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# Sin After Conversion

BY

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## SIN AFTER CONVERSION.

**N**O child of God who has felt the sharp stab of conscience after sin but will ask, almost with dread, whether such sin can be forgiven. "If any [of us; any believer] sin," replies the Apostle, "we have an Advocate with the Father" (1 John ii, 1); not a Saviour, for such we already have; but an Advocate, to plead a damaged cause. Sin is not a necessity, but it is a certainty in the Christian life: the Bible is full of saints who have sinned. "There is no sin so small which a convert doth not abhor, and yet there is scarce any sin so great which he may not commit" (Hardy).<sup>1</sup> We need an advocate to meet a prosecution of infinite cunning, accurate information, and incessant activity: "the accuser [prosecutor] of our brethren, *which accuseth them before our God day and night*" (Rev. xii, 10). And what is our Advocate's brief? "For He is the *propitiation*"—the reconciliation through sacrifice—"of *our sins*": not the

<sup>1</sup> Sins of doctrine (Gal. v, 4), sins of ritual (1 Cor. xi, 22), church sins (3 John, 10), dispensational sins (Matt. v, 34), sins of temper (Eph. iv, 26), sins of the mouth (Jas. iii, 9), sins of worldliness (Rev. iii, 17), sectarian sins (Titus iii, 11), sins of unbelief (Rom. xiv, 23), trade sins and immoralities (1 Cor. v, 11), sins of pride (Jas. ii, 9), sins of neglect (Jas. iv, 17), sins even against Christ (1 Cor. viii, 12), sins which we are frankly to confess (Jas. v, 16 R.V.): an Apostle has put it once for all—"In *many things we ALL stumble*" (Jas. iii, 2). "To say that they [believers' sins] are to be recognised as sins, and yet that no acknowledgment is to be made, and no forgiveness sought for them, is a statement so monstrous as to carry its own refutation" (B. W. Newton).

Propitiator only, but the propitiation: *here is a rare and priceless Scripture which explicitly states that Calvary atones for sins after conversion as well as for sins before.* All sin arouses the wrath of God; all sin requires reconciliation; and all sin finds its propitiation in the sacrificed Christ: "Who is"—not *was*, but is perpetually and for ever—"the propitiation for *our* sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." Our Advocate does not plead our ignorance, for we may not have been ignorant; nor our insufficient grace, for our grace may not have been insufficient; nor the fury of the temptation, for we are never tempted beyond our power: He pleads something utterly dissociated from ourselves—the inexhaustible Sacrifice, that never grows old, and never grows less; which covers all sin, and therefore any sin: and confession is the only fee the Advocate asks; "If we *confess* our sins, He is faithful and righteous to *forgive* us our sins, and to *cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" It is the confessed sins which are the remitted sins.

But a grave responsibility now arises. "If we sin *wilfully* after that we have received the knowledge [the after-knowledge: the knowledge of instruction, that follows on the knowledge that saves] of the truth" (Heb. x, 26): "if we sin *wilfully*"—the Apostle sees no escape from the consequences even for himself, if he so sins: "if we sin *wilfully*"—consciously, not ignorantly; of our own accord, not under compulsion; with our eyes open, and (as the participle implies) *continuing so to sin.* Now it is true that deliberate wickedness, a set choice of sin, reveals the unregenerate or (as in this passage) the apostate; for the believer falls under sin, rather than deliberately chooses it: nevertheless if we *fall* into sin, it is possible to *remain* in it; and to that degree *wilful* sin—that is, known sin, which is unrepented, unconfessed,

and unabandoned—is possible to us all.<sup>1</sup> *This Scripture assumes that it is possible even to an apostle.* "The sacred writer clearly intimates by the very choice of the word ['knowledge'] that it is not a mere outward and historical knowledge, but an inward, quickening, believing apprehension of revealed truth" (Delitzsch).

