Christian's Aren't Perfect ...: Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary

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This is what the bumper sticker said: “Christians aren’t perfect—just forgiven.” When I first read it, I was intrigued. Is this really what we are, “just forgiven”?

The theological one-liner made two assertions, and both were true. Yes, no human being (beside Jesus) is perfect. It is also true that God provides free forgiveness without exception to all who accept Jesus as their Savior—period. Yet there seemed to be something wrong with the message of that sticker, especially if you just read it on the bumper of a car that rudely cut you off in traffic. Is “being forgiven” really the only thing that identifies a person as a Christian or the only thing that matters in Christian life? The Bible seems to point to more. Remember John 10:10, which tells us that Jesus came to this earth and died not only to provide forgiveness but also to give us life, and to give it abundantly. If this is true, the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian should go beyond the fact that one of them is forgiven. There should be a notable difference in the “lives” they experience, don’t you think?

The answer we give to these questions has a lot to do with how we understand the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.

**More Than Just Sin Management**

Some think that Jesus is just the head of a very efficient system of sin management for the universe, located in the heavenly sanctuary. Jesus is much more than that! The proper disposal of waste is imperative to human survival. Governments spend great amounts of money to collect, transport, process, and recycle or dispose waste because they understand this is crucial to the preservation of the environment and the health of their citizens. God also understood from the very beginning that sin destroys life. Thus, before the creation of the universe, He made a plan to dispose of sin forever, should it arise (1 Peter...
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SALVATION
and the three members of
the Godhead were fully involved in it.

God, however, is not only inter-
ested in collecting and disposing of
our moral garbage. He is not content
with being the garbage truck that
comes every other day to take care of
our sins. God wants to eradicate sin
itself. That is why Jesus’ ministry in the
heavenly sanctuary provides not only
forgiveness but also the possibility of
a new life—a life empowered by God.

**New Covenant Blessings**

The purpose of Jesus’ ministry in the
heavenly sanctuary is to ensure that we
receive the benefits of His sacrifice
on our behalf. That purpose is fulfilled
only when, after being cleared of the
penalty of death, we are also delivered
from enslavement to the devil. Jesus’
enthronement at the right hand of God
guarantees these freedoms.

All over the world, governments
protect certain rights of an individual.
The second paragraph of the preamble
to the Universal Declaration of Human
Rights, adopted in 1948, highlights
four freedoms: freedom of speech,
freedom of belief, freedom from want,
and freedom from fear—which is
“proclaimed as the highest aspiration.”
Jesus’ sacrifice was to protect the right
of human beings to enter into a new
covenant with God. Hebrews says that
as a high priest of the heavenly sanctuary
Jesus became “the guarantor”
(Heb. 7: 22, NIV)* or “mediator of a
better covenant” (Heb. 8:6, 7).

The new covenant guarantees or
promises four things to believers: (1)
God will put His laws in our minds; (2)
He will be our God; (3) everyone will
know God; and (4) God will forgive our
sins (Heb. 8:8-12). The way Ezekiel
refers to the promises of this covenant is
enlightening (see Eze. 36:26, 27).
Together with putting His law in our
hearts (Jer. 31:33), God also promises to
put His Spirit in our lives. Both prom-
ises refer to different aspects of the same
reality. By giving us His Spirit, God gives
us the power to obey His laws (Rom.
8:1-4). These guarantees effectively lib-
erate us from enslavement to the devil
and prevent future bondage to him.

**With Confidence**

God offers the guarantees of the
new covenant to human beings not
because it is their inalienable right.
They forfeited these rights when they
rejected His rule. These benefits are
the inalienable right of Jesus.
Because of His victory Jesus has been
appointed “heir of all things” (Heb.
1:2) and ruler of a new people of God.
Just as any country benefits from a
good government, believers benefit

from Jesus’ rule. Believers reap the
benefits of Jesus’ victories over His
enemies. Thus, when Jesus asks bless-
ings for us, He is not asking the Father
a favor on our behalf. He is claiming
the benefits of His victory to share
with us. That is why Hebrews says that
we need to approach God’s throne
“boldly” (Heb. 4:16) and “in full
assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). We
may have doubts about our own wor-
theness, but never of Jesus’ worth.

Not all human beings can approach
God with confidence, though. This is
very important. Only the followers of
Jesus benefit from the guarantees that
the rule of Jesus provides. This helps us
understand an important aspect of
Christian life. What determines our eligi-
bility to the benefits of the new covenant
is not our ability to defeat the devil
(Jesus already did that) but our loyalty to
Jesus. The crucial issue is not how strong
I am, but how much do I love Jesus.

When I think of Jesus’ ministry in
the heavenly sanctuary, I cannot help
thinking about the contradiction of
our situation. We have so rich prom-
ises but often live so poorly. We should
claim those promises right now. I like
how Ellen G. White says it: “With the
persevering faith of Jacob, with the
unyielding persistence of Elijah, we
may present our petitions to the
Father, claiming all that He has prom-
ised [that is, the new covenant prom-
ises]. The honor of His throne is
staked for the fulfillment of His word”
(Prophets and Kings, p. 158).

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