

## SINLESS LIVING IN SINFUL FLESH

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A hair stylist told me that she had cured a number of her customers with simple remedies. One man had a pain in the eye and was prescribed a compress. Another had a large facial sore which was inoperable. This was cured by an application. There were still more remedies were recommended for coughing and the common cold.

Should someone come up with the cure for cancer that person would surely be visited by millions and become rich. When Jesus has the remedy for the fatal disease of sin, who believes at takes Him at His Word. He promises rest to the soul that claims His promise.

The Book of Hebrews is the only place in the NT where Christ is identified as our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. We are thankful it was included in our Bibles! "But what does Christ do there as High Priest?" is a question many are asking.

\* And the Apostle Paul writes in Romans: "Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34). What does it mean that Jesus as our High Priest has to "make intercession" for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25)? The word "intercession" implies that somebody is not happy and has to be interceded with on our behalf. Christ "is at the right hand of God," Paul

says, "who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34).

\* John adds his insight when he compares Christ to "an advocate with the Father," the word "advocate" being *PARAKLETOS* in the Greek (1 John 2:1). This word "was used in a court of justice to denote a legal assistant, counsel for the defense, who pleads another's cause."

\* In other words, Jesus is a defense lawyer pleading a case "with the Father," John says. It seems that the Father is the Judge and that we are on trial before Him, and that we would lose our case if it weren't for Jesus being there in our behalf. This is 100 percent true; we would indeed lose out if it were not for our Divine Lawyer working on our side.

\* But who is He "pleading," "interceding" with? Who needs to be "persuaded" to accept us?

Does it make sense to say it's the Father? Wasn't it He who took the initiative to "so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son" for us? Is there any difference of attitude or opinion between the Father and the Son? No, they are totally one. How could He be against us, needing Jesus to "intercede" for us? Does the Father have a club behind His back, about to let us have it, and then Jesus steps up and says, "Look, Father, at the wounds in My hands, etc. Please be nice to these people!"? No, that doesn't make sense. The Father loves us just as much as the Son loves us! Then who is Jesus interceding with?

\* Is He interceding with the devil? Is Christ trying to intercede with Satan to back off and leave us alone? That idea won't fly either, because the devil

is totally, irrevocably hostile. The devil's mind CAN'T be changed, and the Father's mind DOESN'T NEED to be changed. Where then is there somebody whose mind NEEDS to be changed? Will he or his angels ever be persuaded to be nice to us? Hardly!

Then who has to be persuaded to "accept" us, to stop condemning us? The good angels? No, they are "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister FOR" us, not against us (Heb. 1:14).

\* Then who is left who needs to be "persuaded," interceded with to "accept" us, except we ourselves? We are the ones who need to hold our head high, to join Paul in being "persuaded" that nothing will ever "separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Could it be that our great High Priest is pleading with us, to change OUR minds? Hebrews seems to say so: "Consider the . . . High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus . . . [and] harden not your hearts" (3:1, 15). "He ever lives to make intercession FOR [US]" (7:25). "The blood of Christ . . . will cleanse our conscience from the deadness of our former ways and fit us for the service of the living God" (9:14, NEB).

This is why a very apt name for Him as our High Priest is "Divine Psychiatrist," "the Great Physician" of our souls. Nobody can benefit from His high priestly ministry unless he realizes his need of such a "Psychiatrist." "They that are whole need not a physician," said Jesus, "but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31, 32).

The foundation text of the Seventh-day Adventist Church declares that for once in history, history will not be repeated: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days [years]; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."<sup>1</sup> That cleansing or making right has never yet in history taken place for the body of the church. In order for the heavenly sanctuary to be cleansed, the Lord's sanctuary on earth must also be cleansed. The books of heaven can never record the "blotting out of sins" until this work is first accomplished in the hearts of His people on earth, for those heavenly records will never tell a lie.