Now the consequence of such sin is necessarily grave. "If we sin *wilfully*, *there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins*, but a certain fearful expectation of *judgment.*" The reason is clear. Calvary covers all post-conversion sin potentially, exactly as, potentially, it covers the sins of the whole world; so that atonement can always be had, and by all: *but Calvary is wholly ineffective unless applied*; so that the "propitiation for our sins" is as useless to the believer as the "propitiation for the sins of the whole world" is to the worldling, *unless it is appropriated.* No sacrifice was ordered or accepted in the Old Testament for unabandoned transgression; and the Lord Jesus is not, and never will be, an Advocate for wilful sin. Now this is the case supposed. The transgressing believer either refuses to acknowledge that his sin *is* sin; or he openly declares that he will take the risks; or else he clings to the sin while striving to put the whole subject from his mind; or he may even boldly assert (I have known of such) that a believer's sin does not matter, being covered by the Atonement: in each case *he refuses to apply the propitiation*; and so the sacrifice vanishes. There is no other propitiation to which he can turn: there is no other Jesus than the Son of God: there is no further sacrifice in reserve. So there can be but one consequence. No pro-

<sup>1</sup> Unconscious sin, springing from the still indwelling flesh, the blood covers: "If we walk in the light"—free, that is, from all transgressions voluntary or known—"the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us *from all sin*" (1 John i, 7).

propitiation, no remission; no remission, no pardon; no pardon—judgment: *for all unpardoned sin must appear before the judgment bar of God.* "The Lord shall judge *His people*" (Heb. x, 30).

The type designed to impress this truth remarkably reinforces it. The sacrificial system of the law had been completely delivered, when, on Israel's departure from Sinai, Jehovah gave the crowning ordinance of the Red Heifer. The Passover Lamb had placed all Israel under the Blood: the five great offerings of the Law were the Lamb passed under a microscope—Calvary in its five great aspects: now, since conversion was typed by the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. v, 7), and baptism by the passage of the Red Sea (1 Cor. x, 2), the Red Heifer, a postscript to atonement, by its very nature as a cleansing ordinance added after conversion and baptism, stands forth as a supplementary covering for post-baptismal sin. For it was a wilderness ordinance, to be applied whenever sin occurred, throughout their pilgrim journey, among the people of God, who all shared in the Heifer as a contribution of the whole people. *There was no other mode of cleansing throughout the whole wilderness journey.* And the need arose through contact with a world of death: "whosoever toucheth the *dead body* of any man that is *dead*" (Num. xix, 13). Death is the supreme fact and figure of sin, for "*sin*, when it is full grown, bringeth forth *death*" (James i, 15): leprosy is sin still curable, death is sin beyond cure: the world through which we travel is a doomed world. "Leave the *dead*," says our Lord, giving a vital clue to the type—the dead; that is, the unregenerate world lying in death, the spiritual corpses ringing us round which we are bound to touch—"to bury their own dead" (Matt. viii, 22): *the touching of the dead is the contagion of sin.* Every unregenerate sinner carries in himself sin enough to infect and damn a

world; and consequently, as horribly infectious as a rotting carcase, so loathsomely perilous and death-producing is the sin all around us. Even accidental defilement (Numbers xix, 14-16) requires propitiation before a holy God. "Know ye not that a *little* leaven leaveneth *the whole lump*?" (1 Cor. v, 6),

Now the sacrifice appears. A Heifer—alone of all the sacrifices a female, because offered, not for the world, but for the Bride (cf. Deut. xxi, 3): a *red* heifer—saturate with scarlet sin, and yet drenched with crimson atonement (cf. Lev. xiv, 6): spotless, uncrippled, unyoked—the sinless, perfect Christ, never under sin *for Himself*; yet yoked to death for us. "Tempted men and women need a tempted Saviour; wounded men and women need a wounded Saviour; broken-hearted men and women need a broken-hearted Saviour; and the Master never looks more beautiful than when we see Him through our tears, and under the scarlet of a world's sin." The Heifer was slaughtered *where the sinning believer is*—outside the camp; that is, where the communion is broken, there our Father provides our healing: thus even the justly excommunicate (1 Cor. v, 11) have the heifer within reach, and can be restored to the Father's home, and the broken fellowship of the clean.

