

BLOTTING OUT SIN

It is fundamental Adventist teaching that the blotting out of sin takes place through the special ministry of Christ in the most holy place. It is usual for Christian people to associate the blotting out of sins with the experience of forgiveness of sins. But those who have the light of truth that shines from the sanctuary should know that the forgiveness of sins and the blotting out of sins are two distinct works.



It is fundamental Adventist teaching that the blotting out of sin takes place through the special ministry of Christ in the most holy place. It is usual for Christian people to associate the blotting out of sins with the experience of forgiveness of sins. But those who have the light of truth that shines from the sanctuary should know that the forgiveness of sins and the blotting out of sins are two distinct works.

In the ancient sanctuary service there were the daily and yearly typical atonement services. Says the apostle: "the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year" (Hebrews 9:6,7).

The daily service of the sanctuary was concerned with the forgiveness of sins. When the repentant sinner brought his animal sacrifice to the door of the tabernacle, confessed his guilt upon its head, the priest would minister the blood in the first apartment of the tabernacle. Says the Levitical record, "and the priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he hath committed, and it shall be forgiven him" (Leviticus 4:35).

The original meaning of the word "forgiven" means to send away, to 'Let go, to release'. Through the blood of the sin offering the sinner was released from his guilt, and the sin was sent into the sanctuary. Then on the great Day of Atonement the high priest, for the first time, entered the most holy place of the sanctuary to make a final atonement for Israel. Without, the people gathered about the sanctuary, afflicting their souls and pleading unto God for His mercy. Says the writer of Hebrews, "But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year" (Hebrews 10:3).

Each candidate for the final atonement vividly recalled the sins which he had committed during the year and pleaded that because of them he would be covered by the incense and have his sins blotted out by the sprinkling of the blood upon the mercy seat. The special service in the most holy place symbolized the final work of the blotting out of sins. The sins of Israel having

been removed from the sanctuary were then placed upon the scapegoat who bore them away into the wilderness. Thus the sins of Israel were regarded as forever separated from the congregation. However, we must remember that this ancient service was only typical, as the apostle writes,

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Now what was done in type in the earthly sanctuary is done in reality in the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. The ministry of Jesus secures forgiveness of sins and the blotting out of sins for His people. These two experiences must not be confused. Forgiveness of sins is secured when the sinner exercises repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This does not mean that upon acceptance of Christ the sin is finally blotted out. "For eighteen centuries this work of ministration continued in the first apartment of the sanctuary. The blood of Christ, pleaded in the behalf of penitent believers, secured their pardon and acceptance with the Father, yet their sins still remained upon the books of record."--Great Controversy, p. 421.

"The work of the investigative judgment and the blotting out of sins is to be accomplished before the second advent of the Lord. Since the dead are to be judged out of those things written in the books, it is impossible that the sins of men should be blotted out until after the judgment at which their cases are to be investigated."--Ibid, p. 485.

The Experience of Forgiveness

The whole of the sanctuary and its service is an illustration of God's purpose for the human soul (see Education, p. 36). Forgiveness is an experience, not just a judicial act. Some obtain the idea that forgiveness means that God simply overlooks the sin which has been committed. If this is the meaning of forgiveness, then God never forgives sin. The Scripture says He can by no means clear the guilty. If God could forgive sin in this sense, then it would not have been necessary for Christ to suffer and die. His death is the eternal testimony to the truth that God cannot overlook sin.

Both in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and in the Greek of the New Testament, the meaning of the word "forgive" signifies to send away, to release, or to let go. The only way that God can save the sinner is to deliver him from the sin in order that divine retribution may not fall upon him. Said the angel to Joseph, "thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

There are many who wish to be saved in their sins, but the plan of redemption shows the way of salvation from sin. Forgiveness is justification by faith, which is more than a judicial act; it is the mighty work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust and doing for him that which he cannot do for himself. Forgiveness has a broader meaning than many suppose. When God gives the promise that He will abundantly pardon, He adds, as if the meaning of that promise exceeded all that we could comprehend,

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:7-9).

God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, "Create in

me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). And again he says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). (See Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p.114). Therefore, unless we are delivered from sin, we have not experienced forgiveness for sin; unless its power is broken in the life, so that the soul is set free in Jesus, there is no such thing as forgiveness.

