

THE BLOTTING OUT OF SIN

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If a ship sinks into the depths of the sea, is it gone forever? Many like to quote Micah 7:19 that says that when we confess our sins, the Lord promises “casting all our sins into the depths of the sea” (REB). They ask, “Then why have an investigative judgment?”

But we have a problem here. Back in Micah’s day, if a ship sank into the ocean, it was goodbye forever. But now, no longer. It’s great business, diving into wrecks on the ocean floor. Even the Titanic has been disturbed in its resting place in the North Atlantic where it has lain since that April night in 1915.

No, casting our sins in the depths of the ocean might not be the end of them. That’s not good enough, now. The depths of the ocean are not an eternal resting place, even now. And when God recreates the earth anew, He will also clean up the oceans. Heaven won’t be what we want if the eternal ocean floor is forever littered with wrecks that remind us of this earth’s sinful, cruel past, any more than if ugly wrecked cars and burned out buildings will still cover the surface of the earth made new. Some day the hidden secrets of every “shipwreck” and even of airplane crash sites will be revealed.

So, sins that are hidden, even from our knowledge, must be revealed. And for those who are ready for Jesus to return, that means that it

must all come out in the open beforehand in a judgment before He returns. But that’s not Bad News; it’s Good News . . . because the deeper is the knowledge of your sins, the deeper is your heart appreciation of His grace. And no one can be happy when Jesus returns unless he/she has learned that lesson!

Somebody phoned me, asking if I could provide some biblical basis on which rests the idea of a pre-Advent judgment. When we confess our sins, doesn’t the Lord Jesus forgive us our sins, and hasn’t He promised to cast them into the depths of the sea? Why then would He drag up out of the sea-bottom that Titanic of shameful sin that He promised should be left there? Isn’t this entire idea of a pre-Advent judgment something contrary to Gospel common sense? I was on the spot and had to say something.

My mind went to two biblical statements, both unquestionably inspired because they came from the lips of Jesus and they are not out of context: (1) He said to the Sadducees, “They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that [eternal] world, and the resurrection from the dead . . . cannot die any more” (Lk. 20:35, 36). He had already taught the reality of two resurrections—“they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life” (Jn. 5:28, 29) which obviously can take place only at His second Advent (1 Thess. 4:15-18), and that of those “that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” Revelation 20 quite clearly seems to say it takes place at the close of the thousand-year post-Advent judgment (Rev 20:4-7).

Before Jesus returns again as He promised and resurrects those “that have done good,” somehow it must be determined, or “judged,” who to resurrect in that first resurrection and who to leave sleeping on until the second. It seems hardly common sense to say that God Himself (who presides at the Judgment) needs this investigative knowledge; He knows everything. But the “court” composed of the intelligences of the universe needs to know (and so do we!).

(2) Jesus spoke of “judgment” as of two kinds: condemnation, and vindication. My questioners missed that truth! In this pre-Advent judgment Jesus leaves that Titanic of confessed and forsaken sin and

guilt submerged where it is. The only people He agrees to judge are those who believe in Him, and He will vindicate them. The rest will judge themselves. It’ll be for them a do-it-yourself condemnation (Jn. 12:47, 48).

When God forgives a sin does He forget it? Or does He dredge it up out of the depths of the sea where He promised He would dump it?

A verse in Amos 8 seems to say that He will recycle all our sins and hold them all against us at last if we don’t “overcome” (vs. 7). And we know that there must come a judgment before Jesus can come the second time, and some people’s names will be blotted out of the Book of Life, who at one time served God (for example, Judas Iscariot—he was baptized, preached, even worked miracles). Once forgiven, are we forever forgiven?

God has also said several times, “I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions . . . , and will not remember thy sins,” and “their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Isa. 43:25; Heb. 8:12).

Jesus told a parable of the man who owed 10,000 talents, begged for mercy, got it, was forgiven, then demanded a poor man pay him 100 measly “pence.” Then his lord sent him to prison until he paid the original debt (Mt. 18:23-35). Is our original debt of sin hanging over our heads all the time even after we have “confessed” and been “forgiven”?

The word “forgive” means the sin is not merely pardoned but is taken away out of the heart. That’s true: if you are *truly* forgiven you won’t do it again!

Christ did pay the full penalty for all our sins. No question.

God does not put us under double jeopardy.

Why then will the lost be lost? They did not *receive* the true forgiveness that God *gave* them in Christ. The man who was forgiven 10,000 talents did not *receive* his lord’s spirit of forgiveness. He was as selfish after he was “forgiven” as he was before.

