

It Is Written

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Some "Old Stains"

By Dennis Ross

The other day, while washing dishes, I came upon a small pot that had been scorched during its use. Even though I had soaked it for quite a while, in hot water and soap, I still had a great deal of difficulty removing all the stains from the bottom of the pot. It was almost as though they had become permanent. As I continued to scrub that pot, a lesson occurred to me: even though we have been "soaked" and "cleansed" by the blood of Christ, some old stains from our past sins may still remain. I know because I carry some around with me.

Physical Stains

During my high school years, I was involved in drinking. One night, I decided to go out with some friends and do some partying. We were able to persuade an adult to buy us alcohol, and I paid for a pint of apricot brandy. I then proceeded to drink the entire contents of the bottle.

While I was in this drunken state, we encountered another student from the school we attended, and I "mouthed off" to him. What followed doesn't matter because I "blacked out," but the next thing I remember was sitting, holding a white, blood-drenched towel that covered my left eye.

Somehow, my glasses lens had broken, and most of the glass ended up beneath my eye. One piece of glass, however, cut through the very center of my eye's surface. I am now considered to be "legally blind" in that eye. That's a stain that the blood of Christ could not wash away. That reminded me of something Paul wrote while under Holy Spirit inspiration:

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Corinthians 12:7-10).

Obviously, my life of sin was far different from Paul's. He was religiously wrong; I was not only religiously wrong, but I was also caught up in the lusts of the flesh. It is written, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (I John 2:15-17). However, in God's eyes, sin is sin, and its consequences do not disappear. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

My own sin caused my stain. Many indeed bear the stain of sin long after they cease sinning. For some, the lesson hits home; for others, it is ignored and forgotten. How often has God sought His children's welfare, only to see them again depart from Him to suffer the consequences of their sin? How often have the children failed to learn the lessons their parents learned before them? Though I knew that drinking was wrong, I continued drinking until that night, until I learned the "hard way." I thank God the sin is gone. And I also thank Him for the constant reminder of sin's foolishness and the

consequences I bear in my body.

Social Stains

During my young-adult days, I was involved with drugs, especially marijuana. During that time, I worked as a cook at a restaurant. Almost everyone knew that I smoked pot. During this time, I came to know the truth, and after learning what I needed to do to be right with God, I was baptized into Christ (cf. Romans 6:3-7). Though it was a bitter struggle, I finally stopped smoking. But as immersed in it as I was, there were those who, upon hearing that I had obeyed the gospel, would respond, "That pothead is a Christian?!"

Of course, after I began preaching, the responses were even more emphatic. Though the blood of Jesus had cleansed me from my sins, my old way of life had left a stain on the memories of others, an influence that I could not erase (though I can, and did, try to change it). For some of my former companions, nothing will be remembered but that I was a "pothead!" Once again, I am reminded of something Paul wrote:

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love that is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (I Timothy 1:12-16).

One could easily imagine those who would not accept Paul's conversion to Christ. His former life and his actions against Christians could have served as a stumbling block to them, as my own actions have, undoubtedly, become to some I had known. Of course, Paul's sins had been washed away. Still, it seems he was forever defending his apostleship, and he had made enemies of those who persisted in their persecution of Christ, and perhaps even of those who called themselves Christians. Of some of the persecutions he endured, he wrote,

"... in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, ... in perils among false brethren ..." (II Corinthians 11:26);

"... some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:15-17).

Again, my life of sin was far different from Paul's. What he had done, he did because of religious conviction; I was simply living in sin. However, the stained influence of a former life can remain in others' memories.

Yes, I carry some old stains that the blood of Christ could not soak and wash away. However, what truly matters is what God sees in me. Does He see a heart that has been purified by His Son's blood? Does He see a true servant of Christ? What does God see in you? "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalms 139:23-24). Especially would I encourage the young to heed this lesson from one who has lived, though but a short time, in the world:

- *"... (choose) rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; ..." (Hebrews 11:25).*
- *"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity" (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10).*
- *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).*