions, then you do not have to worry about obeying the Ten Commandments. According to Knight and his associates, all you really need concern yourself about is not having faith. "Faith, only faith," is the cry of the liberals. "Only believe" and you will be saved.

As Knight views it, setting aside behavioral concerns is the key to understanding temptation and sin—and even faith in Christ.

“Our great *temptation* is not to eat this item or to do that thing, but to break our relationship with the Father, to step outside the *faith* relationship and to enter the *sin* relationship of rebellion.”—*Perfect*, 62.

THE NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Just as he tries to change the definition of sin, righteousness, law, and temptation, so Knight ALSO tries to change the meaning of justification and sanctification.

An ongoing concern of new theology zealots is to tear down sanctification and exalt justification. Actually, in real life the two cannot be separated.

As far as your daily life is concerned, justification simply means coming to God, forgiveness for the past and acceptance by Him; whereas sanctification means Christ-empowered obedience, growth in grace, and an ever-deepening walk with God.

George Knight gives to chapter 3 of *I Used to be Perfect* and chapter 4 of *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness* the same title: *Justification, the Work of a Lifetime/ Sanctification, the Work of a Moment*.

You will note that, both in consecutive order and length of duration—in his title, justification is exalted and sanctification is downplayed. This, of course, is in marked contrast with the Spirit of Prophecy statement that “sanctification is the work of a lifetime.” She repeatedly emphasizes the fact.

In reality, both are the work of a lifetime. We must ever be coming to God, and we must ever remain by His side. But, in that title, Knight wants to emphasize his disgust with that famous divinely given aphorism, “sanctification is the work of a lifetime.” By his title, he is saying that sanctification—obedience by faith to the law of God—is so unimportant, that it is of momentary consequence while justification—forensic forgiveness—alone takes you down the Christian path to heaven.

Now it is an error to teach that we only need justification at the beginning of our walk with God. That is what the once-saved-always-saved Baptists believe. **But it is equally an error, as the new theology would have us imagine, that about all we need is justification!**

Keep in mind that, as far as our daily lives are concerned, *justification = coming to God and renewing our relationship to Him*. We do this anew every morning, throughout the day, and whenever we transgress. It is an ongoing way of life to the Christian. In contrast, *Sanctification = remaining by His side and obeying His Written Word*. Apart from Him, moment by moment, we have no justification and no sanctification. The two go together, and are inexorably linked.

“At the heart of all false avenues to sanctified living is a trivialization of righteousness through a breaking up of the righteous life into manageable blocks of behavior. Such an approach is directly related to the atomization of *sin* and *law* we discussed earlier. It lends itself nicely to ‘clothesline preaching’ and making such items as dietary reform and a person’s outward dress the things to focus on in discussions of living the Christian life. That type of ‘sanctification’ has an excellent historic pedigree. It was at the center of Pharisaic Judaism.”—*Perfect*, 45.

According to Knight, “sanctification” sounds pretty bad, doesn’t it? Something to stay away from. If you think too much about doing good, or talking about it, you could end up being a bad person. He views upholding standards as Pharisaical living.

But how can you be bad by doing good? Apparently, in the upside down world of Christian liberalism, you can be saved while doing bad, but lost by doing good.

We all recognize that a basic factor in genuine Christian living is sharing one’s faith and helping others to live clean lives. But Knight infers that you cannot do that effectively if you are carefully observing God’s law.

Did you know that when, in the strength of Christ you try to obey His Inspired Books,—you are lowering your standards? Read this:

“The ‘benefit’ in the trivialization of sanctification and negative approaches to the topic is that they lower the standard to the place where it is conceivably possible to perfectly keep the various laws, rules, and regulations.”—*Perfect*, 45.

Horrors! You might actually correctly obey some of God’s rules for your life! But, in so doing, you trivialize sanctification.

How is this for mixed-up theological foolishness?

On the next page, Knight contends that, instead of obeying God’s law, we should instead just love Him. **—We fully agree that we should love Him, and we further maintain that we can only obey His laws as we love Him. But never in God’s holy Word are we told to love Him *instead of obeying His laws!* See 1 John 2:4-5.**

In his book, *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness*, Knight enters new fields of condemnation of clean, godly, obedient living.

