

## **The Meaning of the Intercessory Ministry of Jesus Christ on Our Behalf in the Heavenly Sanctuary**

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### **Introduction**

Adventist theology differentiates between the “complete” atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross, and the “completed” atonement in relationship to His intercessory ministry in heaven on humanity’s behalf.<sup>1</sup> What happened on the cross is a unique, unparalleled, non-repeatable, and unprecedented divine act of salvation (Heb 10:12, 14) from which all the benefits flow out, including the intercessory ministry of Christ for us today.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the statement of the former dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Dr. W. G. C. Murdock, at the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, Texas: “Seventh-day Adventists have always believed in a complete atonement that is not completed.” Quoted from Morris L. Venden, *Never Without an Intercessor: The Good News About the Judgment* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 140.

The full at-one-ment, i.e., the complete harmony between God and His creation will be reached when sin is eradicated and evil is no longer present (1 Cor 15:24-28; Eph 1:10). This full harmony will be restored at the end of the Millennium (Rev 21-22).

<sup>2</sup> Ferguson underlines that Jesus’s “atoning death was unique and unrepeatable work for human salvation (Heb. 10:12, 14). Jesus’ sacrificial death, therefore, was a ministry that the church cannot continue. . . . Jesus’ redemptive sufferings were complete and cannot be added to. The church, nonetheless, shares in Jesus’ redemptive work; she, too, exists to seek and save the lost. God’s goal is the salvation of all (1 Tim. 2:4), and the church participates in that. God works through her to bring the benefits of Jesus’ atoning death to bear on lost human lives. This is accomplished through the church’s proclaiming the message of the atonement, demonstrating redemption in its life, and working for the redemption of all people.” (Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996], 282).

Ellen G. White explains: “The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary

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Nothing can improve or supplement it, and no one can add anything to Christ's extraordinary sacrifice for humans; salvation is "complete" (Rom 3:21-26; 1 Cor 1:18, 23-24; 2:2; Gal 2:16, 21; Eph 2:4-10). Jesus's mediatory work was made possible only because of this exceptional, unselfish, and once-for-all death for humanity (Heb 9:28). His atoning death on Calvary is like a fountain from which all other blessings spring up or like an acorn which contains the whole oak tree. However, the atonement/salvation is not yet completed because we still live in a sinful world. If it had been completed then there would no longer be a problem with the evil that surrounds us. The lasting solution to all issues related to evil is an extremely complex task and involves Christ's mediatory work in heaven over a long period of time. Christ's intercessory ministry applies His work of redemption to individual believers, but it also involves the security of the whole universe (Dan 7:9-10, 13-14; 9:24-27; Eph 1:7-10; Rev 12:7-12).<sup>3</sup>

### **A Difficult Puzzle**

Apparently, theologians encounter unsurmountable problems with the meaning of Jesus's work for us today. Philip Yancey eloquently declares: "I have concluded, in fact, that the Ascension represents my greatest struggle of faith—not whether it happened, but why. It challenges me more

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above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. ... There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected" (*The Great Controversy* [Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1950], 489).

The intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ for sinners will cease at the close of probation (Rev 15:8; 16:1; cf. 22:11).

<sup>3</sup> "Christ is mediating in behalf of man, and the order of unseen worlds is preserved by His mediatorial work" (Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People* [Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1930], 254). "Not only men, but angels, will ascribe honor and glory to the Redeemer, for even they are secure only through the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the inhabitants of unfallen worlds have been guarded from apostasy. Not only those who are washed by the blood of Christ, but also the holy angels, are drawn to him by his crowning act of giving his life for the sins of the world" (Ellen G. White, *The Home Missionary*, May 1, 1897). "When Christ cried out, 'It is finished,' the unfallen worlds were made secure. For them the battle was fought and the victory won. Henceforth Satan had no place in the affections of the universe. The argument he had brought forward, that self-denial was impossible with God, and therefore unjustly required from His created intelligences, was forever answered. Satan's claims were forever set aside. The heavenly universe was secured in eternal allegiance" (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 12, 1901).

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than the problem of pain, more than the difficulty of harmonizing science and the Bible, more than belief in the Resurrection and other miracles. . . . For me what has happened since Jesus' departure strikes at the core of my faith. Would it not be better if the Ascension had never happened? If Jesus had stayed on earth, he could answer our questions, solve our doubts, mediate our disputes of doctrine and policy."<sup>4</sup> He adds: "By ascending, Jesus took the risk of being forgotten."<sup>5</sup> God's distance and invisibility disturb us. His obvious physical absence frustrates humans especially in view of war's atrocities, pain, rapes, exploitation, killings, torture, innocent suffering, natural catastrophes, and the reality of death. Christians wonder where God is and what He is doing. If He really exists, and is omnipotent, omnipresent, and loving, then after humanity has experienced, for example, the Crusaders' wars, the Inquisition, the French Revolution, the Great October Revolution in Russia, Auschwitz, Rwanda, tsunamis, the fall of the Twin towers, the Gulf Wars, and terrorists' attacks, they question whether God indeed cares for our planet earth and about our individual needs and well being.<sup>6</sup> What is accomplished by Christ's work as our Intercessor?

As a small boy, in my native Czech Republic town, I visited a typical, nicely built European Catholic Church. People were kneeling and praying in front of the statues of Mary and many other saints. By each statue was written in Latin "*Ora pro nobis*" (meaning "pray" or "intercede for us"). I was puzzled. Later I learned that every day the prayers of millions of Christians were directed to these saints who are considered as intercessors. This picture from my childhood raised many questions to my mind: Is not Jesus sufficient? Why pray to so many? Does God need to be pleaded with, because He is angry with us?

