

Atonement and the Cross of Christ

The Benefits of Christ's Atoning Sacrifice

Lesson #11 for December 13, 2008

Scriptures: Job 1&2; Zechariah 3:1-5; Daniel 7:9-13; John 16:25-27; Romans 8:34-39; 1 Corinthians 15:16-18; Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 1:16,17; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Peter 3:21,22; 1 John 1:9; *Prophets and Kings* pp. 582-592; *Great Controversy* pp. 479-491.

1. This lesson is about what Christ is doing now in the "heavenly sanctuary."
2. God has been waiting almost 2000 years since the death of Christ. What is He waiting for? What is He doing while He is waiting? Most Seventh-day Adventists believe that a change took place in Christ's ministry in 1844. What actually changed? Is Jesus doing something now that He was not doing before? Is He still also doing the things that He was doing before? We need to understand that the pre-advent judgment which began in 1844 is a change in activity for God and not a change in some kind of "geography." Christ did not "move" geographically into a new section of heaven called the "most holy place" to be nearer His Father! He just began the final preparations for the second coming. Jesus is God; and where God is already is a "most holy place"!
3. The work which Jesus is doing now is described as "priestly work" and "kingly work." What do those names imply? Do you believe that He is your High Priest and King? What does that really mean? The high priest represented the people to God, and the king represented the people in all political arenas. Thus, these two top officials represented the nation of Israel.
4. If Christ fully and completely answered the Devil's questions and accusations by His life and death, what more does He need to do? Does what He is doing now have anything to do with answering questions in the great controversy? If so, what questions still remain?

Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour's cross; **for though they did not then understand all**, [did they still have questions?] they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. Christ Himself fully comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary. To all these He looked forward when upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished." {DA 764.4}

5. Do you believe that Christ fully answered all of Satan's questions and accusations by His life and death almost 2000 years ago? If not, what question(s) still remain(s)? Did it still need to be demonstrated that sin of itself is destructive? Did He meet all the requirements necessary for forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life for His children? Seventh-day Adventists who believe sincerely in the great controversy have tended to focus on the death of Christ as an answer to Satan's accusations and questions. Other Protestant Christian groups have tended to focus on the resurrection as our hope of eternal life. In your mind which is more important? The death of Christ? Or His resurrection? (1 Corinthians 15:16-19) Does the story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus tell us that these two events are inseparably connected, and, in turn, that they are connected to all that is recorded in the Old Testament? (Luke 24:13-35)
6. Read Job 1:6; 2:1; Romans 8:34-39; Zechariah 3:1-5; 1 Peter 3:21, 22; John 16:23-28. Are these verses contradictory? Is Jesus pleading for us, or not? To whom is He pleading? Who is for us, and who is against us? After reading these texts, do you think you could clearly explain what Jesus is doing now in the heavenly sanctuary, and why? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* (Sunday, December 7) suggests:

His resurrection and ascension mean, first, that He finished the work He came to do

on earth (*John 17:4,5; 19:30*). Second, through His resurrection and ascension, Christ permanently united to God those who will put their faith in His sacrificial death. . . . Third, the ascension of Christ also testifies that His defeat of evil powers on the cross was final. . . . (*1 Pet. 3:22, NIV; see also Heb. 10:12,13*).

But are these points clear in your mind? Does this mean that God has finished everything He needs to do? If so, what is He waiting for now? Is God allowing all this suffering to go on for no good reason?

7. Read Hebrews 7:25, our memory verse for this week. What do you think this verse means? What is it about Christ's intercession that makes it possible for Him to save completely those who "come to God through Him"? In light of the verses above, (especially Zechariah 3:1-5 and John 16:25-27) what case does Jesus need to make on our behalf? Does He need to convince the Father? The angels? The Devil? Who is accusing us? Does the Father need to be placated? Appeased? Propitiated? Does the Father's mind need to be changed? Do our minds need to be changed? Do the angel's minds need to be changed? Who needs to hear the accusations of Satan being refuted?