“For advocates of this way of thinking, the very essence of Christian life is some form of law keeping. For some it is monkish ascetism, while for others it may be dietary perfectionism, but for all the new law becomes a fetish that stands at the center of their religious experience. ‘Mankind,’ penned Leon Morris, has a fiendish ingenuity in discovering ways of bringing itself into bondage.”—*Pharisee*, 105-106.

“For too many people, Christian living consists in seeking to be ‘good by not being bad’ and by building moral fences so that they will have the security of knowing just where to stop in their approach to what might be considered a sin.”—*Pharisee*, 113.

Next, Knight turns his guns on those who try to live healthfully.

“‘Pharisaic athletes’ are still alive and active in the last decade of the twentieth century. Of course, they are no longer as concerned with the size of a rock one can lawfully carry on the Sabbath day as were the historic Pharisees . . .

“It is the paradox of rigid health reform that the better you get at it, the less healthy you look . . . Then there are achievements related to eating between meals. In some circles this vice is apparently viewed as one of the ultimate sins . . . If one were to ask such individuals the rationale for such activity, they would probably reply that they were seeking to develop Christ-like characters. Some might even indicate that when they have ‘perfectly reproduced’ the ‘character of Christ,’ He will come again. At any rate, that is what I used to tell people a few years back when I was more fully on that particular road to ‘Christ-likeness.’ ”—*Pharisee*, 131-132.

Well, at least Knight admits he is no longer on the path. But did he have to trample down that wonderful statement in *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 69, in order to emphasize his separation from historic Adventism?

In the very next paragraph, Knight amplifies on the looseness in living he now believes to be the correct road to heaven.

“Of recent years I have been somewhat troubled concerning how the biblical Jesus, who came ‘eating and drinking’ and fellowshiping with ‘tax collectors and sinners’ in His reaching out ‘to seek and to save the lost,’ could possibly be the model for such ‘spiritual’ attitudes and activities as those listed above. I have also been perplexed over how to line up such approaches to Christianity with the apostle Paul, who flatly stated that ‘the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.’ ”—*Pharisee*, 132.

Always inculcating subtle doubts, encouraging disbelief in the Spirit of Prophecy, seeing evil in doing good. Offering the hope of a higher plane of living while leading families and young people away from God’s Word. Those who are intrigued by the liberal diatribe enter a path which will gradually lead them down to ruin.

As his guidebook to Pharisaical living continues, Knight zeros in more closely at clean, obedient living—which he labels “perfectionism.”

“The very word *joy* used in that text [Romans 14:17] is remarkable, since I can often tell who in a camp-meeting audience is working hardest at perfection by the sullen expression on their faces. I get the impression that being perfect is frightfully serious business.”—*Pharisee*, 132.

As Knight stands in front of the audience at a camp meeting, he alternates between making snide remarks about faithful Christians and seeking to inculcate error. From where he stands above and in front of the audience, he is able to gaze out and see two classes before him: one enjoying his permissive attitude toward their sins and laughing at his caviling comments about the faithful; the others, sitting there glumly, wondering why they came and should they get up and walk out early and go home. If you and I were in his audience, we would have saddened expressions also.

Knight continues:

“To many such people, the word *celebration* is the most diabolical word in the dictionary.”—*Pharisee*, 132.

THE NATURE OF PERFECTION

Knight also presents us with a new definition of perfection.

“The only thing one can conclude from the Bible is that perfection must be possible, or its writers would not have urged it upon believers. Thus the issue is not whether perfection is possible, but what the Bible writers mean by perfection.”—*Perfect*, 65.

Quoting Marvin Moore, a staunch new theology advocate, he provides the reader with a different definition of perfection:

“Perfection is more a state of being, more a relationship with Jesus, more a way of life.”—*Perfect*, 66.

The eternal theme of the liberals is that behavior is not important and obedience to God’s law is not necessary. All that counts is relationships. If I say I am in Christ, then I am perfect.

But, adds Knight, beware of the error of thinking you should obey God’s Word!