Speaking of the [1888] message, Ellen White emphasizes some wonderfully good news:

"Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary, and he is there to make an atonement for the people. . . . To plead for his Church that is upon the earth. He is cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. . . . It is our work to be in harmony with the work of Christ. By faith we are to work with him. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

"While Christ is cleansing the sanctuary, the worshipers on earth should carefully review their life, and compare their character with the standard of righteousness. . . . They may be victors over the very temptations which seemed too strong for humanity to bear; for the divine power will be combined with their human effort, and Satan cannot overcome them."<sup>3</sup>

The One who will accomplish that amazing task is the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary. His

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 8:14 (KJV); cf. Revelation 11:15; 19:7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Review and Herald* January 28, 1890.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, April 8, 1890.

business is being a Saviour from sin. It is His job to cleanse the sanctuary, not ours; but it is our job to cooperate with Him, to let Him do it, to stop hindering Him “in His office work.”<sup>4</sup>

“We are in the day of atonement, and we are to work in harmony with Christ’s work of cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. Let no man who desires to be found with the wedding garment on, resist our Lord in his office work.”<sup>5</sup>

This is the most exciting, glorious hour in which to live. No material or sensual delight the world can offer can compare with the thrill of cooperating with that heavenly High Priest! Never under any circumstance or under any pressure let yourself work at cross-purposes with Him.

\* But how can God’s people ever be sinless as Christ was if they must remain “corrupt channels of humanity” as 1SM 344 says they are? These “corrupt channels” are said to be “true believers” who will need “the Intercessor”, it seems, even after the probation closes. Even our “religious services, prayers, praise, and penitent confession of sin” pass through “the corrupt channels of humanity.” Doesn’t this mean that we must remain “corrupt channels” until Christ comes the second time, and that Christ had to take the sinless nature of Adam and not our sinful nature?

Reading 1SM 344 carefully, the setting is the ministry of “Christ as high priest within the veil” (p. 343). “The [continual] atoning sacrifice through a

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<sup>4</sup> “The Need of Complete Consecration,” *Ibid.*, January 21, 1890.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

mediator is essential because of the *constant commission of sin*. Jesus is officiating in the presence of God, offering up His shed blood” (top of p. 344). Thus it is clear that the expression “corrupt channels of humanity” equals “the constant *commission of sin*,” for which constant *mediation* is required.

But will Jesus continue His mediation for “the constant commission of sin” forever? The Roman Catholic and popular Protestant churches have no answer to this question except an assumed “yes.” Seventh-day Adventists are unique because we understand that the High Priest will *leave* the Most Holy Apartment at the close of human probation, at which time His mediation will *cease*. And this means, of course, that “the constant commission of sin” must also cease. This is made clear:

“Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. . . . [This requires] a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth.” (*GC* 425).

“When He [Christ as High Priest] leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor.” (*Ibid.*, p. 614).

Since “the constant commission of sin” is “through the corrupt channels of humanity”, there must be “a special work of purification, of putting away of sin”

before “the intercession of Christ shall cease.” It seems therefore that the inspired writer (1SM 344) is teaching that a “sinful nature” is not necessarily a “sinning nature.” And if the saints at the close of probation have ceased “the constant commission of sin” while still retaining sinful flesh and a sinful nature, why couldn’t the incarnate Christ have lived a sinless life while having “taken our sinful nature”? Wouldn’t it be blasphemy to suggest that the saints will demonstrate a greater wonder than Christ dared to accomplish?

To ask the wrong questions at the wrong time produces confusion. Whenever “sinless living” is mentioned, someone is bound to ask with a great show of finality: “Are you living without sin? Are you perfect? Can you show me somebody (except Christ) who is perfect?” Laughter usually punctuates the strained silence that follows these taunting questions.

But they are irrelevant to the our theme. It is obvious even to a child that no true Christian will ever *feel* or *claim* to be perfect. Not the proud Pharisee, but the contrite publican is justified (obviously by faith, for there is no other way possible). And he prays, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (see Luke 18:10-14). Until Jesus glorifies His saints at His second coming, they “know that in . . . [them], (that is in . . . [their] flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18). No true Christian will ever claim more than Paul claimed: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect. . . . Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended” (Philippians 3:12, 13).

“Never can we safely put confidence in self or feel, this side of heaven, that we are secure against temptation. . . . Our only safety is in constant distrust of self, and dependence on Christ. . .