When a truly repentant sinner, through the working of the love of God upon his heart, turns from sin to Christ, then like the publican cries, "God be merciful unto me, a sinner," Christ, his advocate, stands for him before the Father and pleads, "My blood, My blood." Now the life is in the blood, which means that Jesus pleads His life for the sinner. Says the apostle, "we shall be saved, by His life" (Romans 5:10). Jesus pleads that the repentant sinner be a partaker of His life, for he has renounced his sinful life and has in reality exchanged it for the new life of Christ. This is the meaning of forgiveness. It verily means an exchange of life.

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4).

The Experience of the Blotting Out of Sins

So too, the blotting out of sins is also an experience for those who shall be alive upon the earth to participate in it. There are so many who imagine that the blotting out of sins is merely a judicial act, just as there are many who think that forgiveness is only a judicial act. But this is not the teaching of the Word of God. When Israel of old gathered about the sanctuary for the great Day of Atonement, the high priest went in to accomplish a work for them. "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord" (Leviticus 16:30).

On this great antitypical Day of Atonement, God's people also are called to gather at the

sanctuary for the work of blotting out of sins. "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar" (Joel 2:15-17).

God does not call His people to engage in this work merely to perform a judicial act for them in heaven, but as the remainder of the chapter of Joel 2 shows, that He may, by the work of the final atonement finish the work of God's grace in the community of saints who shall be prepared for the great day of God.

There are some who have no little difficulty in comprehending that a further work is necessary after sins have been forgiven. Therefore, let us consider in more detail this work of blotting out of sins.

When we have a true sense of the awful reality of our sins being recorded, there will be heard among us on every hand, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God." But we stop at the form of the truth rather than grasping the substance of it: we content ourselves with the mechanical concepts of the sanctuary truth rather than embracing the reality which is Jesus Christ. In a very real sense He is the door of the enclosure. He is the altar and the laver opened for sin and uncleanness. He is the bread of the table, the light of the seven lamps, and the sweet incense of merit. Likewise His flesh is the veil, and His life is the law.

He is the mercy-seat, the manna and the rod that budded. He is both Shekinah and High Priest, Judge and Advocate. So, too, in a very real sense, Jesus is the book of life, symbolized by the breastplate of judgment. The record states, "And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place for a memorial before the Lord continually" (Exodus 28 :29).

As Aaron bore on the breastplate the names of the tribes of Israel as he went into the sanctuary, so Jesus bears upon His heart the names of all who accept Him as the Saviour. As a book contains words and thoughts, so Jesus is the Word of God, the Father's thought made audible. This is indeed a Book "of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). No wonder Jesus told His disciples to rejoice because their names were in the book of life! No wonder that men will weep and gnash their teeth when they look in vain to find their names in the book of life!

There is more to the book of remembrance and the book of record than cold ledgers of names, good deeds, and bad deeds. Jesus says, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). The angels who record our sins register the anguish and unspeakable sadness of Jesus as He is crucified afresh by those who are called by His holy name. "In the midst of the throne" there stands yet "a Lamb as it had been slain"--torn and bruised by our sin (Revelation 5:6). As He bears the iniquity of the sanctuary (Exodus 28:38; Leviticus 10:17). Because of the continual commission of sin, the Saviour must continually undergo the pangs of Calvary.

"Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and to the world. Few think of its relation to God. Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity.

The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him. When there came upon Israel the calamities that were the sure result of separation from God,--subjugation by their enemies, cruelty, and death,--it is said that 'His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.' 'In all their af-

fliction He was afflicted: . . . and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old.' Judges 10:16; Isaiah 63:9."--Education, p 263.

At the same time, we should have a true understanding of what sin does to us, for God says, "he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul" (Proverbs 8:36). Sin is not only recorded in living characters in heaven; it is recorded in the minds of men. "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart" (Jeremiah 17:1).

In the inner apartment of the soul temple, upon those tables of the heart whereon God originally wrote His law, man has inscribed the law of sin and death. Those who imagine that sin is only a matter of guilt which is removed instantly upon repentance should look at the awful consequences of sin in a different light. Let them consider how often Adam must have repented for his one "little" sin as he brought his sacrifices to the gate of Eden. Having eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that knowledge of evil remained in his mind. It was not just a knowledge about evil, but an actual experience in sin which left a lasting impress upon his mind. As he was obliged to battle with the ground cursed to bring forth thorns and weeds, he was constantly reminded about the evil of his nature. He was sentenced to "eat of it"--that is, experience the result of his sin--all the days of his life (see Genesis 3:17, 18).