“A . . . misdirection of perfectionism is [becoming involved in] a moralism that uplifts external conformity to law. In moralistic perfection, every human act becomes regulated by laws that become increasingly complex and cover every aspect of diet, recreation, dress, and so on.”—*Perfect*, 67.

Sounds pretty dangerous.

George Knight and the Sin Problem

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

The truth is that God wants His people to have clean, godly lives. Why need anyone complain about that? Think how it would improve people's lives and make families happier. Such living is not impossible. It can be done through the enabling grace of Christ. Many faithful souls are happily doing it. But Knight and his fellow travelers classify all such attempts as a dangerous attitude of "perfectionism."

We freely admit that a few people make a mountain out of a molehill. But, in Knight's dichotomy, he sees only two classes: those who have "love" and those who are obeying laws.

"The Pharisees and monks belonged to this camp of perfectionism, and Adventists and other conservative Christians in the modern world have often joined in."—*Perfect*, 68.

Did you know that obeying moral laws is an apostasy we got from the Greeks? That is what Knight tells us as he continues roundly condemning obedience under the guise of "perfectionism."

"The Bible knows nothing of the Greek absolutist's definition of human perfection. It is high time that Adventists realize that the influence of Greek philosophy in Christian theology was much broader than the condition of people in death. Another part of that apostasy was the imposition of absolutist, static definitions of perfection over dynamic Hebrew and New Testament ideas. The ascetic life of the monk in the Middle Ages was one result of that verbal confusion. While most Adventists are not tempted to join a monastery, many have been led astray by the definition of perfection that underlies that medieval institution."—*Perfect*, 68-69.

Good is transposed to bad, and vice-versa. **The new theology is Christianity; obeying God's Word is monkish, Catholic, Grecian.**

On page 75, Knight says Christians can be "sinless, even though they still commit acts of sin for which they need to be forgiven." He continues:

"Thus sinlessness is not only a possibility in the present life but a biblical promise and demand."—*Perfect*, 75.

Sounds good, but Knight's brand of "sinlessness" is one in which we keep sinning! He concludes the chapter on perfection with this summary statement:

"Thus we can be perfect or sinless in attitude

without being perfect or sinless in action."—*Perfect*, 78.

In *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness*, Knight assigns the closing four chapters to "perfection."

"Early in my Christian experience I arrived at the 'Pharisaic paradox of perfection.' Having set out to be the first sinlessly perfect Christian since Christ, I eventually came to the ultimate frustration of my life: The harder I tried, the worse I became."—*Pharisee*, 149.

This is an unfortunate tragedy. George Knight was obviously trying to carry out a better-living program in his own strength. But **the yoke of obedience is easy when we are in love with Jesus. In His enabling strength, we can do all that God asks us in His Word.**

It is not difficult to live in Christ and obey His Inspired Writings. Obedience by faith is an ongoing challenge, and requires a continual clinging to Jesus. But it can be done as, hand in hand, we walk forward, trusting in His enabling grace.

Satan is constantly tempting mankind that God's holy law cannot be obeyed, and is therefore faulty. But neither the law is faulty nor the divine power by which to fulfill its requirements. Any failure is our fault, never our kind heavenly Father's.

The holy law is full of promises to those who delight to do the will of God. It is not hard to obey the rules of the One you love, when He empowers you to do so.

I do believe that George Knight has misunderstood certain basic truths. A faulty experience caused him to attempt a reinterpretation of Scripture. Because of this, he no longer exalts obedience to the Law of God. **Because he experienced legalism in his own life, all he can now talk about is love vs. legalism. The first does not involve obedience and the second is trying to render that obedience in one's own strength. The middle ground—obedience to the Father's law by the enabling faith in the Son's righteous merits—is carefully omitted.**

As Knight explains it, if we think too much about obeying God, we are sure to get into trouble.

"Certain types of perfectionism and character development keep us 'thinking about ourselves. It is self-centered, and self-centeredness is the very thing from which we need to be saved, because it

is the essence of sin.’”—*Pharisee*, 149.

So obedient living is transformed into sin.