“It is not only at the beginning of the Christian life that this renunciation of . . . [pride and self dependence] is to be made. At every advance step heavenward it is to be renewed. . . .

“The nearer we come to Jesus and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character, the more clearly we shall discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the less we shall feel like exalting ourselves.”<sup>6</sup>

“From the cross to the crown there is earnest work to be done. There wrestling with inbred sin; there is warfare against outward wrong.”<sup>7</sup>

We should begin by asking the right questions at the right time. And the right time is this time of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, while our great High Priest is completing His work of final atonement.

Christ is to accomplish a work unique in human history since sin began—preparing a body of people for translation. While no child God of will ever *claim* to have overcome all sin, and while it is equally that we cannot judge of any present or past individual that he has overcome as He overcame, that does not mean that the ministry of Christ in the most holy apartment will fail to achieve such results. However much in the past or in the present we have failed to overcome, for us to say that it is impossible to

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<sup>6</sup> *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 155, 159, 160.

<sup>7</sup> *Review and Herald*, November 29, 1887.

overcome sin through faith in the Redeemer is actually to justify and to encourage sin, and thus to stand on the great enemy's side.

The right questions to ask are these:

- Is the sacrifice of Christ as Lamb of God, and is His ministry as great High Priest, powerful enough to save His people from (not in) their sins?

- Is He truly able to save “to the uttermost [completely] those who come unto God by Him”?

- Will He be truly successful “as a refiner and purifier of silver . . . [to] purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness” (Malachi 3:3)?

- When Christ comes the second time, will He find a body of people of whom it can honestly be said, “Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus”?

If the Lord wants to, He can accomplish the preparation of a people for the second coming of Christ. For the first time in human history, a divine announcement is made concerning a corporate body of people from “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people,” “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12, emphasis supplied). Before the grueling inspection of the unfallen universe, they pass the test. The Lord is honored in them. And the next event is His coming (verse 14).

To say that these saints don't really keep the commandments, but God pretends that they do, is to violate the context of the three angels' messages.

Heaven declares these people to be “virgins. . . . They . . . follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. . . . In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (verses 4, 5). They “stand where it can be said of us by the Lord, to the universe, ‘Here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.’ And it will be a fact, not merely because He says it, but He will say it because it is a fact.”<sup>8</sup>

We know they are sinful by nature, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). But in order for this pronouncement to make any sense, the faith of Jesus must have “worked,” and they must have ceased to continue giving in to Satan through the clamors of their sinful flesh or nature. *They have overcome even as Christ overcame.* Revelation 3:21. They don't have “holy flesh,” but they have a holy character, and righteousness is imparted to them. To try to insert this prophetic glimpse of an overcoming people into the post-Second Advent future is to violate the context. Here are “them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name” Revelation 15:2. This same group as having gotten the victory *before* the close of human probation.

\* Is there not a very unique cleansing of the hearts of God's people, if not individually at least collectively in a corporate sense: “The people were not yet ready to meet their Lord. . . . As they should by faith follow their high Priest in His ministrations

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<sup>8</sup> A. T. Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1897, p.279.

there, new duties would be revealed.” “Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified. . [Then] the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing” (GC 424, 425).

Has there ever been a previous time when a community of God’s people were prepared to live in the sight of a holy God without a mediator? Is this not a most unique experience involving a correspondingly unique heart preparation? “Moral cleansing” may not be the right word to denote this experience; but surely it has to do with spiritual, heart cleansing, does it not? Could it have to do with that “hidden selfishness” that is implied to be the taproot of our difficulty (GC L8)?

Is it reasonable to understand that the spiritual work to be done in the hearts of God’s people, is a work parallel to and consistent with the cleansing of the sanctuary, is a deeper work of repentance for that “hidden selfishness” than has taken place before? Is not the obedience to the commandments of God noted in Rev. 12:17 and 14:12 in reality an experience of “*agape*” fulfilling the law (Rom. 13:10) in the hearts of God’s people, thus constituting a preparation for the coming of the Lord?