The authors of the lesson study guide seem to express that the intercession or mediation of Christ "with" or "to" the Father is the essential key to our salvation. So they have gone through the Bible in this lesson and picked out all the verses that seem to support that view. Those of us who take a different approach to understanding the mediation of Christ have a different set of verses that we tend to turn to. But in this lesson, I will try to look at all of "their verses" to see how we can or should understand those particular Bible verses.

There are three approaches, or "moral levels" of thinking to salvation that have generally been accepted down through the generations:

Level A) Salvation is all about what God can do for me!

Level B) Salvation is all about what God can do for our group. (Me and my friends who think like me.) This approach tends to take a "legal explanation" of salvation. Someone has to deal with the "legal requirements."

Level C) Salvation is all about God and answering Satan's accusations and questions. If God cannot be shown to be right, then salvation has no meaning. My salvation is important but only secondary.

8. Do we need an Intercessor and Mediator between us and God? Or do we need to be "healed"? If so, why? If not, why not? Does God need to be persuaded to love us? Do we need to be persuaded to trust Him? Did the disciples need someone between them and Jesus? Does your understanding of what Jesus is doing now in the heavenly sanctuary make you want to witness about Him to others?
9. The Scriptures state very plainly that both Christ and the Holy Spirit are mediating on our behalf. Compare John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7,23-27; **Romans 8:26,27**; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 1:9; 2:1,2; 4:10. In what ways do the mediation of Christ and/or the Holy Spirit build on the work He did when He was here on earth? Are we to believe that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are "pleading with the Father" to forgive us? Do we have two Members of the Godhead pleading with the third Member of the Godhead to forgive us? Was that going on in the times of the Old Testament? Or did Jesus need to wait until He had "His blood" to use to plead with? Is Jesus begging the Father to forgive us, or is He "pleading" in the same way that a lawyer "pleads" his case by presenting the evidence?

In Romans Paul discusses the plan of salvation. After explaining it in various ways in Romans 1-8, Paul concludes that all three Members of the Godhead are on our side. What more could we ask for? Who can possibly challenge all three Members of Godhead on this! Don't you Jews try to tell God how He can run His government or to whom He can offer salvation.

Remember that in the book of Romans, God was speaking to people who were relatively immature in spiritual matters. We wish He would talk to us at “level C” above, but mostly, He has had to speak to humans at “level A,” where they are!

10. Read also Hebrews 2:17,18 and 4:14-16. These verses seem to suggest that Christ is involved in an ongoing mediatorial and intercessory work. They seem to suggest that Jesus understands us better than the Father because He came down and lived His life as a human being. So, when the Father has questions about our behavior, Jesus can say something like, “Father, I realize that You may have trouble understanding this, but I have been down there, and I know how hard it is for those people to do what is right. Accept My word for it. Accept My blood on their behalf.” And the Father might respond, “Well, I cannot see it, but if you say so, I trust your judgment, so I will accept them if You say I should.” Are we to be admitted to heaven over the Father’s objections? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* (Monday, December 8) referring to Hebrews 2:17 says:

This means that although on the cross Christ obtained salvation for all, through His work as Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary He is applying the benefits of the Cross to those who believe in Him. Without the mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, the atoning effectiveness and power of the Cross would not be available to sinners.

What does this imply to you? Is it comforting to know that “Christ is mediating God’s forgiveness on your behalf in heaven?” (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Monday, December 8; Ephesians 4:32) Who in heaven needs to be persuaded? Is God just talking to Himself? Doesn’t God know everything already?