The process of sacrifice in this case is highly peculiar. The whole heifer—hide, flesh, internals, and blood (except that sprinkled)—was burnt: no part of our Lord escaped the cross: our whole believing life, as in some measure tainted and corrupt, finds its substitutionary counterpart in Calvary. Then the ash to which the heifer has been reduced—*with the blood burnt in it*, and so holding all the cleansing efficacy of the blood—was carried to a clean spot, for after-use, and to be ready for constant application. The slain heifer was unclean, for it was covered with the scarlet of human guilt—it is Christ upon the cross: the ash is clean,

for it is the sacrifice after the fire has dealt with it, and has burnt away all the carried sin—it is Christ risen. The ash, the most incorruptible of all bodily substances, is the imperishable residue of the sacrifice, after the judgment flames have searched it through and through: so Jesus “was carried up”—by “clean” angel hands—“into Heaven” (Luke xxiv, 51)—a clean place, and there deposited as the Holy Life stored up, the Advocate with the Father, the *propitiation for our sins*. “For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved [from wrath] by *His life*” (Rom. v, 10). The Holy Ash, burnt once for all, is for ever stored among God’s people, alongside the rushing River; perpetually accessible throughout the pilgrim journey; and charged with the whole power of Calvary to purify and restore. Jewish tradition asserts (though probably incorrectly) that no second heifer was slain for a thousand years: *our pilgrim journey of two thousand years will require no second Christ*.

But the point of supreme practical importance still remains. *The Ash alone cannot restore*: “running water shall be *put thereto*.” Again our Lord Himself supplies the clue: “This spake He *of the Spirit*” (John vii, 39), which gushed forth ten days *after* the Rock had been smitten—that is, after God’s sacrificial system was complete; the healer, the reconciler, the restorer, as well as an inner dynamic *against* sin. “I will pour *water* upon him that is thirsty, and *my Spirit* upon thy seed” (Isa. xlv, 12). So the child of God, penitent, is cleansed, not exactly by a re-application of the blood by which he was purged once for all, but through the water of separation;<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> So from our Lord’s side “there came forth *blood and water*” (John xix, 34), the blood of the atonement and the water of separation; the blood for pre-conversion, and the water for post-conversion, sins.

that is, through the personal application by the Spirit of this powerful disinfecting lye—the merit of the Christ Who survived the judgment fires, *with the blood in the ash*. It is the ash, rather than the water, to which the Holy Spirit (Heb. ix, 13) attributes the cleansing, or the water because of the ash: that is, the Holy Spirit can restore and sanctify only on the ground of Calvary. So David cries, concerning sin committed by him after he had become an eminent servant of God, and manifestly referring to the Red Heifer, “Purge me *with hyssop*”—for the hyssop is in the hands of our High Priest, “a clean man”—“and I shall be clean; *wash me*, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psa. li, 7). One tiny speck of the Ash, so infinitely precious is it in the sight of God, if applied with the Living Water to the penitent soul, instantly cleanses and cures. But oh, the solemnity and the urgency of it! *The pardon must be obtained on the third day with a view to the seventh*: “the same shall purify himself therewith on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean.” The third is the resurrection day of Jesus. “Him God raised up the *third day*, that through His name every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts x, 40); covering in its limitless possibilities of abundant pardon all the days until the seventh: the seventh is the day ushered in by the Judgment Seat of Christ; “there remaineth therefore a *sabbath* rest for the people of God” (Heb. iv, 9); when formal pronouncement of purification (ver. 19) is, or is not, made, and when a sinless body is given to the already clean. Defilement contracted in the walk, unless purged now, reappears as unpurged defilement on the seventh day, with grave consequences. “The man that shall be unclean, and shall *not* purify himself, shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord”—separated from the obedient and self-purified (1 John iii, 3) people of God

in that day (Rom. viii, 13; Gal. vi, 8): for "if any man defile the temple of God, *him shall God defile*; for the temple of God [the antitypical sanctuary] is holy, *which temple ye are*" (1 Cor. iii, 17).<sup>1</sup>