It seems to me that it is our duty to arouse our people to seek for this experience of truly Christlike love in the heart, which experience will surely be unique in history so far as the congregation of Israel collectively are concerned, and is long overdue.

The fundamental premise of Ellen White’s counsels [re 1888] is that the message was unique, it was to prepare a people for meeting the final issues of the mark of the beast, living in the time of trouble without an intercessor, and experiencing translation at the coming of the Lord not death. Countless multitudes since the apostles have prepared for death, and have appreciated the atonement as best they could for their day. But there seems no way that we can evade the fundamental Adventist reality—that preparation for the coming of the Lord requires a more mature development of faith than has hitherto been realized by any *generation* God’s people (this is not to deny some few individuals “in every generation” as exceptions).

Therefore, there must remain a greater comprehension of the “length, breadth, depth and height” of the *agape* of Christ than has been realized by previous generations, sincere as they were, “God having provided something better for us” (Heb. 11:40). Sin has abounded; therefore grace must much more abound.

The answer is not a more rigid works program. Neither is it a fear-oriented spiritual terrorism—straighten up or else face the plagues. We’ve heard that for decades, too. Neither will it help any longer to anaesthetize our spiritual nerve, blocking out the Holy Spirit’s painful conviction that something is terribly wrong. Jeremiah reproves the false shepherds who tell the people that “all’s well, all’s well, when all is not well” (Jer. 6:14, Moffatt).

The Bible says that the answer is a special message of much more abounding grace, a message that has the power built into it that delivers from the addiction of continued sin, self-centeredness, and worldliness. Rightly understood, “the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God to salvation” here and now, salvation *from* sin (Rom. 1:16). And the message of the three angels about “the hour of God’s judgment” has that power inherent within it, for it is to produce a people who truly (not supposedly) “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” They “are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14:12, 5).

By supplying a wholly Christ-centered motivation, the third angel’s message in verity accomplishes what has never been accomplished by any generation of saints in history. “All these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Heb. 11:39, 40). A far clearer understanding of the message must come when “another angel,” a fourth, comes “down from heaven having great authority” so that the earth can be “illuminated with his glory” (Rev. 18:1).

Only then can “another voice from heaven” speak with heart-convincing authority to the millions of honest souls in “Babylon,” “Come out of her, My people” (verse 4). They will respond, in numbers far beyond our present comprehension. Once the great court case is settled and God has clearly won His case, the gospel commission will be quickly finished.

When will such a message come? The proper question is not in the future but past tense. Not when *will* it come, but when *did* it come?

According to Ellen White, its “beginning” came in the [1888] message of Christ’s righteousness. Only God, not the angels, knows when Christ will come. Consider then how a century ago they hoped for the final victory in the crisis in the government of God, and how disappointed they were that His people on earth “in a great degree” rejected that “most precious message” (*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 234, 235; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 91). Untold suffering has been the result for billions of people. And no human mind can imagine the suffering that has accrued to the heart of God.

Ellen White recognized a profound insight during the 1888 era: “Something great and decisive is to take place, and that right early. If any delay, the character of God and His throne will be compromised” (*General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 73). There has been a delay of over a century: the crisis could not be more serious.

Can we be content to be indifferent? Is it enough to remain little children in understanding and experience, willing for more decades to grind by into another millennium while these great issues remain unresolved?

Charlotte Elliott sensed this need when she wrote “Just As I Am” in 1834. A helpless invalid, she felt depressed at her inability to “do anything” to help in the cause of God. She felt bitter, alienated, unhappy. Left alone one day at home in her misery, she remembered the counsel a sympathetic pastor

had given her years before: “Come to Jesus just as you are; He will not cast you out!” So, on that day of lonely discouragement she wrote the words: “Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind [Rev. 3:17?]; Sight, riches, healing of the mind, Yes, all I need, in Thee to find, O Lamb of God I come.” She found her Divine Psychiatrist! And the “healing of her mind” was permanent—the start of a lifetime of joyous service for Jesus. Let her faith inspire you to seek, better—to receive, that healing from Him! Charlotte did more to bless the world with that little poem than if she had been in perfect health all her life and kept on writing funny verses, being the life of the party, as she had been doing.