A sinner may repent of his sin and be cleansed from its guilt; but as surely as that sin remains upon the records of heaven, its record remains upon him. To those who have received forgiveness, the Lord says, "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations" (Ezekiel 36:31).

Many things may be consciously forgotten, but even as neurologists have recently discovered, the whole stream of one's conscious life is retained in the unconscious mind. Every thought and emotion of the soul is recorded in the mind; as

the Bible writer says, "graven on the table of their heart" (see Jeremiah 17:1).

The Apostle Paul shows that there can be no moral and spiritual perfection possessed experientially while this conscience and remembrance of sin remains (see Hebrews 10:1-3). That is why the Bible worthies are not described as men who lived in a state of sinlessness. "These all died in faith . . . God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:13, 40).

Then what is this "better thing" that God has provided for those who shall not die in faith. Those who do not die in faith are those who experience the blessings of the cleansing of the sanctuary. In the ancient ritual, the high priest entered the most holy place with blood to make the final atonement for the people who afflicted their souls without. This symbolically blotted out the sin of Israel. So in completing His work of atonement in the sanctuary above, Christ blots out the record of His people's sin. This great work of final atonement, or blotting out of sin, is not a mere judicial act. It is an experience involving God and His people.

For Jesus' Sake. Firstly, the blotting out of sin is for Jesus' sake. Says the Lord, "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isaiah 43:24, 25).

As unpleasant as the nightmare of sin has been to us, it has been worse to our Lord. Not just from the cold ledgers, but from the memory of the Saviour will our sins be removed. Says the Lord through the apostle, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (Hebrews 10:17, 18).

When will this take place? Just as soon as God's people receive the eye salve to realize what is sin and what is the longsuffering love of Christ.

Then will come the repentance of the ages. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10).

Such repentance will not be inspired by fear of the judgment, the consequences of sin, or self-pity. It will be inspired by a sympathy for Christ as they will look upon Him as the sin bearer of the sanctuary, and mourn for Him. This will be a new experience in repentance that transcends the normal Christian experience which expresses a longing to be free from the burden of sin. Here will be a longing to free the Saviour from the burden of sin. Here will be a consciousness that the sufferings of Calvary will not end until they be done with sin forever. Here will be supplications to have every root of the awful sin principle blotted from the heart for Jesus' sake. For the People, Secondly, the blotting out of sin is for the people of God. This is explicitly taught in the tabernacle ritual. "And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place [most holy], until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord" (Leviticus 16:17, 30).

When God remembers the sins no more, it will be a blessed experience for the saints to remember them no more. Says the prophet, "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve" (Jeremiah 50:20).

This will not mean that God's people will have a mental amnesia to events in the history of sin, but it will mean that the record of sin itself—the thoughts, emotions, and ways of rebellion—will

be erased from the human mind. Neither will any trace of that sin principle be remembered or found in the mind again. The worshippers will have "no more conscience of sins (Hebrews 10:2). "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah, . . . Oh Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish" (Isaiah 26:1, 13, 14)

The Former and the Latter Rain

While Christ ministers in the sanctuary in heaven, those who receive the benefits of His mediation have the blessing of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the sanctuary of the soul temple. It is the Spirit that makes effectual in the life what Christ does in His ministry in heaven. And these two experiences—the forgiveness of sins and the blotting out of sins—is accomplished in the life by the former and the latter rain. Forgiveness of sins is the former rain experience. Peter said, "Repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

Then looking forward to the time of the latter rain he said, "Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

It is the former rain that brings forgiveness to the life, which is deliverance from sin, victory over sin. God's people must have such an experience in forgiveness, that they will have the victory over "every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action."—Early Writings, p. 71.

Only those who have such a victory over sin under the former rain will be prepared to receive the latter rain. It is the latter rain which completes the work of God's grace in the soul, and brings the seed to perfection (see Testimonies to ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 506).

By the final baptism of the Spirit of God, sin is eternally vanquished in the lives of God's people. They are sealed for eternity. For more than one hundred and sixty years Christ has waited to bestow this final experience upon His people. The mystery of God must soon be finished. The saints must be numbered and sealed. Only those who understand the final work of Christ in the most holy place and know what duties are required of them, only those who follow Him by faith as He goes in before God for His final work, will receive the benefits of His mediation.

"The peace of Christ is not to banish division, but it is to remain amid strife and division . . . The Prince of Peace, He was yet the cause of division." OHC 328.