So important is the after-cleansing of the believer that our Lord has enshrined the truth for ever in the loveliest of rites. He that is *bathed*,<sup>2</sup> He says (John xiii, 10). "needeth not save to *wash his feet*, but [if he do both] is clean every whit." A bather, totally immersed, is completely cleansed; but, coming up from river or seashore, his feet get soiled afresh: so, after our total plunge, our complete immersion, in the pardon of God, our perfect cleansing in the blood of Christ, we contract inevitable defilement in our contact with earth, *and need the washing of the walk*. No apostle was omitted as perfect in walk. "Our works may be compared to the soul's feet: the Church will never be so clean that it will have no need of foot-washing" (Spurgeon). Coming up from the great pardon at conversion, and coming up ritually out of the baptismal flood, we come up fully bathed, spotlessly clean; for "ye were *washed*" (1 Cor. vi, 11): but now, over even apostles' feet, our High Priest has to stoop in tender ablution and absolution of post-baptismal sin. "Justification must be followed by sanctification" (Lange). So baptism is the first portrayal by ritual; "arise, and be *baptised*, and *wash away thy sins*" (Acts xxii, 16): our Lord now institutes a supplementary rite to portray the covering of post-conversion sin; "I have *washed your feet*." So Israel,

<sup>1</sup> No believer can destroy the Church of God, nor can he himself be destroyed; but he can defile that sanctuary; and all such defilement will be met by a counter-degradation in the day of recompense for works. "*He that doeth wrong SHALL RECEIVE FOR THE WRONG THAT HE HATH DONE*" (Col. iii, 25).

<sup>2</sup> "Let it be noticed that *λουσθαι*, in contradistinction to *πλυνσθαι*, signifies not 'washing' but 'bathing,' and refers to the purification of the entire body, and not of a portion merely" (Tholuch).

coming up from their plunge through the Red Sea, where they had been walled in and overarched by water, contracted fresh defilement in the wilderness walk, and had that defilement cleansed away (Num. xix, 13) by 'the water of separation.'

Peter's impetuous blunders are used by the Spirit to set all in a radiant light. He says: "Lord, dost thou *wash my feet*?"<sup>3</sup> He does not see the cross in the basin, nor the blood in the water. "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Our Lord's answer startlingly reveals our need of the pardon of all sin, whether before conversion or after. "If I wash thee *not*"—if pardon does not touch you at all—"thou hast *no part with Me*": without the great ablution, there is no life eternal; and without the partial ablution, there is no reward at the Judgment Seat: *justification and sanctification are both essential for a full participation with Christ*. Christ does not say that, once washed, no kind of washing can be needed again: nor does He say that, once soiled, no fresh washing is possible. Peter, still misunderstanding, now rushes to the opposite extreme:—"Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."<sup>4</sup> "Peter was thoughtlessly demanding the repeti-

<sup>3</sup> Our Lord's first reply lays down a principle of vast importance. "What thou knowest not now, thou shalt understand hereafter." *Obedience is not to wait until a command is understood*: it can be most glorious (e.g. Gen. xxii, 12) when the command is least understood.

<sup>4</sup> Thus a believer's cleansing depends wholly on his own consent to Christ's action. This negatives B. W. Newton: "When they [all believers] enter their Father's presence, each foot will have been perfectly washed." Numerous scriptures (such as Matt. xviii, 35, Luke xii, 47, 2 Cor. v, 10, Col. iii, 24-25, 1 John ii, 28, Rev. iii, 3, 16, etc.) make sure the shame of some disciples after the resurrection, when a sharper chastisement will bring a belated repentance, and a cleansing that will be final. Of one sin our Lord says, "It shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, *nor in that which is to come*" (Matt. xii, 32): from which it may justly be inferred that certain other sins (obviously of believers only) will require and receive a future forgiveness in the Age that succeeds to this. "Some men's sins are evident,

tion of his baptism" (Godet). Jesus again corrects the error. "He that is bathed *needeth not* save to wash his feet." "The foot needeth to be washed; but the totality of the cleanness is not lost" (B. W. Newton).<sup>1</sup> The first cleansing is total and final, involving our whole nature, and, up to that moment, a perfect bath, unrepeated and unrepeatable; *justification is for ever*; it is 'one baptism' (Eph. iv, 5) once for all: but for sanctification, continual and progressive, a partial cleansing is required for occasional and partial sin. "The Devil wishes no child of God to get to Heaven with clean feet" (Luther); *but Christ has made it possible*.

