

24. The Cleansing of the Heavenly Sanctuary; the Judgment

JUST AS the earthly sanctuary required cleansing, so does the heavenly. But the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary involves the work of the final judgment. "As anciently the sins of the people were by faith placed upon the sin offering, and through its blood transferred, in figure, to the earthly sanctuary; so in the new covenant the sins of the repentant are by faith placed upon Christ, and transferred, in fact, to the heavenly sanctuary. And as the typical cleansing of the earthly was accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been polluted, so the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out, of the sins which are there recorded." - E. G. White, "The Great Controversy," pages 421, 422.

Evidently, it was the transferring of sin to the sanctuary of which Paul spoke, when he said: "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." I Tim. 5: 24.

Whenever a sinner accepts the sacrifice of Christ as the propitiation for his sins, and in contrition and penitence seeks God for forgiveness through the merits of Christ's shed blood, his sins are removed from him to the sanctuary in heaven. There Christ ministers in the sinner's behalf. He spreads His nail-scarred hands before the Father and pleads that because He Himself has paid the penalty, the sinner should go free. To this the Father agrees, and Christ lifts the burden of guilt from the sinner and substitutes His own righteousness instead. The sins are borne into the sanctuary, of which Christ is the priestly minister; and although they are forgiven, the record of them must remain until they are blotted out in the time of the judgment.

Those, therefore, who have through the years accepted Christ's death as a sacrifice for their sins, and who have in penitence turned from them, have by those acts been sending their sins into the heavenly sanctuary for judgment. The sins of the unrepentant sinner are never brought into the sanctuary, since it is only by confession and the offering of a substitutionary sacrifice that sins are admitted there. Christ deals only with the sins of the righteous in His priestly ministry. Confessed sins alone are placed under the, sacrificial blood. The sinner who utterly rejects Christ has no claim whatsoever upon the grace of God and has no part in His gracious efforts through His priestly ministry to deliver His people from the burden and bondage of sin.

Sin Taken Away

When sins are confessed and forgiven, are they entirely removed from the sinner? Yes, so far as the individual is concerned. But this does not mean that the sins are at the time finally disposed of. Christ removes them from the records in the books of heaven, but they are then charged against Him. He takes the responsibility for the sins and imputes His righteousness to the sinner. The record of sins still remains, only now they stand no longer charged to the one who committed them, but to Christ, his substitute. He has become the sin bearer (Num. 18:1); but the record of sin, now transferred to the sanctuary, must remain until the judgment.

Again it may be asked: "Why wait until the judgment to blot out and make an end of confessed sins? Why should they not be immediately disposed of?" We answer: "There must first be an investigation of the records."

Let us illustrate: Take an individual who accepts Christ as his Savior and humbly confesses his sins to God. By these acts and by His acceptance his sins are transferred to the sanctuary. But they cannot at that time be blotted out. The final blotting out must wait until the end of his life or until probation closes for him. Why? Because he may not continue in the faith. Ezekiel declares that if the righteous man turns away from his righteousness, all the righteousness that he has done shall not be remembered. See Eze. 33: 12, 13. If the forgiven sinner later forsakes God and repudiates his former repentance, all his past sins will be imputed to him again. Jesus will not plead for the unrepentant backslider in the final judgment; for although his sins were once removed, he has not remained faithful, and Christ no longer ministers in his behalf. Of this class the Lord declares: "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into My lips." Ps. 16: 4.

Thus, before the Lord can blot out the sins from the record books, a very careful examination has to be made to see Whether those who accepted Christ are still worthy. "Be thou faithful unto death," says Jesus, "and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev. 2: 10. It is not the beginning of the race that gives assurance of the crown of life through the final blotting out of sin. It is the successful finishing of that race.

From these considerations it is clear that before the record of sins-even of the righteous-can be

closed, and the sanctuary cleansed by a final disposal of those sins, it is necessary that there be an examination of the books of record to ascertain who, through repentance of sin and continued faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are finally entitled to the benefits of His atonement.

A Work of Judgment

The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, therefore, involves a work of investigative judgment, just as was the case in the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary.

