

DOES THE BLOOD OF CHRIST CLEANSE ONCE FOR ALL?

By
A. J. POLLOCK



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Does the Blood of Christ Cleanse *Once for All?*

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Does the Blood of Christ Cleanse ONCE FOR ALL ?

THE answer of Scripture is in the affirmative. It is certain that "the blood of Jesus Christ His [God's] Son cleanseth us [believers on the Lord Jesus Christ] from ALL sin" (1 John i. 7).

There are, however, two schools of interpretation of this well-known verse. One school teaches that the blood of Christ cleanses the believer once and for all from all sin, when he first receives Christ as his Saviour.

The other school teaches that all sin up to conversion is cleansed away when the believer first puts his trust in Christ, but that sins subsequent to conversion are cleansed away as they are confessed to God and forgiveness sought.

The writer heard this view expounded by the principal of a theological institute to a number of students, who were under training for Christian work in various parts of the world. He also heard a Christian worker speaking in the open-air tell his audience how the blood puts away the sinner's guilt the moment he truly believes on the Lord Jesus, and how the cleansing goes on day by day automatically, just as our eyes are cleansed night by night during the hours of sleep by fluid flowing over them.

This view is held largely in Christian circles. We believe it to be thoroughly unsound, and to dislocate

every part of the Gospel of God. To examine how this is so will help the reader to see that the precious blood of Christ cleanses once and for ever the believer on the Lord Jesus.

Those who hold this view point to the form of the verb: "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son **cleansETH** from all sin," and ask, Does not the form of the verb, "**cleansETH**" prove that the cleansing from all sin is continuous, and not once for all? We do not think so.

For instance, a professor of chemistry might hold up a phial containing deadly poison and say to his students, "This poison **killeTH**," or to put it in less archaic form, "This poison **kills**." The professor would be mightily astonished if his students gathered from his words that it was killing at that moment and continually killing day by day. He would explain that what he intended to convey was that the fluid in the phial was of a deadly **character**. He was indicating its **nature**.

Just in the same manner the blood of Christ "**cleansETH**," or cleanses, from ALL sin. That is its characteristic, its efficacy, its power. An examination of the context of 1 John i. 7 confirms this. The efficacy of the precious blood of Christ forms the basis for Christian fellowship. "If we walk in the light, as He [**God**] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Surely the basis of Christian fellowship is immutable and abiding, and that basis is the precious blood of the Redeemer that settles once and for all the whole question of sin.

But let us further prove the statement just made. The writings of John have a good many verbs ending with **eth** similar to "**cleansETH**." To examine a few of them will show that this form of the verb refers to what is characteristic, and does not carry the idea of an oft repeated act.

“I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd **givETH** His life for the sheep” (John x. 11). Here is the same form of the verb “**givETH**.” Does it mean an oft repeated act, or an act which **characterizes** the Giver, once and for all? We all know it means the latter.

“He that **comETH** from above is above all” (John iii. 31). This refers to our Lord. Does it mean an oft repeated act, or an act that **characterized** the One, who came, once and for all? We all know it means the latter.

“The Father **lovETH** the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. He that **believETH** on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that **believETH not** the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God **abidETH** on him” (John iii. 35, 36). Can it be said that the Father loves the Son, then ceases to do so, and again loves Him, again ceases to do so, and again loves Him—an oft-repeated act? To ask this question is to answer it. The passage states that the Father loves the Son **characteristically**, that is He always loves the Son, and never ceases to do so.

Similarly, does **believETH** mean an oft-repeated act, or is it an attitude of mind and soul towards the Lord, a **characteristic** relation to Him; that brings everlasting life as the believer’s possession through infinite grace, and as the result of the atoning sacrifice of our Lord? Surely believing is an act on the part of the sinner that brings him into the possession of eternal life once for all.

“To him that **workETH not**, but **believETH** on Him that **justifiETH** the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans iv. 5). Here we have three instances of the form of the verb ending in **ETH**. If we followed the reasoning of the school that teaches the oft-repeated application of the blood for cleansing we should have to explain the above verse in a way that would be manifestly absurd. We should have to **ex-**

plain that a person is contemplated who at one time is marked by not working for salvation, and then working for it, and then ceasing to work for it, and again working for it, and so on again and again ; of a person, who at one time believes, and then believes again and again, an oft-repeated act ; of God, who justifies the believing sinner again and again, and not once for all. This would be the despair of exegesis. On the contrary, how simple and obvious is the explanation, that a person is contemplated who is **characterized** by not working for salvation, but believing, and therefore is justified once and for all.

Well may we sing P. P. Bliss's beautiful hymn,

*"Once for all, O sinner, receive it ;
Once for all, O brother, believe it ;
Cling to the Cross, the burden will fall ;
Christ hath redeemed us ONCE FOR ALL."*

We could multiply these examples, but enough has been brought forward to prove that the form of the verb, "**cleansETH**" does not mean an oft-repeated act.

