

How is Sin Blotted Out?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | January 25, 2018



Have you ever encountered a well-meaning pastor or some other Christian who teaches that “every one of our bad deeds recorded in heaven’s books will be erased by the blood of Jesus?” Some even go as far as to say that not even God will remember the sins we have committed while on this sin-filled planet.

For many people who experience guilt, shame, and regret over their poor choices in the past, this can sound like a dream come true. They’re overjoyed believing that no one in heaven will ever know or remember their sins—not even them!

But does it make any sense? Have you ever considered that, if true, what would it say about God? And if it doesn’t mean that our deeds are literally blotted out of heaven’s record books, then what could it actually mean?

Let’s take a closer look ...

Making God the Problem

Growing up, the only way I ever heard “blotting out of sins” taught was that it meant erasing the records of our sins, our evil deeds, from “the books in heaven.” To support the claim, preachers would quote passages like Isaiah 43:25:

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

These preachers would then teach that when we confessed our sins, God would go to the “heavenly books” with the blood of Jesus and apply it to our record, thus removing the paper trail of our sins. This process was vital to our salvation, because, they claimed, these books would be opened in the final judgment, and if there were any sins that had not been erased, we would not only be excluded from heaven, but God would use His power to punish us for the unconfessed sins remaining in the books.

It’s no surprise that such a teaching incites a fear of—and not a love for—God in people’s lives. Instead of fixating on the Remedy, people become fixated on their sins and their fears of punishment: *Is there something I haven’t confessed? What if I don’t remember my sins from years ago and they are still on the books?*

This teaching also causes people to form belief systems that function to hide or protect them from God, rather than reconcile us to Him. Instead of saying God is the solution to our sin problem, this understanding says He is the problem we must address. It’s similar to the idea that being covered by the robe of Christ’s righteousness means that the perfect life of Jesus obscures our histories from the Father’s awareness and, thus, in the judgment, the Father doesn’t see our histories of sin; instead, He sees only the perfect life of His Son. This is necessary, it is claimed, because if the Father saw even one sin not hidden by Jesus, then God would strike out and destroy us.

Exodus 32:33 is another Bible text used to support this claim.

The LORD replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.”

Once again, this is taken to mean that “we either get our sins blotted out of the books of heaven or we get ourselves blotted out of the books of heaven.” This fear-inducing, legal interpretation happens because of two reasons:

1. Believing the false premise that God’s law functions no differently than human law, which functions by imposed rules that require arbitrary and inflicted punishment
2. A failure to see the reality behind the metaphor.

Grasping the Metaphor

God is the Creator, and His laws are the laws upon which our reality is built to operate. Like the laws of physics, health, and gravity, God’s moral laws—the laws of love, liberty, worship, and truth—are designed to govern our reality. If you step out of harmony with the law of gravity by jumping off a cliff, then you will pay a natural consequence. If you violate the law of love by being selfish, then you will pay a natural consequence.

Ask yourself: *Why is it wrong to commit adultery?* Is your answer, “Because it breaks God’s law and His government demands that He inflict punishment on me or my legal substitute”? Or is it wrong because choosing to betray your spouse not only harms your spouse, it sears your conscience, damages your reason, warps your character, and incites fear and insecurity—which lead to lying, covering up, distortions, and, if not repented of, ultimately the destruction of your soul?

The latter answer is actually what the Bible teaches:

“Sin when full grown brings forth death” (James 1:15). And, “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction” (Galatians 6:8).

In order to understand what the blotting out of sin really means, we must first reject the false imposed-law construct and, instead, worship our Creator God, whose laws are the protocols upon which reality is built to exist. In God’s universe, if He wanted to ensure that we suffer and die in our sins, He wouldn’t have to do anything—the natural outcome of unremedied sin is pain, suffering, and death. But God loved us so much that, instead of leaving us to die, He intervened to heal and save us.

Now we must move past the metaphor to reality by thinking abstractly.

What is abstract reasoning? It is the ability to see the reality behind a metaphor, simile, parable, illustration, object lesson, or type, rather than holding to the metaphor, as if the metaphor itself were real.

For instance, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). We can all agree that Jesus is not talking cannibalism; rather, he is using a word picture to describe a larger reality. Yet the religious leaders—the theology professors of His day—did not think abstractly. They took Jesus’ words literally and were offended asking, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (vs. 52). They used these words of Jesus, taking them “as they read,” to conclude something Jesus never meant—that He was promoting the literal eating of human flesh. By doing so, they were ultimately drawn to reject Jesus.