Fearful are the warnings that God has given throughout the ages, of the time when men would have to give an account of themselves to God: "For 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." 2 Cor. 5: 10. At that time the destiny of every soul will be determined. Just after the judgment, the rewards or punishments will be meted out.

If men were sent to their places of reward or punishment at death, then the judgment must have been going on for the past six thousand years, ever since sin first entered and men began to die. Untold millions would already be suffering the fate of the lost. But this is impossible, for the reason that a just God would never punish any man for his sins until the individual had first been properly tried and found guilty. Thus, it is clearly taught in the Scripture that there is to be a final judgment, in which all men must be tried, and that this judgment will be near the end of the world. The judgment does not come at death, but sometime after death. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Heb. 9: 27. Paul reasoned before the Roman governor Felix of a "judgment to come." Acts 24: 25. Just before the coming of Jesus, God will try in heaven's tribunal those who have lived upon the earth, so that it can be clearly determined what the reward of each shall be.

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works." Matt. 16:27.

The punishment of the wicked must wait for this coming judgment. The fire that is to destroy them will not be kindled until the judgment has taken place and the sentences are handed down. For--- the heavens and the earth, which are now.... are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." 2 Peter 3: 7. The judgment comes first. The fire in which sinners will meet their fate follows. The Apostle Peter states it thus: "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." 2 Peter 2: 9.

The Book of Life

The Bible states that God keeps a faithful record in heaven of the names of all His people upon earth. The book in which, these names are enrolled is called – "the Lamb's book of life." Thus, John the revelator tells that those who will finally enter the city of God are they who "are written in the Lamb's book of life." Rev. 21:27.

Paul declared of his fellow Christians that their names were written "in the book of life.", (Phil. 4: 3.) David declares that as a result of judgment there will be those whose names were once recorded in this wonderful record of God's earthly family who will be found unworthy at last, and whose names will finally be "blotted out of the book of the living." (Ps. 69: 27, 28.) Others there are, according to the beloved John, who will be adjudged "overcomers," of whom it is said, "He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels." Rev. 3:5.

In addition to the books containing the names of the righteous, God also has books of record, that are kept by the unerring hands of heavenly angels. In these books are exact transcripts, faithful records, of each life. Of this the prophet, Malachi says: "A book of remembrance was written before Him." Mal. 3: 16. Again, in Isa. 65: 6, God reproves His people for their iniquities, and He declares to them: "Behold, it is written before Me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom."

When God, speaking through Moses, chided His people for their disloyalty to Him, He said:

"Is not this laid up in store with Me, and sealed up among My treasures? To Me belongs vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone." Deut. 32:34-36.

From these record books the righteous will be judged. By what is written in these books the Lord will determine who have remained steadfast in their faith in Christ and in following Him. Those who have been “faithful unto death” will be given “a crown of life.” Their names will be retained in the book of life, and they will be sealed for heaven.

“He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches.” Rev. 3:5,6.

The Books of Record

The sins, though forgiven when confession was made, are still found in the books of record. These now are blotted out, and final disposal of them is made. Those, on the other hand, who have become careless and have turned back from following Christ will have their entire record of sin turned back upon them, and their names will be blotted from “the book of the living.” This startling truth is forcibly set forth in Hebrews, where it is declared:

“For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongs unto Me, I will recompense, says-the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Heb. 10: 26-31.

These persons, though once enlightened and having tasted the good Word of God, have fallen away and by worldliness and sin have crucified the Son of God afresh. See Heb. 6: 4-6. The investigation of the books of record in heaven is graphically described by John the revelator:

“I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” Rev. 20: 12.

It is clearly stated in the Scriptures that the blotting out of sins is to take place just before the return of Jesus. Thus Peter declares:

“Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3: 19-21.

Thus, the blotting out of sin will take place just before Jesus comes who brings about the “restitution of all things.” It will be accomplished in the very last days of the world's history. After this event comes the day of rewards.

