

A HEART-CLEANSING INVESTIGATION¹

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Millions of people around the world are longing for the second coming of Christ. They realize that this world is the Titanic facing an iceberg. "Lord, save us!" is the cry of many.

But few realize what must happen before Christ can return. Jesus' words in Matthew 24:14 remind us that God is fair and merciful; it would not be just for Jesus to return until all have had the privilege of hearing the gospel message that alone can prepare them for His coming: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." And Rev. 14:6-12 tells of three angels who proclaim the "everlasting gospel" to every nation, kindred, tongue and people," symbolizing the work of the church to whom Christ has entrusted the mission of proclaiming the Good News of His salvation.

Rev. 18 describes the work of "another angel," a fourth, who joins the three "with great power, and the earth was lightened with his glory." Then will come the final warning, the final proclamation of the gospel that will make possible a final judgment, so that Jesus can return.

But before the church can be empowered to proclaim such a message, there must come the blessing of the latter rain outpouring of the Holy Spirit ("and when He is come, He will reprove the

world of sin," John 16:8). He will give the final gift of repentance.

The sanctuary in heaven cannot be cleansed of sin until our hearts on earth are cleansed by the work of the Holy Spirit. Just knowing the sanctuary cleansing started in 1844 according to Bible prophecy (Dan. 8:14) is not enough. So let's make the cleansing of the sanctuary practical on a level that we can understand today. Here is what the investigative judgment means for you on a day-to-day experience.

Is the Holy Spirit our Friend? You say, Yes, of course; but think: Jesus says that His first work is to "reprove the world of sin" (John 16:8). Is that fun? The doctor does a scientific test and convinces you that you have a lethal disease. You "feel" okay and it hasn't worried you, but he says you must do something drastic now. Fun? Is the doctor your "friend"?

Now suppose he has many, many patients all with a lethal disease they don't want to recognize; and suppose they all reject his counsel to do something, even though he is genuinely their friend. Wouldn't he be unhappy?

Is it impossible to conceive of a patient being concerned for the reputation or happiness of his physician? Patients are usually consumed by a me-first mind-set; few make appointments to inquire how the doctor is, and give HIM treatments. Few if any are concerned that he not be forced out of business.

The Good News is that the Holy Spirit is "reproving" or "convicting" "the world of sin." The

¹ Hebrews 10:19-22. 256 "Have Thine Own Way, Lord."

Bad News is that most who need help (His “patients”) reject His reproofs and convictions of sin, so that Satan hopes that in the end the Holy Spirit will be proven a failure. Satan’s last hope is that “the people of God” will reject His reproof and be involved in the general ruin coming on the earth.

There’s a better reason to listen to the Holy Spirit’s conviction of sin, than our own little personal salvation. He is Christ’s Vicar; His job is to “convict of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment,” the latter because “the prince of this world is condemned” (vss. 9-11). In listening, in receiving His reproof, in giving up the sin He convicts you of, you honor Christ in this last battle of the millennia-long great controversy. The Holy Spirit is your Friend; now be a friend to Him also. Say thanks to Him for His work.

When Christ was crucified, He left the planet. By the crime of Calvary, humanity had thrown Him out. But because “God [still] so loved the world,” He gave the Holy Spirit in His place, to “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). This was possible only for one thing: as He was being murdered, Christ had prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). The Father forgave the world, making possible the gift of the Holy Spirit to humanity. Paul says that “the powers that be [earthly government] are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1); in other words, you couldn’t drive home in comparative safety today unless the Holy Spirit were in the world restraining the evil that ferments

in the hearts of all who are at “enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7; Rev. 7:1-3).

But now . . . when humanity finally agrees to crucify and exile the Holy Spirit; then what?

HOW CAN WE KNOW THAT WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?

There is a great Enemy who wants to mislead us. In the last great day, multitudes will be surprised to hear Jesus say, “I never knew you!” They will protest, “We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Luke 13:26, 27).

What went wrong? These people had trusted to an ecstatic experience, but they had been deceived. Mere emotion or ecstasy can often be produced by a “high” of drug abuse, or by dancing and beating of drums but that may not be the reception of the true Holy Spirit of Jesus. He asks, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Jesus has no use for false assumptions or hypocrisy. He told His disciples, “Whoever loves me will *obey my teaching*. My Father will love him, and my Father and I will come to him and live with him” (John 14:23, GNB). We had better be sure of the truth. To be self-deceived here will be tragic.

John urges us, “My dear friends, do not believe all who claim to have the Spirit but test them to find out if the spirit they have comes from God. For many false prophets have gone out everywhere. This is how you will be able to know whether it is God’s

Spirit: anyone who acknowledges that Jesus Christ came as a human being [*in the flesh*, Greek] has the Spirit who comes from God. But anyone who denies this about Jesus does not have the Spirit from God” (1 John 4:1-3, GNB).