The belief that saints are praying for humans in heaven is related to the extremely crucial understanding of the biblical teaching of what happens after death:

An initial question regarding the prayer of saints in heaven for the sake of others (intercession) has to do with our knowledge about the condition of

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (New York: Walker and Company, 1995), 297-298.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>6</sup> Mother Teresa aptly states: "First we meditate on Jesus, and then we go out and look for him in disguise." Quoted from *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, ed. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 304.

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the Christian dead. Do they now live with Christ and, if so, are they aware of the situation and needs of people still on earth? If these questions are answered in the negative, it is more difficult to claim an intercessory role for them and to justify calling upon their help in our prayers.<sup>7</sup>

In Roman Catholicism, there are many intercessors: “One basic theological and liturgical conviction which has carried the Catholic tradition holds that Jesus Christ alone is never merely alone. He is always found in the company of a whole range of his friends, both living and dead. . . . Saints show us how the grace of God may work in a life; they give us bright patterns of holiness; they pray for us.”<sup>8</sup> However, the New Testament plainly claims that there is only one Intercessor between God and humans—the Man Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:3-6).

**Biblical Affirmation**

The Bible powerfully declares that Jesus Christ is presently in heaven (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11) and is interceding for humans (hinted to in Rom 5:10-21, but explicitly taught in Rom 8:34; 1 John 2:1). This fundamental teaching attests that Christ’s intermediatory role is urgently needed to accomplish the plan of salvation. Jesus Christ is our Intercessor and serves as our Mediator, our High Priest, in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 4:15-16; 8:1-2).<sup>9</sup> The author of Hebrews presents the most elaborate picture of Jesus Christ as our High Priest and Mediator/Intercessor who is alive and makes intercession for sinners (Heb 7:25). The Gospels provide concrete examples: Jesus prayed for His disciples and future generations of followers (John 17) as well as for Peter (Luke 22:32). Already the Old Testament points to God Himself as a heavenly Witness or Advocate (Job 16:19-20; cf. 33:23) and explains that the Servant of the

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<sup>7</sup> H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 51-52.

<sup>8</sup> *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Three times Jesus Christ is called the Mediator in the book of Hebrews and always in relation to a new or better covenant (8:6; 9:15; 12:24).

There are many examples of intercession in the Bible when humans were reconciling instruments while interceding for other human beings: Job (Job 1:5; 42:10); Abraham (Gen 18:20-33); Moses (Gen 32:31-32; called by Paul as mediator, because he received the Decalogue and mediated it to the people—Gal 3:19-20; cf. Acts 7:38); and Esther (Esth 7:3-4). The priests in Israel were mediators: they connected people with God as bridge makers (pontifex) in order to reestablish a right and true relationship with Him.



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Lord makes “intercession for the transgressors” (Isa 53:12).<sup>10</sup> This Suffering Servant, who the early church identified as being Jesus Christ (Acts 8:27-35), dies for humans on their behalf, forgives their sins, and gives them His righteousness, thus His work brings the benefits of His substitutional death to sinners (Isa 53:3-12).<sup>11</sup> According to the book of Daniel, at the time of the end Michael will stand for His people in order to deliver them from oppression (Dan 12:1-2). Likewise Jesus was standing for Stephen when he was stoned to death (Acts 7:55-56). Thus standing at the right hand of God is a biblical imagery for the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Many biblical scholars and theologians confirm the biblical teaching that Jesus Christ is our Intercessor,<sup>13</sup> but what does it mean? What does the Bible want to convey by this terminology? What difference does it make for our everyday problems that He “always lives to intercede” for us?

#### Popular Model

When we imagine the work of a mediator or intercessor, we have in mind two antagonistic parties with a go-between seeking to reconcile them by changing their mutual hatred, misunderstandings, presuppositions, feelings, and attitudes toward each other. This popular model is built on the intense work of the intermediary who seeks to reconcile both parties. The middle person has to plead with those involved in order to heal the broken relationship and restore the damaged communication and friendship.

Unfortunately, this popular pattern is often automatically transferred to the biblical teaching about Christ’s intercessory ministry in heaven. This

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<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are from the NIV.

<sup>11</sup> There are five songs of the Servant of the Lord in the book of Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:12-53:12; 61:1-3).

<sup>12</sup> There is a difference between standing and sitting at the right hand of God. “Standing” points to intercession and “sitting” to the rulership, victory, authority, and kingship of Christ’s ministry (Matt 26:64; Mark 16:19; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 12:2; cf. Ps 110:1). The standing also refers to the action of the judge who is ready to pronounce the legal verdict regarding the indicted person. Thus, the verdict brings deliverance and victory or condemnation.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959); G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965); Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1947); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2013); Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); Edward Heppenstall, *Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1972).

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view has serious implications for a correct understanding of God's character. He is perceived as an angry deity who has to be begged, and His attitude toward humans needs to be changed in order for grace and mercy to be granted. With a majority of Christians, this negative understanding even becomes worse as they think that Jesus's work is not powerful enough nor sufficient or adequate—He needs Mary's assistance in pleading with God and even the additional help of a whole pantheon of saints including Peter, the other apostles, Paul, and many international, national, and local saints. This grossly distorts the picture of God and depicts Him as a moral monster with Jesus as an Intercessor having to calm the angry Father in order to obtain His grace and blessings for sinners.

**What Christ's Intercessory Ministry Does Not Mean**

It is necessary to underline what the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary does not mean. It does not imply that Jesus has to (1) plead with the Heavenly Father or beg Him to forgive our sins; (2) appease an angry God; (3) change the Father's attitude toward us; nor (4) reconcile God with humanity. Jesus and the Heavenly Father are not involved in a celestial arm-wrestling match to ascertain who is stronger in order to show either favor or anger toward humans.