Our Lord binds His authority and example upon us in terms the most drastic in order to compel us to an obedience which critically affects our future. "If I, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash *one another's feet*"; "for," as He said elsewhere (Matt. vi, 15), "if ye forgive not men their trespasses, *neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*." I doubt if a day will ever pass on which we shall not need either to forgive or to be forgiven. "They are to admonish one another, to confess their sins one to another, to bring gently and lovingly before each other their mistakes, errors, and imperfections" (Govett). The priests, entering on the service of the Temple, bathed once for all; yet on daily entering, daily washed their hands and feet *on*

*going before* unto judgment; and some men also they *follow after*" (1 Tim. v, 24).

<sup>1</sup> "Then flew"—for God is swift to pardon at the cry of His penitent child—"one of the seraphim unto me"—for even an Isaiah needs partial cleansing—"with a live coal"—a burnt cinder of the sacrifice—"from off the altar"—an invariable picture of Calvary—"and he touched my mouth with it" (Is. vi, 6). All our sin was burnt in the Sacrifice upon the Altar: but the burnt ash must touch the part that has sinned. "Lo, this"—cinder of Christ, this application of the burnt ash—"hath *touch'd thy lips*": the part tainted is the part touched: and the expiation is made actual only by the confession (ver. 5) followed by the contact.

*penalty of death* (Exod. xix, 19-21): so our footbath follows "the *laver* of [attached to, significant of] regeneration" (Eph. v, 26)—our full bath, our complete plunge. And penalties attach. "Ye are clean" (John xv, 3): grafted into the Vine, the cleansing juices and purifying sap course through the veins of the living branch: nevertheless it is 'cleansed' again (verse 2, R.V.), to produce more fruit; *and, if fruitless, it is removed*. "For this cause [abuse of the Supper, to which the foot-cleansing introduced] many among you are weak and sickly, *and not a few sleep*" (1 Cor. xi, 30). So again we catch the solemn and urgent undertone. For it was at the moment when the disciples were talking of rank in the coming kingdom (Luke xxii, 24) and "when the hour was come that He should depart [by rapture] out of this world," and go unto God, that the Lord points to the soiled feet, and thus reveals our golden opportunity on the eve of the rapture and the Kingdom. "Whosoever would become *great* among you shall be your *servant*; and whosoever would be *FIRST* among you shall be your *SLAVE*" (Matt. xx, 28): supremacy in glory is in inverse ratio to lowliness in present service.

While extra-Biblical tradition is no basis whatever for our faith or conduct, evidence that the acceptance of our Lord's words as indicating a rite is not an individual idiosyncrasy may justly be offered, on behalf of an interpretation which, through ignorance of church history, may seem new-fangled and peculiar. The Greek church has preserved it, together with immersion in baptism, from the apostolic age. Of the four so-called 'doctors of the Church,' two—Ambrose and Augustine—taught and practised it, and in the sub-apostolic age "the ceremony was used by some churches, but rejected by others."<sup>1</sup> As late as the

<sup>1</sup> Bingham's *Christian Antiquities*, vol. i, p. 561. The Church of Rome, which refused the rite, substituted its own caricature, Penance. Many errors (like Penance) are shipwrecked spars which mark the spot where a ship

