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For Messer-Uppers Only

David Newman

Chesapeake Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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FOR MESSER-UPPERS ONLY

Do we lose our salvation when we sin and have to get justified all over again?

So you messed up again!
You'd promised the Lord it
would never happen again!
But it's happened again and
again. . . .

And now you can't see how he
can forgive you again. Maybe you
weren't really converted. But you
were so sure. And now you feel like
you have to go back and start over—
right back to the beginning. And this
time you're not at all sure the Lord
will even listen to you.

Many Christians, Adventists in-
cluded, share this depressing ambiva-
lence. It comes, I've found, with too
much concentration on self and not

enough information on Jesus. The
result: We imagine ourselves speed-
ing down a broad four-lane highway
to hell, and there, just around a cor-
ner, is God with his radar gun locked
on us!

I've never told anyone who enter-
tains this scenario that all he or she
has to do is produce a valid driver's
licence, have a ready excuse, and
everything will be all right. After all,

**David Newman is Senior Pastor of
New Hope Seventh-day Adventist
Church in Burtonsville, Maryland.
Previously, he was editor of Ministry,
a monthly magazine for clergy.*

most of us at some time or another have been pulled over; have produced our driver's licence, have made our excuses, and been told to "tell it to the judge." A judge who, we learned in the courtroom, was all too ready to give us just what we deserve.

Frankly, the last thing I want from the Lord is just what I deserve! All I have to do is look to the cross to see just what that is! But thank God, it is not I whom I see there! It is Jesus, who took responsibility for all my sins, and when he died, the Father stamped my sad record, "Paid in full."

There's another wonderfully encouraging thing that Jesus did on the cross. Look up the record, and you'll see him struggle through the layers of agony of bearing my sins and yours, and those of all humanity, to assure a repentant thief (who'll never be taken down and given another chance to do better) that he'll be with him in Paradise! But doubt intrudes: If the thief were to have another chance, and sin again and again as I have. . . .

The bad news is that we're all sinners. Paul says, quoting the Psalmist, "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10, NIV).** That's you and me. Further, Paul confesses: "What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Rom. 7:19). He laments, "What a wretched man I am!" The good news, the "gospel," is that Christ died

to save wretched sinners! That means that God is calling people who mess up all the time. When we ask God for forgiveness, surrendering our will to him, the Bible says that he "justifies" us. Not when we become worthy, but when we are unworthy!

But doesn't justification apply only when we make our first surrender to Jesus? If so, we're in real trouble, because even after conversion, our motives continue impure, our actions less than perfect. As Paul confesses, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Of course, this is the same apostle who wrote to the Corinthians: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1, KJV).

Ellen White comments on Matthew 5:48:

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' This command is a promise. The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and he has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning.

"The tempter's agency is not to be accounted an excuse for one wrong

act. Satan is jubilant when he hears the professed followers of Christ making excuses for their deformity of character. It is these excuses that lead to sin. There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 311).

Surely we must never set a goal short of complete victory over sin through Christ. So let that victorious one who has never fallen short, never messed up, write and tell the editors of *Perspective Digest* all about it! Actually, perfection is not the subject of this short piece. It's whether Christ disowns us when we slip. It's whether we have to get justified all over again.

And the great news is that we do not lose our salvation every time we mess up. As long as we're not in rebellion against God, justification covers us like a huge umbrella. If this were not so, the angels would have to go to worlds whose inhabitants have

never sinned and invite them to fill the mansions prepared for us!

No, again, this does not mean that we can just go on sinning. That we can kiss victory goodby. Paul didn't. "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" he asked. That is, the great big burden of guilt that we often carry like a backpack. His answer: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:24, 25).

Justification means that so long as we continue to choose to live a life dependent on God, his forgiveness is graciously extended to us, and we are counted to be victorious through Jesus Christ. Counted, if you please, to be righteous! To be holy! To be perfect! All through him! His attitude of love and acceptance toward us continues unchanged.

Wow! What love!

□

** Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible texts in this article are quoted from the New International Version.

GOOD NEWS FOR SINNERS

To deny sin is bad news, indeed. The only good news is sin itself. Sin is the best news. . . there could be in our predicament. Because with sin, there's a way out. . . You can't repent of confusion or psychological flaws inflicted by your parents—you're stuck with them. But you can repent of sin. Sin and repentance are the only grounds for hope and joy. The grounds for reconciled, joyful relationships.

—John Alexander in *The Other Side* (January-February 1993).