Reasons for these conclusions are plainly explained in the Scriptures:

1. Jesus does not need to beg our Heavenly Father to love us. He himself declared it: "In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (John 16:26-27).
2. Jesus does not need to change the Father's attitude toward us—"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Christ died for us, because the Father loved humans.
3. We humans need to be reconciled with God and not vice versa. This is our message of reconciliation as God's ambassadors: "Be [you people] reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). Sinners need to be

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brought back to Him; He is constantly searching for the lost (Gen 3:9).<sup>14</sup>

If Jesus Christ needed to appease an angry heavenly Father, then He would not be different from pagan gods that necessitate pacification and their anger expiated with sacrifices and gifts. One cannot buy God's favor thus Jesus does not need to plead with the Father on our behalf but is satisfying God's righteousness/justice in dealing with sin, thus He is both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26 NKJV). Our Heavenly Father loves people (Deut 33:3), and He and Christ are united in their efforts to save humanity (Eph 1:3-10).<sup>15</sup>

**Necessary Prerequisite**

The divinity and humanity of the Person of Jesus Christ, this oneness of His Being as God and man, are the essential preconditions for His mediation. He came to save fallen humanity. The incarnation of Christ and His atoning death on Calvary are foundational qualifications and opened the way for His intercessory ministry. The cross was a necessary prerequisite for His salvific mediatory work for humanity (Rom 3:23-26). His victory over sin (Matt 4:1-11; Rom 8:3) and His voluntary and substitutionary death for us qualified Him to be our Intercessor.

The intercessory ministry of Jesus puts into practice the results of the cross by expanding the efficacy of Calvary. Jesus became sin and a curse for us (Isa 53:3-6; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13) so what was accomplished on the cross almost two thousand years ago now needs to be applied, actualized, and incorporated into our lives in order for us to be restored to His image and have abundant life (John 10:10). He is the God-Man, our Mediator,

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<sup>14</sup> Romans 5:10 states: "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (NKJV). Regarding a sense in which God was reconciled to humanity in order that His justice could be satisfied through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, and His wrath propitiated (Rom 3:25; 2 Cor 5:18), see the "Linguistic Connotations" section below.

<sup>15</sup> Ellen G. White clearly notes: "The atonement of Christ was not made in order to induce God to love those whom He otherwise hated; . . . We are not to entertain the idea that God loves us because Christ has died for us, but that He so loved us that He gave His only-begotten Son to die for us" (*The Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1893). "The atonement of Christ was not the cause of God's love, but the result of that love. Jesus died because God loved the world" *The Review and Herald*, September 2, 2890). "The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us" (*The Home Missionary*, April 1893).

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because He “gave himself a ransom for all people” (1 Tim 2:6; cf. Mark 10:45). He is our Mediator, because He is our Savior. His intercession is a continuation of His saving activity on our behalf, the realization and integration of His work for us on the cross. We need his death and life in order to be spiritually alive (Rom 3:24-25; 5:10).

Raoul Dederen directly emphasizes the role of Christ’s death on the cross: “While His sacrifice for sin was made once for all on the cross (Heb. 7:27; 9:28; 10:11-14), the ascended Christ is making available to all the benefits of His atoning sacrifice.”<sup>16</sup> At the moment sin entered the world, Jesus reached down from heaven and stepped in as our Intercessor in anticipation of His victory at the cross. This proleptic reality is best described in the book of Revelation: “The Lamb who was slain from the creation [or better ‘foundation’; Greek: καταβολ ] of the world” (Rev 13:8).

**Christ’s Twofold Ministry**

Christ’s role as Intercessor is twofold: (1) revealing and ministering the mysteries of God’s goodness and richness to humankind, and (2) presenting our existential needs to God and securing our salvation. In other words, His intercessory ministry is both a revelatory and redemptive process for humanity forming one unit that cannot be separated. Alister McGrath correctly explains that “the presence of God in Christ is intended to mediate between a transcendent God and fallen humanity. This idea of ‘presence as mediation’ takes two quite distinct, yet ultimately complementary, forms: The mediation of revelation on the one hand, and of salvation on the other.”<sup>17</sup>

First of all, Jesus being divine (John 1:1-3; Rom 9:5; Col 1:15-18) represents the Godhead. As the Mediator, meaning Communicator, of the divine, He reveals the Father, His character, and all the values of the Godhead (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:14-18; 17:6), because He and the Father are one (John 10:30). Even the Old Testament paints the picture of God mediating for His people (1 Sam 2:25; Job 16:20). Christ also discloses the Holy Spirit by explaining the Spirit’s ministry (John 14:16-17; 15:26-27; 16:7-15), of also interceding (*entynchanein*) for the saints (Rom 8:27).<sup>18</sup> With the entrance of sin (Gen 3:1-10) and the ensuing distortion of God’s

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<sup>16</sup> Raoul Dederen, “Christ: His Person and Work,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 187.

<sup>17</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 346-347.

<sup>18</sup> In the case of the Spirit, the word *mesites* is not used.

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character, Christ's birth and great sacrifice on the cross for humanity demonstrates credibly and convincingly that God is the God of love, truth, and justice (John 3:16; Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-26; 5:5-8).

Proverbs 8:22-31 hints to the special role that Jesus took upon Himself as an Intermediator and Communicator between the Triune God and their created beings. From the moment God began to create beings in the Universe,<sup>19</sup> Christ was presenting the principles of love, government, and the will of the Godhead to the created worlds.

When the New Testament uses the term *mesites* (Gal 3:19-20; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) or *mesiteuein* (Heb 6:17), it denotes what God is doing for humans through Jesus Christ. He came from above to be with us, Emmanuel (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:20-23), a movement from God toward humanity not the reverse. He came to live among us as a fragile human being in order to reveal God's values, truth, teachings, and how God hates sin and evil. He never stands on the side of the oppressor but on the side of the oppressed; and in our suffering and distress, He suffers with us (Isa 63:9).