The lost at last in the final judgment do not die for their sins which were indeed forgiven; God kept his word. They will perish because of their unbelief, their refusal to receive the spirit of forgiveness; they have crucified Christ “afresh” (Heb. 6:6). For that, there can be no forgiveness.

They will be “Esau” all over again, who *had* the birthright but “despised” it and “sold” it.

Suppose someone was spending \$4 million to hire prosecuting attorneys to pursue you relentlessly,

trying to expose publicly every moral misstep or misstatement in your life. I think you would join me in praying to God as did David, “*Blot* out all mine iniquities” (Ps. 51:9). Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the prosecuting sleuths couldn’t find even one thing wrong?

We know we all have a skeleton of some kind in our closets. Romans 3:10 says “there is none righteous, no, not one.” We all want vindication in a judgment. And we must all face an eventual judgment for we read in 2 Cor. 5:10: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” The word “receive” means full exposure. The sweet unconsciousness of a sudden martyr’s death by a bullet (such as Lincoln and Kennedy suffered) would be delightful compared to the agony of a protracted public humiliation of one’s nakedness with no merciful covering.

We must remember that appearing before “the judgment seat of Christ” does not mean that *He* wants to expose us to humiliation; He has promised that *He* will not embarrass those who will be lost—their own record will condemn them (see John 12:47, 48); and in that judgment He will vindicate those who believe in Him (vs. 47; John 3:16-19).

As the ancient Romans flocked to the Coliseum to watch gladiators wrestle with each other and die, so we watch in horror the spectacle of a man in the arena fighting for the last vestige of his honor and we instinctively put ourselves in his place. That’s why the drama is so compelling.

Thank God for a Saviour who does truly “blot out all our iniquities”! It was He who endured the public hellish humiliation of our nakedness. Gratitude and appreciation will motivate us “henceforth” to live for Him (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

If King David were writing his Psalm 51 today, instead of praying, “Lord, blot out all mine iniquities,” he would pray, “Lord, erase all those video and audio cassette tapes! Please blot out all the newspaper and magazine reports so I can go down in history with a moral record as clean as Mother Theresa’s!”

But God is not a magician—even He cannot erase electronic tapes, or at least, He won’t. And although David prayed, “Blot out all my iniquities,” the fact is that the full sordid record of his sin of adultery and cover-up crime of murder is printed there in the Bible for billions of people to read in all ages since, even for children to see. King David has been twisting in the wind of public exposure ever since.

Didn’t God answer his prayer? It depends on what he meant when he prayed. If he wanted only a divine cover-up so he could be spared the embarrassment, the answer is No. But fortunately, what David really wanted was something better: he craved a clean heart. He was willing to take any punishment, even endure the horror of hell, if only he could be “washed thoroughly” from sin itself. “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness,” he begged; like the famous Prodigal Son, he was tired of wallowing in guilt-filth with the pigs. He wanted a clean conscience, let the record or the consequences be as they may. Don’t abandon me alone in outer

darkness forever, “take not Thy Holy Spirit from me,” he prayed in vs. 11.

In full, open, voluntary confession (not forced by evidence!) he found what he was praying for: “I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Ps. 32:5). And then he adds in verse 6 the Good News that every sinner longs for: “the floods of great waters” will not drown the repentant sinner. “He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about” (vs. 10). If you know anything about what it feels like to be a sinner, you’ll rejoice at that Good News!

I wonder if you are like I am? When I was a child I was taught a little prayer to say at night before I went to sleep: “Now I lay me down to sleep; /I pray the Lord my soul to keep. /If I should die before I wake, /I pray the Lord my soul to take.” Then as I grew up, I would pray each night before getting into bed, “Lord, please forgive all my sins, Amen.” And I thought that little prayer took care not only of sins I remembered, but automatically cleared my record in God’s computer of all sins that I didn’t know about.

Now comes the problem of how to understand what Isaiah says in chapter 43:25, that the Lord blots out our transgressions, and 44:22, “I have blotted out [past tense] as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins.” If the Lord has already blotted out our sins, how can we understand what Peter says in Acts 3:19 that our sins will not be blotted out until “the times of

refreshing” shall come just before the return of Christ? Clearly, there has to be a judgment before Jesus returns; then it is that the sins of God’s people, forgiven all along in the past, will be finally “blotted out.”