We will now proceed to show how the teaching that the precious blood of Christ is continually cleansing the Christian, when alas! sin comes into his life, is destructive of the very foundations of the Christian faith, little as its exponents realize this to be so.

For what is the position of the believer, who, having sinned, has to seek cleansing afresh by the precious blood of Christ? He is in exactly the same position in which he was when he first contemplated trusting the Saviour and seeking the efficacy of the precious blood. **He is in the position of being UNSAVED and needing salvation afresh.** It matters not if he has a lifetime of sin behind him, as he had when he first trusted Christ, or only **one** sin needing the cleansing efficacy of the precious blood, he is in the same condition, **unsaved.** This is serious, indeed, and leaves a saint in and out of salvation again and again.

When is he saved and when is he unsaved? Who can tell? Either this cleansing is automatic or consequent on repentance and confession. If automatic it needs no confession, and would be like the illustration the writer heard that the blood cleanseth as fluid cleanses the eye automatically when the person is asleep, a strange theory indeed. But if cleansing is the result only of repentance and confession; how many sins we believers are ignorant of, nay may even take a pride in, or one may sin and think so lightly about it as not to repent and confess, as for instance a display of temper, a thought of foolishness. If such happens and the saint does not repent and confess then he is, according to this teaching, not cleansed, and if he died in this condition he would be lost for ever. Surely such a theory is dishonouring to God and subversive of His precious Gospel.

But let us see how other aspects of the Gospel are dislocated by this strange theory.

We have been quoting the verb ending in **ETH**, such as **cleansETH**, **givETH**, **comETH**, **eatETH**, **drinkETH**, **lovETH**, **believETH**, etc., in the writings of the Apostle John. Let us take another example from the writings of Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

“David also **describETH** the blessedness of the man, unto whom God **imputETH** righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Romans iv. 6-8).

Here we read, “David **describETH.**” Is it an oft-repeated act or an action of David’s done once and for all? Surely the latter. Then when God **imputETH** righteousness without works, is this then an act done again and again? Yes, if the theory we have been considering is true; for according to it a sinner believing in Christ is accounted righteous—righteousness is im-

puted to him. Let him sin, and need a fresh application of the blood of Christ, and he is **UNrighteous**. On confession of that sin, he is again righteous, has righteousness again imputed to him. When is such an individual righteous, and when is he not? When is he a saved saint, and when an unsaved sinner? No, a thousand times, no! This is not the case. The teachers of this theory may not put the case so crudely as this, but this is exactly where their theory would land them. Thank God, He imputes righteousness to the believing sinner **ONCE AND FOR ALL**.

Again, the Apostle Paul writes, "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and **righteousness**, and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians i. 30). The Apostle Paul is writing to believers—believers not of a high order for he told them they were carnal, harbouring horrible sin in their midst, getting drunk at the Lord's supper, some teaching evil doctrine, yet the Apostle without reservation states of them that Christ is their righteousness. This could not be true if the precious blood of Christ did not cleanse once and for ever of **ALL** sin. It is not that the Apostle makes light of the sins of believers, as we shall see later on, but he knows the ground of the Gospel well, and the grace of God that meets our needs.

But it may be asked, How can sin be cleansed away **before** it is committed? In reply we may ask, How could the Apostle Paul write of our Lord as "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification" (Romans iv. 25)? Or how could the Apostle Peter write, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter ii. 24), when many of those they addressed were not even born, and therefore had committed no sin, when our Lord died? Take the cases of the writer and the reader. Our Lord died on the cross nearly two thousand years ago, and yet it is true He bore our sins in His own body on the tree

—sins borne and atoned for before ever they were committed. Just in the same manner the precious blood cleanses from **all** sin—such is its wonderful efficacy.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "By the which [God's] will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **ONCE FOR ALL** . . . For by one offering He hath perfected **for ever** them that are sanctified" (Hebrews x. 10, 14). Does this not support our contention that the precious blood of Christ cleanses the believing sinner **once and for all**? Is it likely the offering of the body of Jesus Christ should sanctify and perfect the believing sinner **once and for all**, and not cleanse him **once for all**?

Can a saint who needs a fresh application of the blood for his cleansing be accounted "perfected for ever"? Surely not! It is plain, too, this perfection does not mean sinless perfection, that is to say, a saint who is perfectly free of sin in thought, word and deed. It cannot mean this for our personal knowledge of ourselves as Christians contradict this. The righteousness the believer has is **imputed**. In the same manner this perfection relates to the standing of the believer before God on the ground of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. This is argued out in this chapter, ending up with the triumphant statement, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews x. 17). How can that be true if sins are imputed and remembered and the saint is called upon to obtain a fresh application of the blood? The whole testimony of the Gospel is clear and decisive that the precious blood of Christ cleanseth once and for all from all sin.