Jesus is the best self-revelation of God, He is the revealer of truth, because He is the Life, the Truth, and the Way (John 14:6; cf. Exod 34:6-7). He is not only revealing God and proclaiming the Word of God, but He is Himself the Revelation and the personified Word of God, God in the flesh (John 1:1-3; Col 2:9). In His humanity, He was exegeting (εχέγεομαι), i.e., giving a right interpretation of the true character of His heavenly Father (John 1:18c). On this existential knowledge depends eternal life (John 17:3). He wants to break the circle of lies about the Godhead and rebuild a loving and trusting relationship between Himself and humanity.

In sharp contrast, Jesus Christ also came to defeat Satan and unmask his work (John 16:11; 1 John 3:8) so we can understand the character of our enemy (Matt 13:25, 28-29), which is full of deception, violence, and death (John 8:44; 2 Cor 11:14).

Thomas Torrance aptly declares: "Thus as both the incarnate revelation of God and the embodied knowledge of God, Jesus constitutes in himself the Way, the Truth and the Life through whom alone the access to God the Father is freely open for all the peoples of mankind. That is to say, as the incarnate Word and Truth of God Jesus Christ in his own personal Being is

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<sup>19</sup> See on this point a seminal article by Richard M. Davidson, "Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 33–54.

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identical with the Revelation which he mediates.”<sup>20</sup> “Thus in Jesus Christ the Mediation of divine Revelation and the Person of the Mediator perfectly coincide. In Jesus Christ God has given us a Revelation which is identical with himself. Jesus Christ is the Revelation of God.”<sup>21</sup> “Jesus Christ *is* the Word of God, not that he is only the bearer of God’s Word, for he is the very Truth of God addressed to us in the form of his personal Being.”<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, Jesus Christ by experiencing true humanity (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 2:52; John 1:14; Rom 8:3; Phil 2:5-11; Col 2:9; 1 John 1:1-2; 4:2-3) understands our struggles (Heb 4:15-16), and thus as our Representative (1 Tim 2:5) can efficiently mediate on our behalf between the Holy Father and sinful humanity. The rest of this article focuses on this aspect of Jesus’s role as our Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary and pursues a clearer understanding of His ministry. The Scriptures certainly attest that Jesus Christ intercedes (*entynchanein*) on our behalf before the heavenly Father (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 9:24) and that He is our Advocate (*parakletos*, 1 John 2:1). The movement is clearly from down up, uplifting believers in God from earth to the heavenly Father.

**Linguistic Connotations**

A careful study of the biblical vocabulary related to Christ’s intercessory ministry can assist a serious student of Scripture in discovering the meaning of Jesus’s function as our Intercessor:

1. The Hebrew word for “intercede” is *paga*’ which basically means “to meet” or “encounter” (Gen 23:8). Another verb is *palal* translated as “to pray” or “intercede” (1 Sam 2:25; 7:5). Also the term *khalah* in Piel means to “pacify,” “appease,” or “intercede” (1 Kgs 13:6).
2. The Greek verb *entynchano* means also “to meet” or “encounter,” and as its Hebrew counterpart it conveys according to the context whether this meeting is positive or negative (Acts 25:24; Rom 11:2).

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI: 1983), 19.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 67; italics in original.

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3. The notion of *parakletos* literally means “someone who is called (to help or to stand by),” thus “Helper,” “Advocate,” “Intercessor.” Jesus Christ as well as the Holy Spirit are called *parakletos* (John 14:16 [the Holy Spirit]; 1 John 2:1 [Jesus Christ]), and it means that “He is Someone called to help,” or “Someone to stand by.” He can help efficiently in our struggles. When Stephen was being stoned, the heavens were opened, and he saw Jesus “standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:25), thus being assured that in spite of the violence transpiring against him, Jesus was defending him and giving him the needed strength to die as a martyr.

4. Jesus Christ is a *hilasterion* (atonement, expiation, propitiation) according Rom 3:25. The Hebrew equivalent of this expression is *kapporet* (a mercy seat; see Lev 25:17; 16:15-17). There is a significant debate among New Testament scholars about the correct translation of the word *hilasterion*, if it means to expiate or to propitiate.<sup>23</sup> Christ is a reconciling or atoning sacrifice (Greek: *hilasmos*; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). He experienced God’s wrath, because He became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21) and took upon Himself the curse for our transgressions (Gal 3:13-14) that we may live and have eternal life (John 5:24-25; 11:25). The biblical understanding of the Lord’s anger or wrath (Rom 1:18) is that it is God’s antagonistic, irreconcilable, and burning reaction toward sin. It is His passionate attitude toward everything that is irreversibly associated with evil, because sin destroys what is good, valuable, and beautiful. God cannot tolerate evil, because it is opposite to His very good nature (Ps 107:1). God is love by definition (Deut 7:9; 1 John 4:16), and never called “anger” per se, but He can be angry, i.e., He shows His uncompromising attitude toward sin and everything that destroys life. God’s anger is thus the other side of God’s love with love being His proper nature. The Triune God found a very costly

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<sup>23</sup> See James E. Allman, “ἰλάσκεσθαι: To Propitiate or to Expiate?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172 (July-September 2015): 335-355; C. H. Dodd, “ἸΛΑΣΚΕΣΘΑΙ, Its Cognates, Derivatives, and Synonyms, in the Septuagint,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1930-31): 352-360; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955): 144-213; Roger Nichol, “C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (May 1955): 117-157; Valentin Zywiets, “Representing the Government of God: Christ as the *Hilasterion* in Romans 3:25” (MA Religion thesis, Andrews University, 2016).