Well, maybe your computer can help us understand. When you want to blot out a document, you send it to the trash can down in the lower right hand corner of my screen. And the cute little trash can starts to bulge with the contents of your discarded documents. But there comes a time when you really must empty that trash can. So you press a button that commands the computer, “Empty the trash can.”

But, wait! Something happens! A little message flashes: “Are you really *sure* you want to trash all those documents? If you want to take something back, to retrieve something out of the trash can, here’s your last chance! You’ve kept all those things under the table out of sight,” says your computer to me, “until you make that final, solid, irrevocable decision. Now, what is your final decision?” Then, when I click on yes, they are gone forever, and no one, not even the FBI, could resurrect them.

Can you say that when you first sent that document to the trash, you were “forgiven,” and the document was gone, no longer on your desktop or in my file; it was forgotten? But the record was still there just in case later on you decide to go back to your old ways and retrieve it.

So when we confess our sins, they are indeed forgiven; but we sinful humans can sometimes go back to our old ways like the dog that Peter says

returns to his vomit. And the Lord doesn't want to take anybody to heaven who secretly is sorry that he ever repented and he really wants to go back to the devil.

So, as we near the coming of Christ, there has to be a final investigation: "Are you *really* sure you want your sins *forever* forgiven? Are you *really* sure you don't want to go back to your old selfish, lustful, worldly ways, ever?" Well, I hope you're ready to click yes on that.

Suppose you have done something or said something that is wrong and you know it. You feel burdened; the joy of life is gone. Now it's a dark and cloudy day. What do you do?

Well, first of all, welcome to the worldwide club of people who know they are sinners. Maybe you didn't know you had the capability of doing or saying what you did that is wrong. The truth is, there is no end to our capability for sin. A wise writer says that when Jesus was hanging on His cross, He realized how bad a person can become. That is why He cried out, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" If our Saviour were to let go of our hand, we could fall, fall, fall. There's no end to the depth we would go. Remember, your salvation does not depend on you holding on to His hand; it depends on your believing that He is holding on to your hand. So, what do you do now?

You find a chance as soon as possible to get on your knees before the Saviour (not some earthly priest, or psychiatrist please!), and you confess your sin to Him. The whole thing; with no attempt to justify yourself or any plea bargaining. Tell Him that

you are Peter sinking in the waves in the storm on Galilee, and you join him in crying out, "Lord, save me or I perish!"

Secondly, you ask Him to forgive you your sin.

Thirdly, you believe what He says in 1 Jn. 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

Fourth, you believe what else He says there, "and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The true forgiveness kit comes complete with a brand—new attachment—a new hatred for the sin itself. That little gift that comes in the package is not based on fear, but heart-sorrow for wounding the Savior. It is a new evidence to you personally of a miracle. So, from now on, any doubt that He loves you personally is washed away by this new personal miracle—utterly impossible for "sinful you" unless the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart. You don't naturally hate sin; naturally, you love it; so this newly implanted hatred for the sin is personal evidence for you that Christ is risen from the dead, He's alive, and He is your High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Yes, that is Good News.

A newspaper picture showed a Sarah Jane Olson looking disconsolate in court on trial for putting bombs under police cars 24 years ago. She had been incognito for years as an apparently law-abiding wife and mother. She was young and hot-headed 24 years ago; should she be held accountable today for trying to murder policemen then?

Should God hold us accountable for sins we committed when we were young and hot-headed (or hot-blooded)?

Modern governmental jurisprudence has no mechanism of justification by faith; you're guilty or not, and if the former, you pay up. Sarah Jane had a debt to society, and prosecutors said she must pay.

We sinners before God have a debt to pay to the law and order of the universe, but we can't pay it and still live. Cosmic justice demands that it be paid. One has paid our debt, and the gospel is God's mechanism of repentance, which operates "through faith" (Eph. 2:8, 9). We can identify with the One who paid our debt; we can appreciate what it cost Him to do so; and that very experience of faith changes the sinful heart and creates a true hatred for the sin we once loved. In such an experience of justification by faith we are "born again." We are new people, each of whom can say, "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20).

Sarah Jane had no one who can stand before the court and prove that her debt of 24 years ago is paid. Hence her disconsolate look in court. David teaches us what to pray: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord" (Ps 25:7).