The whole argument of Hebrews x. is very conclusive. We read, "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers **once purged**

[cleansed] should have had no more conscience of sins" (Hebrews x. 1, 2).

In contrast with the Jewish oft-recurring sacrifices, our Lord has offered one sacrifice of infinite value for sins, and sat down at the right hand of God. Thus "the comers thereunto"; that is, believers on the Lord Jesus, are made perfect and **cleansed** once and for ever.

The idea of a continual application of the blood is akin to the Roman Catholic mass, where they deny the finished work of Christ on the cross, and impious man takes upon himself to offer a sacrifice week by week upon their altars, falsely claiming that they change bread and wine into the very body and blood of Christ. It has been known that the sacrificial priest has been poisoned and died in agonies before his duped congregation, when he drank of a poisoned chalice, proving the falsehood of the claim that he had changed the contents of the cup into the very blood of our Lord.

We now come to the constructive side of this pamphlet. We believe that what lies behind the theory of the continual application of the blood of Christ for cleansing, is failure to realize the place the "water" has in Scripture. They endeavour to make the "blood" do the cleansing which belongs to the "water", and thus they rob it of its wonderful efficacy.

That the "water" and the "blood" are scripturally presented as two cleansing agencies is set forth in that world-wide, popular hymn,

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
 Let me hide myself in Thee ;
 Let the water and the blood,
 From Thy riven side which flowed,
 Be of sin the double cure—
 Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

(A. M. TOPLADY.)

We read, "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood

and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record it true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (John xix. 34, 35). The solemn and full asseveration of what the Apostle John saw is very striking. The blood and water flowing from the side of a dead Christ was the proof of His death.

That blood and water have a symbolic meaning is very evident from the testimony of the same writer, "This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood" (1 John v. 6). Further he states, "There are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one" (1 John v. 8). It is in the understanding of these three witnesses that we shall be saved from these wrong notions as to the precious blood.

Evidently "blood" and "water" are two cleansing agencies in Scripture. Here are proof texts.

"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7); that is cleansing from the **GUILT** of sin.

"Christ . . . loved the church, and gave Himself for it: that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians v. 25, 26); that is from the **DEFILEMENT** of sin.

We certainly need cleansing from the **defilement** of sin, if, as Christians, we sin. Thank God, the guilt question is settled once and for ever by the atoning death of Christ, and when the sinner believes on Christ he is cleansed from **all** sin, justified, righteousness imputed once and for all, "perfected for ever," as to his standing before God.

It may be someone may say, Well, if we are saved and saved for ever, then we can do what we like. Will not such a doctrine lead to carelessness of walk? Such a question is anticipated in Scripture. The Apostle Paul asks the question, "What shall we say

then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Hear his indignant answer, "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans vi. 1, 2). He points to the believer's baptism as the symbol of having died to all that Christ died to, and the consequent walking in "newness of life."

In John xix. 34 we read of blood and water flowing from the side of a dead Christ; whereas in 1 John v. 6 it tells us Christ came by water and blood; thus reversing the order of the two. In the Gospel the fact is presented from its highest aspect, from God's side, from the viewpoint of atonement in all its breadth. The blood is evidently the foundation of all. Guilt must be met before defilement can be removed. In the Epistle the matter is presented from the side of the believer's experience and blessing.

Why then is the order in 1 John v. 8, "the Spirit the water and the blood"? Because when blessing comes to anyone of us the first step must be taken by God and that by His Spirit. It is no use applying "the water of the word" to the flesh. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John iii. 6). "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans viii. 7).

It reminds us of an apt illustration. A traveller got stranded in a remote cottage inhabited by peasants in Italy. He looked ruefully at the filthy floor, and was about to ask the woman of the house to clean it, when he noticed that it was a mud floor. He reflected that the application of hot water, soap and flannel, to a mud floor would only produce mud, so he refrained from making his request. Two things were necessary for a clean floor—(1) a **new** floor made of material capable of being cleaned; (2) periodic cleansing from time to time to keep it clean.

There are two things produced by "the water of the word," viz: (1) new birth answering to a new floor

in our illustration and (2) the application of "the water of the word" to our daily lives, awakening conscience as to ways that are not according to God, answering to the periodic cleansing of the floor.

These two things are illustrated in the consecration of the priests in connection with the Tabernacle in the wilderness. They were (1) washed all over ceremonially, answering to new birth; (2) in their daily ministration they had to use the brazen laver for washing their hands and feet to keep them in continual fitness for approaching God. We get this set forth in the following verses.

(1) "And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water" (Exod. xxix. 4). This answers to new birth as we shall presently explain.