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solution to the problem of sin: Christ Himself is that solution, by His sacrifice of love He brings reconciliation and peace within the Godhead (Rom 5:9-11; 2 Cor 5:18-19; Col 1:19-20). He is the mercy seat, the atoning sacrifice Who covers all repentant sinners with His righteousness, thus removing the cause of God's wrath as God propitiated His own wrath (2 Cor 5:18). All sinners who admit that they have transgressed His word, the law of God, and openly, honestly, and sincerely confess his/her sins, and accept Christ as their Savior are forgiven; and God is their righteousness (Pss 32:1-2; 51:1-12; Jer 23:5-6; 33:16; Rom 3:26; 1 John 1:7-9). Michael Bird puts it in these words: "We might say that when sin is expiated, then God's wrath is propitiated. When sin is removed, God's wrath is appeased."<sup>24</sup> However, unrepentant sinners stay under God's anger (John 3:36).

God's anger is revealed against all iniquity, but Jesus Christ is a *hilasterion*, a mercy seat, *kaporet*.<sup>25</sup> The cross was a revelation of God's love and justice (Pss 85:10; 101:1). By the cross, God demonstrated that He was just while justifying "those who have faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26 NIV) and accepted Christ as the Mercy Seat (Rom 3:25). His righteousness is manifested through His ultimate sacrifice of life.

Jesus Christ is our only Intercessor (1 Tim 2:2-6): this assertion by Paul was intended to counter the Gnostic teaching of his time, a world teeming with different intercessors.<sup>26</sup> But Paul assures that no other power can come between God and this world, Christ is fully God and fully human, therefore we do not need to worry. He is our Intercessor because He gave Himself for

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<sup>24</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 406-407.

<sup>25</sup> In the sanctuary, the *kaporet* covered the ark of the covenant under which was the law of God, the Decalogue (see Exod 25:17-22). In the Septuagint, the *kaporet* is translated as *hilasterion* (see, for example, Exod 25:17, 20-21; 31:7; Lev 16:13-15; cf. Heb 9:5). This mercy seat or covering lid represented Jesus Christ, His atoning sacrifice on the cross. He was the sacrifice of atonement which God provided in order to cover sinners and give them transforming grace. Paul identifies Jesus as a mercy seat—"hilasterion" or "kapporet" (Rom 3:25; 1 John 4:15). Jesus makes propitiation or atonement (*hilaskomai*—Heb 2:17), and He is the propitiation or the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:2; cf. "an offering for sin"—Isa 53:8).

<sup>26</sup> Thus, for example, Ivan T. Blazen in his article "Jesus: Priest and Coming King," in *The Essential Jesus: The Man, His Message, His Mission*, ed. Bryan W. Ball and William G. Johnsson (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2002), 251.



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humanity in order to redeem us. No one and nothing on earth or in the entire Universe can separate us from God's love (Rom 8:35-39).

**What Does the Intercessory Ministry of Jesus Christ  
on Our Behalf Mean?**

On the basis of the previous biblical, theological, and linguistic observations, we can proceed with four definitions of Christ's intercessory ministry for us:

**I. Christ Meets the Father in Order to Help**

A. Assistance with Daily Struggles, Problems, and Temptations

Jesus Christ and the heavenly Father **meet** (*paga'* and *entynchano*) together in order to **help** (*parakletos*) humans with their everyday problems and enable them to be victorious Christians. All heaven (the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit) is united in helping us in our struggles with sin, Satan, and temptations, because without His assistance we are powerless and cannot resist evil, change, and spiritually grow (John 15:5; Phil 4:13).

B. Imparting the Holy Spirit

The first tangible result of that meeting after Christ's ascension was the sending of the Holy Spirit and giving Him to the believers (Acts 2). Everett Ferguson rightly states: "God gives help in living out one's salvation (Phil. 2:12) in the Christian way of life. The Holy Spirit provides the link between baptism and the Christian life. The Holy Spirit not only sanctifies (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 1:2) but also gives new life in baptism (John 3:5) and takes up residence in the one converted (Acts 2:38; 5:30; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19). The Holy Spirit provides the continuing present benefits of God's one-time action in the cross and the one-time commitment in baptism (there is 'one baptism'—Eph. 4:5). He is the power of the Christian life."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 204.

Consider also the following statements of Ellen G. White: "By a union with Christ, by living faith, we are privileged to enjoy the efficacy of His mediation. We are crucified with Christ, buried with Christ, risen with Christ, to walk in newness of life" (*Signs of the Times*, October 11, 1899). "Everyone who will break from the slavery and service of Satan, and will stand under the blood-stained banner of Prince Immanuel will be kept by Christ's intercessions. Christ, as our Mediator, at the right hand of the Father, ever keeps us in view, for it is as necessary that He should keep us by His intercessions as that He should redeem us with His blood. If He lets go His hold of us for one moment, Satan stands ready to destroy. Those purchased by His blood, He now keeps by His intercession" (MS 73, 1893;

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Since we now have free access to God, we can approach Him directly through Christ without any human or “semi-divine beings” (Heb 4:16; 10:19). “Christ has made direct access to God in the heavenly sanctuary possible. That access is also related to the Holy Spirit. ‘For through [Christ Jesus] both [Jew and Gentile] have access in one Spirit to the Father’ (Eph. 2:18). The Holy Spirit provides a life that in some measure already participates in the future life (Eph. 1:13-14; Heb. 6:4).”<sup>28</sup>

John’s comment: “Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:39) needs to be correctly understood.<sup>29</sup> This proclamation does not mean that the Holy Spirit was not present, active, and engaging during the Old Testament period (ample evidence testifies against this popular standpoint),<sup>30</sup> but it signifies that the Spirit of the Lord could only work proleptically during Old Testament times and was acting in anticipation of Christ’s glorification, i.e., Jesus’s victory on the cross, His resurrection, and ascension. James Hamilton states: “The sense in which the Spirit is yet to be given is that *believers* are about to receive Him at the glorification of Jesus.”<sup>31</sup>

The cross historically validated the Spirit’s activities, and Jesus’s glorification (see John 13:31-32; 17:1-5)<sup>32</sup> was the seal authenticating the

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Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review And Herald, 1980), 6:1078).