In other words, there is a true Holy Spirit, and there is a clever counterfeit. We must distinguish them. The true one brings Jesus close to us, and He motivates us to obey His commandments. The counterfeit promotes ecstasy of feeling, motivating to disobedience to His law. Jesus told His disciples how we can for sure recognize the Gift of the true Holy Spirit: “If I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:7, 8).

Therefore the first work of the Holy Spirit of Jesus is not to flatter us, or even to make us feel comfortable like an aspirin pill masks our pain. If there is something wrong in one’s body, an aspirin could be dangerous in that it would deceive one into thinking all is well when he has a serious problem that requires treatment or surgery. The Holy Spirit puts His finger painfully on the *sin* which is deep within our heart, and makes us conscious of it. Without the Holy Spirit, it is impossible that any of us can have that welcome, healing conviction of sin because our spiritual nerves are anaesthetized by sin, and we cannot feel its pain. “Thou knowest not” your true condition, Jesus says to us (Rev. 3:17). This is because we do not know, do not feel, the reality of our true undoneness. But the Holy Spirit

convicts us of our “enmity against God” which is the root of sin (Rom. 8:7).

The bottom-line sin of all mankind is that enmity that manifested itself in the murder of the Son of God. All other sins stem from that root. On the day of Pentecost the apostles honestly told this truth to the people: “Know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made Lord and Messiah!” When the people heard this, they were deeply troubled and said to Peter and the other apostles, “What shall we do, brothers?” (Acts 2:36, 37). *That was the true conviction of sin.*

THE WHOLE WORLD IS ALIKE GUILTY

It is not only the actual Jews and Romans who crucified Him, who share this bottom-line guilt. It includes all of humanity, for all men are one person before God. “The whole world [is] under God’s judgment” (Rom. 3:19, GNB). Before the Holy Spirit convicts us, we are not aware of this; we foolishly think we are fine; we are even proud of ourselves, of our “spirituality.” We may talk glibly about sin and use the word *papa* (daddy), but our natural mind is satisfied to regard sin as merely a mistake that deprives us of some advantage, like breaking a leg. We do not realize and abhor the deep-seated enmity against God, the selfishness of the soul. In fact, our blindness is hopeless, except for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit minister a deep conviction of sin to our proud, cold, self-satisfied hearts? The answer is: by the revelation of the *agape* of Christ at His cross, in the same way that

He ministered that conviction to the people at Pentecost.

We may wash a white dress or shirt and think we have it clean and white, and hang it out to dry. But if a snowfall comes, what we thought was “white” appears as a dingy gray in comparison. Isaiah thought he was quite a good person and was satisfied with himself until he saw a vision of God’s holiness. Then he cried out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; and because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

Until that gift of the Holy Spirit is received, we will never desire a genuine conversion of heart. We will still consider ourselves “good.” Speaking of proud, self-satisfied people Jesus remarked, “They that be whole need not a physician” (Matt. 9:12). The only people He came to heal are those that know themselves “sick.” The only people He came to feed are those who are “hungry.” The only ones to whom He can give a drink of the water of life are those who are “thirsty.” No one can be proud, and be truly wise. Nor can one be satisfied with himself, and be wise. When we are full of self-sufficiency we haven’t even begun yet to *live*; we merely *exist* in a fool’s paradise.

The vision of the cross of Jesus ministers eternal life to us today if we will only receive it humbly. There we see that we have no righteousness of our own; it is 100% imputed from Christ. Our blind eyes are opened, and we see how naked we are in His

presence. Here is how someone who understood the truth prayed for us:

“I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in *agape*, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the *agape* of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God (Paul, in Eph. 3:14-19).

The very heart of the Good News of Jesus is the grand dimensions of this *agape* love, the most glorious reality that we can know:

“I may be able to speak the languages of men and even of angels, but if I have no *agape*, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith to move mountains but if I have no *agape*, I am nothing. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burnt but if I have no *agape*, this does me no good” (1 Cor. 13:1-3, GNB).

It means that we can say No! to every temptation, within or without, and Yes! to the Holy Spirit.

It means that we can truly become obedient to the law of God, so we can say with Christ, “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8).

It does not mean pristine perfection of the flesh. Perhaps even Jesus as a carpenter sometimes missed the nail with His hammer and dented the wood instead. It would be foolish to define that as

sin. Sin has to do with the will, with choice. Note these verbs of volition: “The sin of evil-speaking begins with the *cherishing* of evil thoughts. . . . An impure thought *tolerated*, an unholy desire *cherished*, and the soul is contaminated, its integrity compromised. . . . If we would not *commit* sin, we must shun its very beginnings. Every emotion and desire must be *held in subjection* to reason and conscience. Every unholy thought must be instantly *repelled*. . . . No man can be *forced* to transgress. His own *consent* must be first gained; the soul must *purpose* the sinful act before passion can *dominate* over reason or iniquity *triumph* over conscience. Temptation, however strong, is never an excuse for sin.”²

Luther wisely said that we cannot keep the birds from flying over our heads, but we can stop them from building a nest in our hair. The Lord does not ask us to do more than our Savior did. He too was “in all points tempted like as we are,” but He chose constantly to say, “No!” to temptation: “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). “No!” to sinful self and all its clamors, no matter how insistent—this we may constantly *choose*, by His grace. And this is precisely what New Testament faith leads one to do. “To consider Christ continually and intelligently, just as He is, will transform one into a perfect Christian, for ‘by beholding we become changed.’”