Sadly, this same problem exists today when people, viewing the Bible through the imposed-law lens and taking illustrations and metaphors “as they read,” conclude that the “blotting out of sin” is the literal blotting out of historical deeds from the books in heaven, in order to hide our misconduct from God.

So, what is the truth—the reality—behind the metaphor? Where does sin happen? In record books or in the hearts and minds of people? From where does God want to erase our sin? From recorded history or from the minds, hearts, and characters of His people?

King David had this concept right:

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion **blot out my transgressions**. Wash away all my iniquity and **cleanse me from my sin**. Hide your face from my sins and **blot out all my iniquity**. **Create in me a pure heart**, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me (Psalm 51:1,2, 9, 10).*

David knew from where his sin truly needed to be blotted out: from his heart, mind, and character—his inmost being! And this is exactly what God did for David; He created a new heart and right spirit within David and erased the sinfulness from David’s character. History did not get erased, as evidenced by the Bible and its ongoing record of David’s sin that we are all still reading about today.

So, if the heavenly records are not a long list of historical deeds that need to be erased, then what is recorded there and what is being erased? Revelation reveals the answer:

*He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will **never blot out his name** from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels (3:5).*

What is recorded in the heavenly records is not a list of sins of each person, but rather the “name” of each person. And in Bible symbolism, a name doesn’t mean a monogram, the word people use to call you to dinner. In the Bible, a name means character. This is why Jacob, whose name meant “deceiver,” had his name changed to Israel-“one who, with God, overcomes”-after he overcame his selfishness.

Under the imposed-law view, the records of heaven are seen as lists of deeds. But the truth, under the design-law reality, is that the records in heaven are like medical records; they document the actual condition of each person’s character. And I believe that more than this—more than just a description of our character—the records are something like a computer server on which you back up your hard drive. Our actual characters are being recorded in the books of heaven. Thus, when we open the heart to God and allow Him in, something truly miraculous and wonderful happens. Notice what He will do and why the sins are erased:

*This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. **I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.** I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. **For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more**” (Hebrews 8:10-12).*

What is happening? Sinfulness—not sins—is being blotted out of the hearts, minds, and characters of God’s people. And in its place, God writes in His perfection. And because the records in heaven are the perfect record of each of our characters, the sinfulness that used to be in our characters, and thus in the records of heaven, is removed both from our characters and, subsequently, the record of our character in heaven. In other words, the only way to have sin removed from your record in heaven is to trust God, to open your heart to His Remedy, and to have sinfulness removed from your character here on earth.

Those who refuse to allow God into their hearts to remove sinfulness and write in His righteousness will, instead of having their sins blotted out of their hearts, and therefore their records, have themselves blotted out of existence; thus, they will be removed from the heavenly records. This is precisely what the Scripture means in the Exodus 32 passage, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.”

Or, as the psalmist says:

“May *they* be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous” (Psalm 69:28).

Finally, for those who think the actual memory of our sins will be erased from our minds and those of others, consider Jesus’ response to those who criticized the woman who anointed His feet with expensive oil: “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47).

Imagine your child was dying of cancer and your regular doctor said there is nothing more that could be done. But then, a new doctor enters and gives your child a pill and, within minutes, all the cancer is gone and your child is restored to perfect health. Would you appreciate the new doctor? But what would happen if, the next day, you awoke and your child was completely healthy, but you had no memory of their sickness and, therefore, didn’t remember the healing? Would your appreciation and love for the doctor be diminished? Of course it would!

This is what Jesus is saying in Luke 7:47: If we don't remember from what Jesus has delivered us, we will appreciate Him and love Him little. This is why Revelation tells us that the 144,000 sing a song only they will be able to sing—no others in all the universe will be able to sing this song (Revelation 14:3). Why? Is it because no one else has the musical skill? Is it because God forbids others to sing it? No! It is because it is a song of their experience, and only those who have the experience can sing of the experience. And the only way they can sing of their experience is if they remember their experience.

So, don't fall for the legal lie—the idea that sins are merely bad deeds that require erasure from record books. It instills within us the belief that sin is mostly a behavioral problem, rather than a heart problem; it also says God is the One we must fear, because He will punish us for any unconfessed sin, instead of fearing sin itself and what it will do to us if we don't take the Remedy.

Embrace the truth that God wants to erase all sin, all defects, and all deviations from His design from you and restore you to His ideal! And He will do it if you trust Him!