<sup>28</sup> Ferguson, 217.

<sup>29</sup> See Luke 24:49; John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:8. See also seven New Testament statements about the “baptism of/with/in/by the Holy Spirit” (Matt 3:11-12; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16-17; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Cor 12:13). Compare with Luke 1:15 (John the Baptist); 1:41 (Elizabeth); 1:67 (Zechariah)—all these Old Testament saints were filled with the Holy Spirit before Pentecost or Jesus’s glorification.

<sup>30</sup> John Goldingay, “Was the Holy Spirit Active in Old Testament Times? What Was New About the Christian Experience of God?” *Ex Auditu* 12 (1996): 14-28; Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006), 62; italics in original. See also, Geoffrey W. Grogan, “The Experience of Salvation in the Old and New Testaments,” *Vox Evangelica* 5 (1967): 12-17; Sidney H. Hooke, “The Spirit Was Not Yet (John 7:39),” *New Testament Studies* 9 (1963): 372-380.

<sup>32</sup> By the sacrificial life and victorious death for sinners, Jesus Christ glorified His Father and saved humanity. Each believer in Him has eternal life, the glorious result of His ultimate sacrifice for humanity. The Father glorified Jesus, i.e., resurrected Him to life and restored Him to His previous position of glory (John 17:5; Acts 2:32, 36; 5:30-31; Phil 2:8-9).

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involvement of the Holy Spirit's work during Old Testament times and onward. Thus, the triumphant death of Jesus was the prerequisite for giving the Spirit of God to the world and at the same time the justification and affirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament dispensation during which His activity was real.<sup>33</sup>

#### C. Praying for Us

Jesus's intercession is also compared to His praying for us. By praying for His followers, He helps them to become strong in faith and be united in love and truth (see John 17). Jesus's intercessory prayer for His disciples and the successive generations of His followers is that they be a model of that unity and faithful. A good example of this is Jesus praying for Peter: "I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail" (Luke 22:32 NKJV). He wants believers to know Him (John 17:3; Eph 9:10), be victorious in Him (Rev 3:6), love each other (John 13:34-35), and be His bold and courageous disciples (Matt 14:27; Acts 4:13, 29; 23:11; 27:22, 25; 28:31; Phil 1:20).<sup>34</sup>

#### D. Our Best Perfumed with Christ's Merits

Through Christ's mediatory work, our Intercessor needs to perfect even our best actions that spring from our gratitude to God's kindness (see Rev 8:3-4). For example, our prayers, worship, obedience, our best praises coming from gratitude to God, all need His purification. Ellen White powerfully comments on this aspect:

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Christ's death started not only a new dimension of His ministry, but also approved and authenticated all what was done before in Old Testament times.

<sup>33</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (2010): 315: "The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a most significant work wherein the Spirit arrived in state, visibly and dramatically, thereby showing in time and space what had been experienced all along in the Old Testament was not unreal, but was fully part of the whole plan of God."

He also asks a very pertinent question: "How could all of these old covenant persons have believed and been enabled to live sanctified lives if the Spirit of God did not dwell in them?" And to prove the point, he provides examples of Old Testament believers like Enoch, Noah, Joseph, Job, Bezalel, and David (Kaiser, 309).

<sup>34</sup> In Exod 32:31-32, there is an excellent example of such a praying ministry where Moses intercedes for the people of God who have sinned against Him by making a golden calf. Moses asks for God's forgiveness and offers even his own life for them.

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Christ, our Mediator, and the Holy Spirit are constantly interceding in man's behalf, but the Spirit pleads not for us as does Christ who presents His blood, shed from the foundation of the world; the Spirit works upon our hearts, drawing out prayers and penitence, praise and thanksgiving. The gratitude which flows from our lips is the result of the Spirit striking the cords of the soul in holy memories, awakening the music of the heart. The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary; but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor who is at God's right hand presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ's propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned. O, that all may see that everything in obedience, in penitence, in praise and thanksgiving must be placed upon the glowing fire of the righteousness of Christ. The fragrance of this righteousness ascends like a cloud around the mercy seat.<sup>35</sup>

### E. Empowering to be Witnesses

Jesus Christ as our Intercessor helps His followers to be connected with Him and be active in His Church. "To be in the church is to be in Christ, and to be in Christ is to be in the church."<sup>36</sup> Ferguson fittingly comments: "One is not 'in Christ' because of being 'in the church,' but one is 'in the church' because of being 'in Christ.' . . . To be saved is to be in Christ, and to be a Christian is to be a member of the church."<sup>37</sup> Jesus gives to His followers the Holy Spirit to be His faithful witnesses: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Act 1:8).

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<sup>35</sup> Ellen G. White, MS 50, 1900; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1077-1078. See Also Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1958), 353.

<sup>36</sup> Claude Welch, *The Reality of the Church* (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 165.

<sup>37</sup> Ferguson, 205.

## II. Christ Completely Saves

Jesus Christ **justifies and saves** (Zech 3:1-7; Rom 8:1). As a result we identify with Him (Rom 6:1-4; Eph 2:4-10). He is our Substitute and Representative because He died for our sins (1 Cor 1:30; 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21). His substitutionary death brought victory over the evil forces and Satan. He defeated death (Rom 6:24; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 26, 54-55), which is why He can now give His followers eternal life (John 5:24-25; 11:25).

According to Heb 7:25 Jesus “is able to save completely.” Our Intercessor saves all who come to Him as they are, confessing their sins. Christ as our Intercessor reflects the Old Testament function of the Priest and High Priest who made an atonement for the people (Lev 16:19, 30) and reconnected the sinner with the holy and gracious God. But Jesus gave Himself as an ultimate sacrifice for us (Heb 9:25-26, 28) and His blood purifies us from our sins (Heb 9:12; 5:9; 1 Pet 1:18-19). We are perfect in Him, “*en Christo*,” and Paul very strongly emphasizes our dwelling in Christ (Rom 6:23; 8:1; 9:1; 12:5; 1 Cor 1:30; 4:15; etc.).