The mere fact that one at sometime in life has become a Christian and has united with the church is no guaranty of his final salvation. The doctrine of “once in grace, always in grace” will not do. There are thousands who start well, but who “cast away” their “confidence” (Heb. 10: 3 5), and who in the final judgment will be “weighed, and found wanting.”

Now this work of judgment-the searching of the records and the blotting out of sin-is a part of the work of cleansing the sanctuary in heaven. In fact, its cleansing can be accomplished only as decisions are reached in each case and final disposal made of the record of the sins of each individual. It is self-evident that no final removal of the sin from any individual would be possible until his record had been thoroughly searched and a decision reached as to his final relationship to Christ and the plan of redemption.

When this work of searching and cleansing is completed, probation will close, and the work of the gospel will end. At that time Christ's priestly ministry in behalf of sinners will cease, and a

mighty fiat will go forth from the throne that will settle the destiny of every soul.

“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” Rev. 22:11,12.

Two Phases of Judgment

The work of judgment has two phases. First comes the trying of the case—the searching of the records, the hearing of the witnesses, and the pronouncing of the sentence. Then comes the work of execution. The first is investigative; the other, executive.

The first phase of the judgment begins simultaneously with the work of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary; the other takes place subsequent to the close of probation and in connection with Christ's coming. When the investigative phase of the judgment begins, it begins with those who have at sometime in life accepted the plan of salvation and have been numbered with the household of God. Thus Peter declares: “The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” I Peter 4:17.

The first phase of the judgment work—the investigation of the records of the righteous—is to be carried on while people are still living upon the earth, and while the call to repentance is still being sounded throughout the nations. Thus John declares:

“I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” Rev. 14: 6, 7.

This work must necessarily all be done before Jesus comes the second time to the earth. At His coming He will bring men's rewards with Him. (Rev. 22: 12.) At that time He will receive His people unto Himself. (John 14: 1-3.) Naturally, it will have to be decided beforehand just who are to be numbered with the redeemed and who are to be “cast out.” Every man's case will have been settled for weal or woe. The unrepentant wicked who have never accepted the plan of salvation, having no claim whatsoever upon God's mercy, are already adjudged to be lost. In the investigative judgment the tares have been separated from the wheat in the household of God. The way is thus prepared for the final disposition of sin.

Satan, the Scapegoat

Just as in the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary the high priest came forth bearing the sins of his people for which atonement had been made, and placed them upon the head of the scapegoat, so at the close of the investigative judgment in heaven, Christ, the High Priest, will lay aside His priestly garments, will garb Himself in kingly attire, and will come forth from the heavenly sanctuary bearing the sins of His redeemed people. He will roll them back upon the head of Satan, the great instigator of all evil, who is primarily responsible for all transgression the blood of Christ has covered. The psalmist declared that when God judges the righteous, He will be angry with him who led His people to sin.

“He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordains his arrows against the persecutors. Behold, he travailed with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.” Ps. 7: 13-16.

Just as the scapegoat was led away from the camp of Israel and the habitation of man into a desolate wilderness place to perish, so will Satan be cast into the “bottomless pit” (Rev. 20: 1-3), finally to be consigned to the lake of fire and brimstone, prepared for him and his followers, where he will have to suffer sin's utmost penalty before he finally perishes in the flames. It is in this manner that the sanctuary will be cleansed, and Christ our High Priest will make an end of sin.

With these considerations before us, we are led to inquire earnestly: When is the heavenly sanctuary to be cleansed, and when does the judgment work begin? We shall consider this phase of the subject in the next chapter.

When Jesus shall gather the nations,
Before Him at last to appear,
Then how shall we stand in the judgment,
When summoned our sentence to hear?

Shall we hear, from the lips of the Savior,
The words "Faithful servant, well done,"
Or trembling with fear and with anguish,
Be banished away from His throne?

He will smile when He looks on His children,
And sees on the ransomed His seal;
He will clothe them in heavenly beauty,
As low at His footstool they kneel.

Then let us be watching and waiting,
With lamps burning steady and bright;
When the Bridegroom shall call to the wedding
O may we be ready for flight!
HARRIET B. M'KEEVER.