Someone may ask, “Does this mean that God’s people will merely overcome all *known* sin? Or will

they overcome *all* sin, even that which is now unknown to them?”

Christ’s “final atonement” ministry will enable His people to overcome *all* sin, even that which is now unknown to them. The two greatest sins of all history were unknown sins: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), Jesus prayed concerning those who crucified Him; and Laodicea’s terrible sin of lukewarmness is due to a condition that Christ lays the church is not aware of (Rev. 3:17). The Lord can never translate *sin* into His eternal kingdom even if it is buried beneath the conscious surface, for if He did, such buried seeds would spring up anew and contaminate the universe.

The simple, practical ministry of the Lord, what He is doing, in this time of the cleansing of the sanctuary, is explained: “He gave himself for our sins; but . . . He will not take our sins although He bought them—without our *permission*. . . . The choice is forever with me as to whether I would rather have my sins than to have Him, isn’t it? . . . Then from this time henceforth can there be any hesitation about letting anything go that God shows is sin? Will you let it go when it is pointed out? When sin is pointed out to you, say, ‘I would rather have Christ than that.’ . . . Just tell the Lord, ‘Lord, I make the choice now; I make the trade; make thee my choice; it is gone, and I have something better.’ . . . Where in the world is the opportunity for any of us to get discouraged over our sins?”

“Some have done that very thing. But the Spirit of God brought up something they never saw before. The Spirit of God went deeper than it ever went

² *Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 177, emphasis supplied.

before, and revealed things they never saw before; and then, instead of thanking the Lord that that was so, and letting the whole wicked business go and thanking the Lord that they had ever so much more of Him than they ever had before, they began to get discouraged. They said, ‘Oh what am I going to do? My sins are so great.’ . . .

“If the Lord has brought up sins to us that we never thought of before, that only shows that He is going down to the depths, and He will reach the bottom at last; and when He finds the last thing that is unclean or impure, that is out of harmony with His will, and brings that up, and shows that to us, and we say, ‘I would rather have the Lord than that’—then the work is complete, and the seal of the living God can be fixed upon that character.

“Which would you rather have, the completeness, the perfect fullness, of Jesus Christ, or have less than that, with some of your sins covered up that you never know of? . . . How in the world can that seal of God, which is the impress of His perfect character revealed in us, be put upon us when there are sins about us? He cannot put the seal, the impress of His perfect character, upon us until he sees it there. And so He has got to dig down to the deep places we never dreamed of, because we cannot understand our hearts. . . . He will cleanse the heart, and bring up the last vestige of wickedness. Let Him go on, brethren; let Him keep on His searching work. . . .

“If the Lord should take away our sins without our knowing it, what good would it do us? That would simply be making machines of us. . . .

“We are always intelligent instruments—not like . . .

a pick or a shovel. . . . We are *intelligent* instruments. We will be used by the Lord at our own living choice.”³

This is what Paul speaks of when he says: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14).

Ellen White firmly supports this tremendous idea: “Your circumstances have served to bring new defects in your character to your notice; but nothing is revealed but that which was in you.” “His eye . . . searches every chamber of the mind, detecting all lurking self-deception.” “Undiscovered traits of character . . . must come to light.” “God . . . reveals their hidden defects, . . . the moral machinery of their own hearts.” “In the closing up of the great day of atonement . . . the remnant church . . . are fully conscious of the sinfulness of their lives.”

The sanctuary ministry is a type of removing previously unconscious sin from the heart; the Crucifixion of Christ is man’s deepest, unconscious sin; and the final judgment will disclose the hidden content of the unrepentant sinner’s *unconscious* mind.⁴

The relationship of this truth to the [1888] revelation of Christ’s righteousness is very close: “Christ was in

³ *Bulletin*, pp. 404, 405.

⁴ *Review and Herald*, August 6, 1889; *That I May Know Him*, p. 290; *Testimonies*, Vol. 7, pp. 210, 211; Vol. 4, p. 85; Vol. 5, pp. 472, 473; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 201, 202, 357, 358; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 58; *Review and Herald*, June 12, 1900; November 10, 1896.

the place, and He had *the nature*, of the whole human race. And in Him meet all the weaknesses of mankind, so that every man on the earth who can be tempted at all, finds in Jesus Christ power against that temptation. For every soul there is in Jesus Christ victory against all temptation, and relief from the power of it. That is the truth.⁵

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 to cast them into the depths of the sea. 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 1912.

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 downed passenger jet 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!

⁵ Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, p. 234.