(2) "Thou shalt make a laver of brass . . . and thou shalt put water therein. For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat" (Exodus xxx. 18, 19).

Then between the instructions for washing all over with water and the use of the brazen laver, we get the blood of the sin-offering (Exodus xxix. 13, 14); the burnt offering going up as a sweet savour to God; the ram of consecration. Notice the order in the type—water first, then blood, then water in the brazen laver.

Hebrews x. 22 gives these two things. "Let us draw near, with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience [the blood giving the worshipper a purged conscience], our bodies washed with pure water [answering to the new birth]."

Now it may be asked, How are the bodies of believers washed with pure water? It is evidently symbolic language. What then does it apply to? Scripture itself furnishes the answer.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, asking questions. As a man he must have been exemplary to have held the position of a ruler of the Jews, a master in Israel. Was his good life, as men say, sufficient for God's acceptance? How startled and surprised he must have been when our Lord made such a sweeping statement,—“Ye must be born again.” Good and excellent man as Nicodemus was, his heart was no better than the mud floor of our illustration. A new floor was needed; a new birth, a birth from above was necessary.

When Nicodemus asked how a man could be born again our Lord replied, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God” (John iii. 5).

Here we get our answer, **“BORN OF WATER and of the Spirit.”** It is a remarkable association of ideas—“water” and being “born.” So we see how the priests being consecrated, by being washed all over, answers to new birth. This is the only way for moral cleansing, cleansing from the defilement of sin; a nature given that answers to God's holy nature, so that we can live a life that is pleasing to God.

We know how ritualists affirm that water here is the water of baptism, and that thereby infants are made children of God, inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven; but this cannot be the meaning of the passage, for God's Word says, “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians iii. 26). Not by baptism but by faith; not infants unconscious of the meaning of the rite; but sinners led to put their trust in Christ. “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them which believe on His name: which were born, not of blood [not by heredity], nor of the will of the flesh [not by self-determination], nor of the will of man [not by a priest putting a few drops of water on the face of an unconscious infant] **but of God** [God's own sovereign act]” (John i. 12, 13).

The washing all over and the washing of the feet are brought together in John xiii. 9. When Peter, going from one extreme to another asked our Lord not only to wash his feet but also his hands and head, our Lord answered "He that is washed [the Greek word here used meaning: "**washed ALL OVER,**" answering to the ceremonial washing of the priests all over] needeth not save to wash [the Greek word used here means to wash a part, answering to the brazen laver] his feet, but is clean every whit" (John xiii. 10).

The Apostle John further points out that new birth is God's sovereign act, using His word to accomplish it. He uses the striking illustration, "*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit*" (John iii. 8).

Not only is propitiation, secured by the blood of Christ, necessary for our salvation, but we need **life**, a life suitable for God, a life that rises to Him and is happy in His presence. So we read (1) "God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might **LIVE** through Him . . . [and] to be the **PROPITIATION** for our sins" (1 John iv. 9, 10). Thus we get the double cleansing—"cleanse me from its [sin's] guilt and power."

What then is the position of the saint, who sins after conversion? If he is really founded in the truth of the gospel he knows that sin has been eternally cleansed away by the precious blood of Christ, that on the Cross our Lord bare our sins in His own body on the tree. And it is the knowledge of this that is the most potent element in his repentance. The believer has sinned. He does not lose his salvation, righteousness imputed to him is still true of him, justification is his, eternal life his possession, but he loses the **JOY** of his salvation. Even David, who sinned grievously in the case of Bath-sheba, did not cry, "Restore unto

me Thy salvation," but "Restore unto me the **joy** of Thy salvation" (Psalm li. 12). Communion is broken. Misery fills the heart.

What then is the course to be taken by the sinning saint? 1 John i. 9 instructs. We are not told to apply for a fresh cleansing by the blood of Christ, but we are told, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." How good it is for the repentant saint to get into the presence of God and own his sin, and receive the gracious cleansing He ministers.

And this is further made plain. What happens if a believer sins? We read, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John ii. 1). Our side, if we sin, is repentance and confession and forgiveness from the Father and communion restored. Our Lord's side is He takes the place of "An Advocate [One who comes alongside to help] with the Father." Note it does not say with God but with the Father, though God is the Father of course. It is a **family** affair, not a sinner coming to God for cleansing by blood; but the child by the ministration of the Advocate—our Lord Jesus Christ—coming into the **Father's** presence, and in the sense of His deep grace, having it all out, and as a consequence forgiveness given and communion restored. It is to be remarked that God is **just** and **faithful** and the Advocate, our Lord Jesus Christ, is described as **righteous**, showing an immutable basis on which God can act, even the atoning sacrifice of His beloved Son—"the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from ALL SIN" (1 John i. 7). Thank God for that again and again.

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