It is very unfortunate that someone in his influential position is doing this. Is it worse to curse God’s law—the written transcript of His character—than to curse God Himself? George Knight’s skeptical position on obedience by faith and reliance in the Spirit of Prophecy is injuring the souls of thousands who listen to him or read his books.

Shall we join Knight’s camp of sinful sinlessness and fallen perfection? I shudder to consider the possibility. God’s plans for us are much better; let us remain with them. They are laid out before us in His Inspired Books.

Recognizing that the very clear statements about perfection in the Bible are amplified even more clearly in the Spirit of Prophecy, Knight laments:

“My first point, therefore, is one of theological methodology. Adventists ought to go to the Bible for their basic understanding of Christian perfection rather than to Ellen White.”—*Pharisee*, 170.

Beware of any teacher or writer who downgrades the importance of the Spirit of Prophecy writings! Flee from such people! They will lead you to destruction.

It is an interesting fact that the Pharisees in Bible times developed such strange errors because they systematically set aside the Inspired Writings for their theories, which they set down in their rabbinic books.

Knight and his colleagues are modern-day Pharisees. Like the hypocrites of old, they replace God’s books with their own theories. They toss out the Spirit of Prophecy, and then twist the Bible. The tortured logic which emerges is a misery to behold.

“I could have a field day of fanaticism if I took 1 John 3:9 out of context.”—*Pharisee*, 170.

“For Ellen White, a person may be simultaneously sinless and not yet sinless.”—*Pharisee*, 170.

“People will never become perfect by avoiding this sin and that transgression, even if they are able to avoid all of them.”—*Pharisee*, 181.

“Some people would have Mrs. White and Jesus put some form of perfect law keeping or lifestyle into their statements.”—*Pharisee*, 192.

“Humans will . . . never be sinless as He [Christ] is sinless.”—*Pharisee*, 198.

“The Pharisaic approach to righteousness has had a large following in Seventh-day Adventism. That is not true only of the works-oriented righteousness of pre-1888 Adventism, but in the twentieth century through the writings of M.L. Andrea-

sen and others.”—*Pharisee*, 201.

“Some Adventists today, in the tradition of M.L. Andreasen and his itemized version of sin and sanctification, apparently have the same view as the Pharisees. One gets the impression from some advocates of perfection that the final demonstration will center on those who have a perfect diet and flawless lifestyle.”—*Pharisee*, 205.

“In their self-centeredness the Pharisees made God dependent upon them and their law keeping. That very concept stands as the ultimate Pharisaic arrogance.”—*Pharisee*, 206.

“No one reaches full and final perfection or sinlessness in this present life.”—*Pharisee*, 211.

To Knight the wrong belief is this:

“When I finally stop doing all the wrong things and start doing all the right things, I am perfect in the sense that Andreasen defined perfection. Then Christ can come again.”—*Pharisee*, 204.

“It is that transformation expressed in daily life that is the essence of character perfection. Such people will not have become sinless in the fullest sense of the word at the time of their death or at the time of the second coming.”—*Pharisee*, 216.

The last chapter of Knight’s book, *I Used to Be Perfect*, bears that title.

“The most important thing you can know about me is that I used to be perfect. Notice the past tense—I used to be perfect. Used to be perfect in a way that I’m not perfect now.”—*Perfect*, 80.

Knight then relates how, upon becoming an Adventist, he tried to stop sinning in every possible way, but became grouchy and hard to live with. Obviously, he was trying to do it by himself.

So then he went to the other extreme and decided that Christians do not need to concern themselves so much about the matter.

We may regret that he came to that conclusion, but we should not follow him in his error.

George Knight was correct when he said this:

“Different views of sin lead to radically different roads to salvation.”—*Perfect*, 17-18.

And he was right when he said this:

“It’s no accident that the theological war in Adventism is over the doctrine of sin.”—*Perfect*, 17.

Since the sin problem is what the battle is all about, on the next page I will reprint two pages from a study which I published back in 1980.

The study on pages 11 and 12 consists of the last two pages in a tract study, entitled *The Man of Romans Seven [FF-42]*, which was released in 1980. (see that tract)

One can hardly turn anywhere in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy—without recognizing that sin is the transgression of God’s moral law. Sin is not love, as George Knight maintains.