Everybody has "sins of . . . youth" we wish we could forget. God has promised to "remember [them] not," but this is only for His "goodness' sake," that is, because One has paid the debt, the Son of God. The transaction is highly unfair if it is mere

"vicarious substitution," allowing us to escape with the same hard, selfish hearts we had 24 years ago (or whenever). God cannot be "just and the justifier" of any of us unless we can convince the heavenly Court that we "believe in Jesus," and that "with the heart [that] man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. 3:20; 10:10).

All of Sarah Jane's decades of law-abiding conduct since the 1970's can't help her now; likewise a lifetime of good works can't help us. And how can the heavenly Court be convinced that our faith is genuine and not spurious? Only by looking to see if it is genuine—"faith which works" and demonstrates a true "atonement."

Nothing in the vast universe is so joyous to receive than God's forgiveness. King David let himself be lured into horrible sin—adultery-murder. For a year or more he was able to repress the painful guilt, stomp on it, and keep it covered up. And he bluffed and smiled his way through his royal appointments of state; but when the guilt finally caught up with him when he was alone, his devastation of soul was horrendous. Not even a new Lexus or speedboat could have made him happy.

When God's forgiveness came, he wrote: "Happy is the man whose offence is forgiven, whose sin is blotted out! (Ps. 32:1, REB).

Forgiveness is great, but there is another dimension involved: the blotting out of sins. It is simultaneous with God's giving (and the church's receiving) the latter rain, which prepares them for the final issues of earth's history: "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).

When He forgives us He takes the sin away and dumps it in the depths of the ocean where no one can retrieve it—not even Himself. It’s His objective act for us. But we can dig it up again like Judas Iscariot did (he had been baptized and ordained and even had worked miracles). We can “crucify Christ afresh” (Heb. 6:6).

The “blotting out of sins” is plural, subjective; it concerns the sanctuary itself. It’s the meaning of Daniel 8:14, “Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” The forgiveness of our sins sets us free; the blotting out of sins sets God free. The accumulated burden of the sins of God’s people is guilt He has taken upon Himself in the great controversy with Satan. It’s for us a deep work of heart-cleansing that is done on the Day of Atonement.

When sin is totally eradicated from the hearts of His people, the gospel is demonstrated to be at last effective, “the power of God unto salvation.” Christ’s sacrifice is fully rewarded. God is relieved of the burden He has carried all this long while.

The entire Book of Hebrews is concerned with this truth of “the blotting out of sins. Forgiveness has gone on for 6000 years. The sins confessed, forsaken, and repented of, have been sunk in the depths of the ocean deeper down than the Titanic. But you and I can do something that even God cannot do; we can retrieve them again, He has promised never to bring them up again. “Your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more,” He

promises, and what He cannot do is break His promise (Heb. 8:12).

But we humans are clever. “We” have devised a way whereby “we” can send sophisticated equipment down to the Titanic and “we” can recover artifacts that God intended should never come up again. If we choose to rebel against our Savior, we can bring back those sins that He has forgiven and forgotten. There must be a final end—that “blotting out” that Peter mentioned in Acts 3:19.

The Book of Hebrews explains something that our Savior is doing just now. It’s never been done before—preparing a people for His personal, literal second coming. They are the special “we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord [when] . . . the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and . . . the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thess. 4:14-17). Those “we which are alive and remain” will say “yes!” to Jesus when He performs that “blotting out of sins.”

That seems to be when Hebrews 9:28 comes into focus: “Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” The “without sin” means the sins have been blotted out, not merely pardoned. “The High Priest will do what He promised if we choose not to “resist Him in His office work.” That is the theme of the Book of Hebrews. As High Priest *He* cleanses His sanctuary. We cooperate with Him. We *let* Him do it. We stop fighting His Holy Spirit.

The New Covenant replacing the Old is a tectonic shift in the thinking of God’s people. It’s a deeper

experience of justification by faith as cataclysmic as seeing Jesus as their High Priest was to the Jewish Christians of Paul's day (see Heb. 8:8-13).

You may ask, "But maybe I have committed the unpardonable sin! If so, has God forsaken me?" The unpardonable sin is not God forsaking the sinner, but the sinner forsaking God. He still loves the person who has committed that sin (if he has!), but the sinner has burnt out his antenna and cannot receive the forgiveness "signal" from God. If you can catch even the faintest signal from the Holy Spirit assuring you of God's faithful love, cherish it; don't let Satan overwhelm you with discouragement because you know you have sinned. It's sinners that Christ has come to save. We rob Him of His due if we withhold ourselves from Him. Don't accept Satan's judgment; appeal over his head to the Supreme Court of heaven—Christ Himself.