Jesus Christ **identifies** with us, one to one, and this identification is so close that it is compared to the most sensitive part of our body: the pupil of our eye. “For this is what the LORD Almighty says: . . . ‘whoever touches you touches the apple of his [Lord’s] eye’” (Zech 2:8). “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’” (Matt 25:40). Additional biblical examples demonstrate how Jesus is closely uniting Himself with His followers: “He will reply, ‘Truly, I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me’” (Matt 25:45). “He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied” (Acts 9:4-5). “Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16).

Jennings rightly comments: “Jesus interceded in the course of sinfulness itself. . . . He took on himself our terminal condition in order to conquer, overcome and cure. ‘Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows’ (Is 53:5 NIV 1984). Yes, Jesus became one of us in order to reverse all the damage sin has done to his creation and to restore us, his children, back to unity with God. Jesus came to crush the serpent’s head

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(Gen 3:15)—to destroy Satan and eradicate the sin infection from this world (Heb 2:14).<sup>38</sup>

Jesus takes us into the very presence of God the Father and applies the results of the cross (Eph 2:5; Heb 9:24). Ellen White powerfully summarizes the biblical teaching:

If you give yourself to Him [Jesus Christ], and accept Him as your personal Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God as just as if you had not sinned.<sup>39</sup>

Begin a friendship with Christ today. Put your case in the hands of the great Advocate. He will plead your cause before the Father. Though you have transgressed the law, and must plead guilty before God, Christ will present his precious blood in your behalf, and through faith and obedience, and vital union with Christ, you may stand acquitted before the Judge of all the earth, and he will be your friend when the final trump shall sound, and the scenes of earth shall be no more.<sup>40</sup>

Because Jesus Christ is our Intercessor, we can come to Him with full confidence, assurance, and boldness (Heb 3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35; 1 John 2:28; 4:17). We can come to Him without fear, doubt, or wavering for in Him we have hope (Heb 6:19; 7:19; 10:23; 1 Pet 1:3). He is highly and uniquely qualified to be our Intercessor since He is one of us, our older Brother, and He was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Heb 4:15 NIV; 2:17-18). He is the source of salvation for everyone who comes to Him (Heb 5:7-9, 16), and there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ (Rom 8:1).

### **III. Christ Changes and Transforms**

Salvation means healing (Pss 6:2; 41:4; Jer 17:14; Hos 14:4) and transformation (Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 6:14; 1 Thess 5:23-24). Jesus Christ did not come to save us “in” sin but “from” sin (Matt 1:21). He desires our sanctification (1 Thess 4:3-4; Heb 12:14; 13:12) by walking humbly with

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<sup>38</sup> Timothy R. Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 82-83.

<sup>39</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1956), 62.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 27, 1888.

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the Lord (Micah 6:8), persevering (Rev 12:14), and living with eyes fixed on Him (Heb 12:1-2). In this way, we will more and more reflect the character of God (2 Cor 3:18). Hebrews 4:16 eloquently spells out why the intercessory ministry of our High Priest<sup>41</sup> is needed for us: “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” As broken and fragile human beings, we are constantly in need of Jesus and totally dependent upon Him. We are crucified with Christ (Rom 6:5-6) in order to live a new life (Rom 6:4; 8:11; Eph 1:15-21; 2:1-10). Being a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) does not mean that we no longer have a sinful nature (Ps 51:5; Rom 7:14-20), but our sinful desires are under the control of His Spirit (Rom 6:11-14; 8:1-4), and then Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20; Phil 1:21). Our sinful nature will be changed only at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:50-54; Phil 1:6; 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-3). Jesus proclaimed: “Without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5 NKJV). Paul confesses: “I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13). To fight against temptation, overcome sin, have a successful fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7), and bear lasting good fruit is an impossibility without Christ, without His Spirit. Only Christ is able to keep us from falling (Jude 1:24), because His intercession breaks the power of sin, gives freedom, and liberates from addictions and slavery to evil. He saves us from the consequence of sin—eternal death, but He also enables us to live a new life according to His will (Ezek 36:26-29; Rom 8:13-14). Only He can transform by His grace so that we may replicate His loving, compassionate, and serving character. He wants to change us by the power of His Word, Spirit, and grace in order to rid us of selfishness, self-centeredness, self-justification, and striving to be the strongest. “Godly love is at war with the survival-of-the-fittest principle.”<sup>42</sup> He desires that we be governed by the fruit of the spirit against which there is no condemnation (Gal 5:22-23).

#### **IV. Christ Vindicates/Defends His People**

Jesus Christ **vindicates** His children against the accusations of Satan. The book of Job gives insight into Satan’s charges against God’s followers (Job being a typological figure for them), and how God stands against Satan

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<sup>41</sup> In the book of Hebrews it is explicitly stated nine times that Jesus Christ is the High Priest (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11); and for two times it is implied (Heb 7:28; 8:13). In the same book, Jesus is called the Priest six times (5:6; 7:16, 17, 21).

<sup>42</sup> Jennings, 83.

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and for them (see Job 1:8-9; 2:4; 42).<sup>43</sup> It is plainly explained in the book of Revelation where His victory on the cross is described:

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (Rev 12:10-12).

Jesus Christ personally withstood Satan's accusations when He defeated Him on the cross (John 8:31; 16:11; Rev 12:7-10). He was the Victor, and His followers can be victorious only because of Him. Our victory is His gift to us. Jesus Christ not only opposes Satan, the powers of darkness, and the principalities of evil (Eph 6:10-13) but He defends us against Satan's accusations (Rev 7:1; 12:10-12). He is placing a hedge of protection around his people (2 Kgs 6:17; Job 1:10; Pss 34:7; 91:1-3; 103:1-5). Thus, the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ means that He personally stands against Satan to defend us and silence our accuser.