fifth century Augustine says:—"Brethren perform this action one for another. Among some saints the custom exists not, but they do it in heart; but much better and more exact is it, beyond controversy, that it be done by the hand." Bernard, called 'the last of the Fathers,' is equally explicit:—"That we may not doubt concerning the remission of daily sins, we have its sacrament—the Washing of Feet." The Council of Toledo (A.D. 694) fixed an annual date when the feet of the newly baptised were washed. Luther was not averse to it. Nor are the Moravians the only modern group to observe the rite. One of the giant intellects of modern days, foremost in the ranks of science—Faraday—was (with many an obscure disciple through many ages and in many lands) a humble follower of this ritual of ablution. "Many humble Christian societies have adopted this view, and still we find that some devout people are earnest for it" (C. Stanford, D.D.). In words taken from an exhaustive study of the rite:—"Jesus FOUNDS THE OBLIGATION OF THE PRACTICE ON THE REALITY OF THE FACT. 'If I your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye *ought* also to wash one another's feet.' By this simple test, the question whether the command be intended to be taken figuratively or not, is settled at once. Did Jesus wash His disciples' feet *figuratively*? If He did, you may imitate Him and keep the command by a *figurative* washing. But *if it was real and literal*, nothing but a real and literal washing will suffice."<sup>1</sup> Be it also noted that the truth contained in baptism, coupled with our experience of after-defilement, together require a complementary rite; that no *Scripture*

has gone down richly laden. It is obvious that the annual washing of the feet of twelve beggars by the Pope, the King of Spain, and the Emperor of Austria, cannot be taken seriously as a perpetuation of our Lord's ritual.

*Sin After Baptism*, p. 15: R. Govett: one penny, A. J. Tilney, 66, Hall Road, Norwich. So the Quaker has a right to criticise us, *and does*, for inconsistency.

evidence exists of a host or guest washing any but his own feet; that, even if it were a custom, simultaneously a supper, equally a custom, was changed into a rite; that the evidence for the one is identical with the evidence for the other; that the Lord enormously more emphasises the obligation (John xiii, 14) and the literality (ver. 15) of the Foot-washing than of the Communion; that the Holy Spirit has endorsed it as in the catalogue of 'good works' (1 Tim. v, 9-10); that if it were an act of heavenly loveliness and humility nineteen hundred years ago, it can be no less lovely now; and that both it and baptism must be as perpetual as the truths they enshrine. *The wine has perished* (Luke v, 37) *because the wine-skin has been destroyed*. It is true that a rite, by itself, is nothing: *Judas was a baptised and foot-cleansed man*: unless the spiritual truth for which it stands has been actually experienced, it is a physical action, and nothing more. But a rite is priceless for permanently embodying a truth to sight and touch.<sup>1</sup> "The cycle of time to be completed by the Second Advent will soon enable those who now 'wash one another's feet' for Jesus' sake, to link up the circle of the past intervening years with those Christians of the first centuries, and to stand with them on the same ground to share in the 'part with' Christ" (C. S. Utting). "If ye know these things"—the ablution for post-conversion sins, and the rite in which it is enshrined—"BLESSED ARE YE IF YE DO THEM."

Thus two jagged, dangerous rocks hem in a believer who has sinned—presumption and despair; presumption, which says it does not matter, and despair, which says it cannot be forgiven; on either of which, if the soul

<sup>1</sup> Even if, however, it be taken as a symbolic action only, and not a ritual, the truth on post-conversion cleansing remains exquisitely pictured by this kindergarten action of our Lord. Whether symbol or ritual, one and the same truth is expressed, decisively and for ever.



dashes, the discipleship splits in pieces. So *Sin not* is the first command; but, *if* we sin, *Despair not* is the second. So long as there is a penitent disciple on earth there will never be wanting a pardoning Advocate in Heaven. *All post-conversion sin specifically confessed to God and abandoned is wholly forgiven and forgotten.* Calvary was an infinite sacrifice, and so, if offered for human sin at all, it must have been offered for all sin: "the blood of Jesus Christ *His Son*"—THE SON OF GOD—"cleanseth from all sin" (1 John i, 7); not the Son of Adam, nor the Son of David, nor the Son of Mary, but the Son of God: for only an infinite Sacrifice can cover an infinitude of souls; and only an Infinite Being can *be* an infinite sacrifice. The propitiation is Jesus Christ the righteous, the sinless: if one sin was to be purged, it could be no less; if the sin of an entire universe, it could be no more. So there is a great ocean of pardon, in which a whole world can be plunged; a pardon for every sin, a pardon for every soul; so that it is possible for all to enter Heaven, not sinlessly perfect, but totally forgiven: "set before the presence of His glory *without blemish* in exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

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