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## The Mediator's Twofold Role

IT IS very difficult for men and women to grasp completely or to express adequately the awesome truths implied in the fact that Jesus was "Himself the priest, Himself the victim" in the plan of salvation (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25). Paul noted His role as victim when he wrote, "He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). He emphasized our Lord's function as priest when he said, "Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (verse 24).

As Sacrifice He provided the basis for man's salvation and made forgiveness possible; as High Priest He supplies the power to meet the conditions of salvation. Pardon and power—the "double cure."

The connection between these two phases of our Lord's priesthood is exactly what Satan wants obscured: "The archdeceiver hates the great truths that bring to view an atoning sacrifice and an all-powerful mediator."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 488. Misunderstanding these two vital phases has led Christians into such gross errors as widely divergent as predestination and universalism; it has misled millions by the false security of "once saved, always saved," and the "cheap grace" that inevitably follows, sooner or later, when justification is emphasized disproportionately over sanctification. Clarification occurs when we remember that justification is our title to heaven and sanctification, our fitness.

Without our Lord's death on the cross, His sacrificial atonement, there would be no salvation available for anyone (Romans 5:17-21; Acts 4:12). What He has done for men and women could never be matched by anything that we could do, no matter how long we lived, or how earnestly we tried. But the benefits of His sacrificial atonement made for all men (1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:4) apply only to those who *appropriate* His gift by faith (John 1:12; 3:16), that is, by accepting His gracious invitation to be His sons and daughters, and demonstrating their gratitude by trusting Him and obeying His will.

Our Lord's sacrificial atonement has been more generally understood by the Christian church than has His high-priestly intercession. In fact the fuller understanding of our Lord's work as mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) is a unique theo-

logical position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, especially in view of our emphasis on the investigative, or pre-Advent, judgment as the closing phase of His intercessory work.<sup>1</sup>

Satan is not displeased if church members emphasize the sacrificial atonement in sermons and song, if the benefits of what Christ has done *for us* are not appropriated *by* men and women, to be effective *in* men and women.

Therefore, we should look carefully at our Lord's intercessory, mediatorial role. His priesthood is the only link of living human relationship between God and man, the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). When He entered the heavenly sanctuary at His ascension, He "entered by His own blood, to shed upon His disciples the benefits of His atonement" (*Early Writings*, p. 260).

Clearly it must be kept in mind that "the intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross."—

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<sup>1</sup>"At-one-ment is an expression of the divine intention to destroy sin that ruptured the universe. Restoration to oneness was not consummated at the cross. The sin problem has not yet been finally resolved. The cross is the supreme act of God for man's redemption. But that is only one aspect of Christ's work toward the final at-one-ment. Reconciliation is effected by the living Christ. It is not something that happened two thousand years ago. At-one-ment is experienced only as men daily live a life of trust and dependence on Him. . . .

"It may be that the failure to grasp the whole work of our Lord, both on the cross and from the heavenly sanctuary, leaves man with less than a complete knowledge of all the truth the Bible reveals as to the full meaning of the atonement. . . . Both the triumph at the cross and the work of Christ as priest in heaven are the hope and pledge of final renewal and at-one-ment."—EDWARD HEPPENSTALL, in *Our High Priest*, pp. 29, 31.

*The Great Controversy*, p. 489. Why it is so essential to understand the purpose of our Lord's function as our high priest is the purpose of this study.

His intercessory role as our high priest is divided into two segments; the first, extending from His ascension to 1844, and the second, from 1844 to the close of probation. His work since 1844, while He continues to apply "the benefits of His mediation" (*ibid.*, p. 430) to those entitled to them, involves also the "last acts of His ministration in behalf of man—to perform the work of investigative judgement and to make an atonement for all who are shown to be entitled to its benefits" (*ibid.*, p. 480).

The questions are: What are the benefits that He has been applying since the cross by virtue of His sacrificial atonement? and What are Christ's "last acts of His ministration" involving "the work of investigative judgement"?

As intercessory mediator, Jesus fulfills two specific roles: (1) He silences the accusations of Satan "with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own" (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 472). His perfect life of obedience, sealed by a death that wrung the heart of God and exposed the awfulness, and the terrible end, of sin, became the basis of reconciliation and atonement between God and man. He earned the right to forgive us. (2) He is free to provide the power of grace to all those who choose to live overcoming lives. "He is the High Priest of the church, and He has a work to do which no other can perform. By His grace He is able to keep every man from transgression."—ELLEN G. WHITE, in *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 14, 1900. What more could any person ask for?

Seen in the light of the cosmic controversy between good and evil, between the central figures, Christ and Satan, our

Lord's intercessory, mediatorial work takes on great significance.<sup>2</sup> When Satan says that sinful men and women do not deserve forgiveness, that they are not entitled to eternal life any more than he is, that God has asked too much from His created beings and is therefore unreasonable—Jesus stands up in full view of watching worlds as the eternal answer to these questions.

What do angels and others see? They see a Man who faced Satan on his home court, who "had to be like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest" (Hebrews 2:17). They see a Man who conquered every temptation to serve Himself, proving that all men and women, with the same power available to them that He had, can live a victorious life. Our Lord's thirty-three years of perfect obedience to God's will, fighting "the battle as every child of humanity must fight it" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 49), silences every one of Satan's accusations. We have a Friend in court who has never lost a case.

In addition, Christ's powerful arm reaches out to all people who have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He has won the right to intercede in the lives of His followers. He breaks through the power with which Satan has held them captive, developing within His faithful followers a strengthened will to resist sinful tendencies. It is the same defense by which He Himself conquered sin.