Jesus Christ as our Intercessor vindicates His people in front of the whole universe (see Dan 7:9-10, 13-14, 22; Eph 3:10-11). He is both our Advocate and Judge at the same time, so we can look forward with bold assurance and without fear to the day of judgment (1 John 2:28; 4:17). For who He is, for what He accomplished, and for what He does, He deserves to be eternally praised (Rom 9:5; Rev 5:9-10, 12-13).

Jesus Christ is our Intercessor until the close of probation (see Rev 15:7-8; 22:11). However, this does not mean that after this time believers live without Christ (but only without His specific role and ministry as their Intercessor) and the help of the Holy Spirit. We will never live on our own independent of Him. This dependence will be maintained throughout eternity (Rev 22:1-4). Even more intensely will the Holy Spirit be with His people and carry them through the last short period of time when they will live without the intercessory ministry of Christ since it will no longer be necessary because He has saved them completely, began in them the

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<sup>43</sup> For details, see my article "The God of Job and Our Adversary," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15, no. 2 (Autumn 2004): 104-117.



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process of powerful transformation, and vindicated them in front of the Universe (for details, see Matt 25:1-10; Matt 28:20; John 15:5; Rom 8:14; 2 Cor 3:5; Phil 1:6; 3:12-15; 4:13; 1 Thess 5:23, 24; 2 Thess 3:3; Jude 24, 25; Heb 12:1,2; Rev 3:10).<sup>44</sup> During this short period of time before the Second Coming of Christ, between the close of probation and our glorification, the true believers will still need to be covered by the results of the cross, the atoning merits of Christ, because of our sinful natures. We will still have need for a “constant dependence upon the atoning blood of Christ”<sup>45</sup>

#### Conclusion

One can observe an incredible pattern in the whole Bible regarding God’s intercessory ministry. It is very positive toward His people because He is for them, never against them, and wants to save. This crucial role of Jesus Christ’s is indispensable as the following statement indicates:

*What does **intercession** comprehend? It is the golden chain which binds finite man to the throne of the infinite God. The human agent whom Christ has died to save importunes the throne of God, and his petition is taken up by Jesus who has purchased him with His own blood. Our great High Priest places His righteousness on the side of the sincere suppliant, and the prayer of Christ blends with that of the human petitioner.*<sup>46</sup>

Ellen White properly explains the vast efficacy of Christ’s intercessory ministry:

All blessings must come through a **Mediator**. Now every member of the human family is given wholly into the hands of Christ, and whatever we possess—whether it is the gift of money, of houses, of lands, of reasoning powers, of physical strength, of intellectual talents—in this present life, and

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<sup>44</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1962), 431; idem, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 86; *Great Controversy*, 615, 623.

<sup>45</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 352.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1964), 78; emphasis added.

Christ’s mediation claims all the graces of the covenant, including all blessings of this life and the life to come. Christ is “the Mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9:15) making available all the new covenant promises. For example, note the various covenant promises included in Jesus’ intercessory high priestly prayer of John 17: the efficacy of our witness (v. 18), unity as in the Godhead (v. 23), love among His disciples (v. 26).

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the blessings of the future life, are placed in our possession as God's treasures to be faithfully expended for the benefit of man. Every gift is stamped with the cross and bears the image and superscription of Jesus Christ. All things come of God. From the smallest benefits up to the largest blessing, all flow through the one Channel—a superhuman **mediation** sprinkled with the blood that is of value beyond estimate because it was the life of God in His Son.<sup>47</sup>

We can come to Him with full confidence because whatever He does, He does for our salvation. In His actions He wants to be transparent to us as well as to the whole universe. He is a great Communicator with His created beings from the beginning, because He wants everyone to understand who God is, His character, purposes, and will. He does not hide His purposes from His created beings; on the contrary, He opens Himself and His thoughts, feelings, actions, and the future to everyone who wants to know and understand.

Christ's intercessory ministry is twofold: He reveals God's character and His values to humanity, and presents our needs, struggles, and issues to God. The Triune God closely collaborates in this double mission. A decision for Jesus Christ means complete salvation—eternal life (Heb 7:25), and He is always ready to help (1 John 2:1; 1:8-9). The following summarizes the four main functions of Jesus Christ as our Intercessor:

1. On Jesus Christ's return to heaven, He and the heavenly Father meet together in order to help humans in their everyday struggles with evil. The first tangible result of that meeting on our behalf is that the Holy Spirit is given to believers—see Acts 2. All heaven is united in helping us in our struggles with sin, Satan, and temptations (John 15:5; Phil 4:13). Jesus prays for us (John 17; Luke 22:32), and our best is covered by Christ's perfect life and atoning sacrifice. We are enabled through His power to witness to others.
2. Jesus Christ saves completely and identifies with us when we give our life to Him (Zech 2:8; Matt 25:40, 45; Acts 9:4-6). Jesus Christ saves, justifies, sanctifies and changes believers into His

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<sup>47</sup> Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1979), 22; emphasis added.

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image (Zech 3:1-7). Because of His goodness (Rom 2:4; Eph 1:7) we identify with Him (Rom 6:1-4; Eph 2:4-10).

3. Christ's intercessory ministry transforms His followers into His likeness, they grow in Him and His grace, and become more and more like Him (2 Cor 3:18; Col 1:25-28; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 3:18).

4. Jesus Christ vindicates us against the accusations of Satan (Rev 12:10-12; Job 1:8-9; 2:4; 42). He personally stands up against them; and because He is the Victor, our victory is secure in Him when we accept Him as the Lord of our life.

Knowing this magnificent work of Jesus Christ "for" and "in" us, one cannot do otherwise than give Him glory. Doxology is the only proper response to His kindness: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph 3:20-21).

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