11. We are told repeatedly that Christ is now at God’s right hand “pleading” on our behalf. (Acts 5:31; Ephesians 1:3; 2:18; Hebrews 1:2; 4:16; 13:20, 21) Why, then did Jesus in His final hours with the disciples say that He does not need to plead with the Father on our behalf? (John 16:25-27) Did Jesus need to request the Father to send us the Holy Spirit? (John 14:16,17) Is Jesus “pleading” in the sense that a lawyer “pleads” or presents his case, or is He “begging” the Father to forgive us?
12. Read Revelation 8:1-5. Are these words symbolic language suggesting that Jesus must do everything possible to convince the Father to forgive us? If we consider Revelation 5:1-14, we discover that only the Lamb has the ability to open the seals. Does that have anything to do with His intercessory work?
13. There are several very important verses in Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, that seem to discuss what goes on in the councils of heaven. Read Job 1&2; Daniel 7:9-13; and Zechariah 1:1-5. Do these verses help to give us a better idea of what is going on in heaven right now? (See *Prophets and Kings* 582-592; *Great Controversy* 479-491)
14. Read John 3:35; Colossians 1:16,17; Hebrews 1:3. These verses suggest that Christ sustains the entire universe by His power.

Every pulsation of the heart is a rebound from the touch of the finger of God.

He watches over us by day, and under his wings we find shelter by night. His preserving care is over us, whether we wake or sleep. He is as a sentinel to guard us from Satan’s power, or we should be taken captive by him. Jesus is our constant friend. We are to look to him moment by moment, and by looking to him we are to live. (*RH*, December 2, 1890 par. 15)

Compare other words of Ellen G. White:

It is not to be supposed that a law is set in motion for the seed to work itself, that the leaf appears because it must do so of itself. God has laws that He has instituted, but they are only the servants through which He effects results. It is through the immediate agency of God that every tiny seed breaks through the earth and springs

into life. Every leaf grows, every flower blooms, by the power of God.

The physical organism of man is under the supervision of God, but it is not like a clock, which is set in operation, and must go of itself. The heart beats, pulse succeeds pulse, breath succeeds breath, but the entire being is under the supervision of God. "Ye are God's husbandry; ye are God's building." [1 Corinthians 3:9] In God we live, and move, and have our being. [Acts 17:28] Each heartbeat, each breath, is the inspiration of Him who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life—the inspiration of the ever-present God, the great I AM. (*RH*, November 8, 1898; *MM* 9.3)

In addition to pleading on our behalf in heaven, Christ and/or the Holy Spirit sustain our physical lives day by day.

15. What is Satan's role in the courts of heaven? (Revelation 12:7-12) Is it clear in your mind from the verses we have looked at this week that Satan is the accuser? That Christ speaks on our behalf? That the Father conducts His governmental business in "full disclosure"—open to the view and questioning of all the beings in the universe? Surely, we must recognize that neither Jesus, nor the Holy Spirit, nor the Father need to "learn anything more" about sin or about us as sinners. (Romans 3:23) With their omniscience they knew in advance exactly how we would behave. So the "investigative judgment" "cannot" be for Their benefit. Are the angels able to read our minds? No! Do they need to see the evidence for themselves? (*SC* 105) Yes! Read *Prophets and Kings*, Chapter 47, pp. 582-592 and *Great Controversy*, Chapter 28, pp. 479-491:

As Satan accused Joshua and his people, so in all ages he accuses those who seek the mercy and favor of God. He is "the accuser of our brethren, . . . which accused them before our God day and night." Revelation 12:10. **Over every soul that is rescued from the power of evil, and whose name is registered in the Lamb's book of life, the controversy is repeated.** Never is one received into the family of God without exciting the determined resistance of the enemy. But He who was the hope of Israel then, their defense, their justification and redemption, is the hope of the church today. {*PK* 585.2}

Then the Angel, who is Christ Himself, the Saviour of sinners, puts to silence the accuser of His people. . . . {*PK* 584.1}

Zechariah's vision of Joshua and the Angel applies with peculiar force to the experience of God's people in the closing scenes of the great day of atonement. {*PK* 587.2}

Satan accuses us; Christ defends us; the entire Godhead is working to save us! But God does not arbitrarily just "post" a list of those He is going to save. He allows any angel or any being from any other part of the universe to ask any question. That is called the "pre-advent" judgment. During the millennium, the righteous will be given the opportunity to look over God's work of judgment and decide for themselves if God was completely fair. By the third coming, after the panorama in the heavens where each individual sees the part he played in the great controversy, even Satan will be "on his knees" (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10,11) admitting that God did the best that it was possible to do to save everybody.

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