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<sup>2</sup>"In the heavenly sanctuary all is vital, dynamic, genuine, and concerned with eternal issues. The sanctuary truth treats Satan as the real enemy, the forces of evil as real, in conflict with Christ in a war that affects every creature in the universe. Here alone the destinies of men are decided for weal or for woe. Here the realities of God's truth and purpose can be clearly seen."—HEPPENSTALL, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

This kind of intercession men and women need now, daily, and until Jesus returns. “Everyone who will break from the slavery and service of Satan, and will stand under the blood-stained banner of Prince Immanuel will be kept by Christ’s intercessions. Christ, as our Mediator, at the right hand of the Father, ever keeps us in view, for it is as necessary that He should keep us by His intercessions as that He should redeem us with His blood. If He lets go His hold of us for one moment, Satan stands ready to destroy. Those purchased by His blood, He now keeps by His intercession.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Romans 8:34, p. 1078.

Here, in the second role of the Mediator (that of providing sustaining grace to keep from sinning) rests the hope of every Christian. Through what He has done *for us*, Jesus will do His part in silencing the accusations of the accuser. But He cannot silence the accusations if we do not give Him permission to do His work *in us*. John’s words are simple and emphatic: “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, K.J.V.).

In commenting on this verse, Ellen White said, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. . . . We need to keep ever before us the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. That life-cleansing, life-sustaining blood, appropriated by living faith, is our hope. We need to grow in appreciation of its inestimable value, for it speaks for us only as we by faith claim its virtue, keeping the conscience clean and at peace with God.”—*Ibid.*, on 1 John 1:7, 9, p. 948.

Our Lord’s double role as mediator silences Satan’s charges, thus opening the door for the benefits of His life to

be given to men and women, and guarantees that sufficient power is available to keep every suppliant from sin.

This double role focuses on the heart of the plan of redemption, that God's purpose is to eradicate sin from the universe. This is not done by declaring it eradicated, or by sponging clean everyone's record with a mighty sweep of mercy. If this were so, the wisdom and justice of God Himself would be forever suspect; nothing would have been settled in the great controversy as to whether God was fair in setting up laws that no one could keep or whether He was just in irrevocably casting from heaven Satan and one third of the angels (see Revelation 12:3, 4).

The only way for sin to be destroyed while preserving both the sinner and God's justice is for the rebel to become a loyal son, willingly and habitually. Sin is a created being's clenched fist in the face of his Creator; sin is the creature distrusting God, deposing Him as the Lord of his life. The consequences of such rebellion are deadly, as the history of this dreary world reveals.

Only the sinner who confesses his sins *and* forsakes them "shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13, K.J.V.). God is not interested in destroying men and women; His first goal is to save them, to rescue them from their self-centeredness, to appeal to their better judgment, and to restore them to a happy, willing relationship of trust.

But one thing that God cannot overlook is sham. Nothing is settled if church members claim the name of Christ, but not His power; or claim His power, but not His character.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>"Lucifer desired God's power, but not His character."—ELLEN G. WHITE, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 435.

For this reason Ellen White emphasized a fundamental Biblical doctrine when she wrote, "The religion of Christ means more than the forgiveness of sin; it means taking away our sins, and filling the vacuum with the graces of the Holy Spirit."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 419, 420.<sup>4</sup>

The intercessory work of Jesus as our "all-powerful mediator" not only applies to supplicating sinners the forgiveness made possible by His atoning sacrifice, it also supplies the power through the Holy Spirit by which those sins are truly eradicated from the character of trusting, willing Christians.<sup>5</sup> This astounding thought can never be repeated enough; yet it is rarely heard throughout the pages of church history. It is the truth that Satan fears most.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"To be pardoned in the way that Christ pardons, is not only to be forgiven, but to be renewed in the spirit of our mind."—ELLEN G. WHITE in *Review and Herald*, August 19, 1890.

"The grace of Christ purifies while it pardons, and fits men for a holy heaven."—ELLEN G. WHITE, *That I May Know Him*, p. 336.

<sup>5</sup>"Through the perfect obedience of the Son of God, through the merits of his blood, and the power of his intercession, man may become a partaker of the divine nature."—ELLEN G. WHITE in *Signs of the Times*, July 6, 1888.

<sup>6</sup>Ellen White focused on these great issues that Satan wants obscured: "If those who hide and excuse their faults could see how Satan exults over them, how he taunts Christ and holy angels with their course, they would make haste to confess their sins and to put them away. Through defects in the character, Satan works to gain control of the whole mind, and he knows that if these defects are cherished, he will succeed. Therefore he is constantly seeking to deceive the followers of Christ with his fatal sophistry that it is impossible for them to overcome. But Jesus pleads in their behalf His wounded hands, His bruised body; and He declares to all who would follow Him, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' Let none, then, regard their defects as incurable. God



No wonder Satan is delighted when the sanctuary truths are mystified, obscured, or set aside as a boring subject. No wonder Ellen White wrote, "All need to become more intelligent in regard to the work of the atonement, which is going on in the sanctuary above. When this grand truth is seen and understood, those who hold it will work in harmony with Christ to prepare a people to stand in the great day of God, and their efforts will be successful."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 575.

This work of preparing "a people to stand in the great day of God" can be best understood in terms of the sanctuary doctrine. The task of making this clear to the world has been assigned to Seventh-day Adventists.

The following chapters will examine this more specifically.

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will give faith and grace to overcome them."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 489.