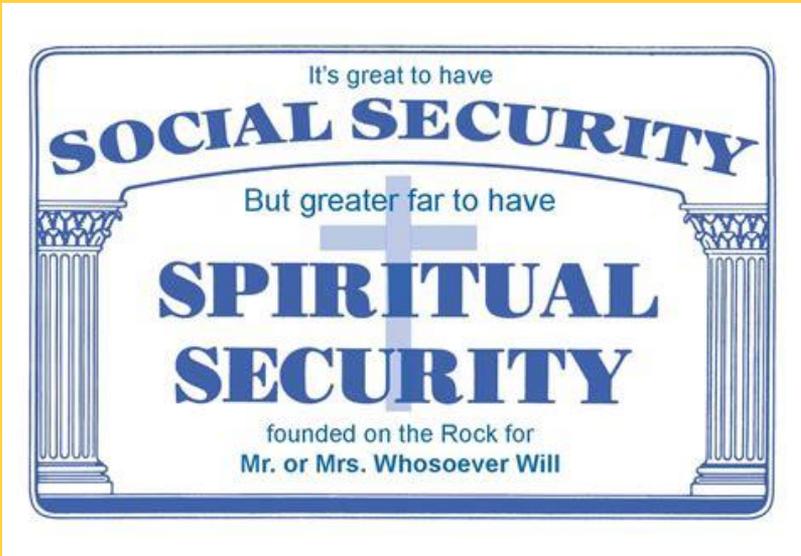


Continual Cleansing

Spiritual Security for the True Believer
That *Walks in the Light* (1 John 1:7)

By Robert Waters



The Author

For about fifty years, I have participated in discussions about what forgiveness means for Christians, which has sparked considerable controversy. Initially, these debates appeared in journals like the Guardian of Truth, Searching the Scriptures, and Gospel Truths. With the arrival of the Internet, discussions shifted to a forum known as the “Mars-list” and other similar platforms. Today, conversations continue in various Facebook groups and on some individual Facebook profiles.

As a new full-time gospel preacher in the late 1970s, I had questions regarding how a Christian could feel spiritually secure and confident in being in God's grace. It seemed that Christians who recognized their imperfections believed they had limited chances of attaining heaven. Initially, my approach was to read and listen. But it was not long until I accepted the position that Leslie Diestelkamp describes in his endorsement of a book I wrote: “Denies all Calvinism but at the same time he advocates full assurance and confidence for the faithful child of God.”

Not once, for many years, did I hear a preacher mention 1 John 1:7, which is a foundation passage for a Christian's spiritual security. Could the confusion about forgiveness of sin for Christians stem from a misinterpretation of 1 John 1:9? This passage, once understood, clarifies the truth with surrounding verses.

As I studied the passages that mentioned “*continual cleansing*,” I felt prepared to write articles for journals and participate in discussions. Unfortunately, my opponents have never been willing to agree to a formal written debate with a fair proposition – a proposition that truly represents what they are saying.

The inconsistencies that an opponent faces in open discussion surely must be embarrassing to them. While asserting that no sin is forgiven unless it is learned of, repented of, and confessed, they also are heard to say things like, *“God is merciful and gives us time to repent.”* These viewpoints are not harmonious. Suppose God is merciful and gives time to repent. Why are these teachers not accepting the passages that teach this rather than trying to explain them so that they do not harm these men’s contention that any sin one has not learned and repented of results in that person’s being lost forever if he dies first?

This book aims to promote unity among readers regarding what is believed to be clear biblical teachings. It suggests that a state of salvation might not be achievable if one believes they are only saved if they have no unlearned, unrepented, or unconfessed sins, due to the belief that everyone has sinned. Paul wrote, *“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23), and John added, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8). While older opponents of continual cleansing may not repent, we aim to help younger Christians and new converts understand this essential teaching for hope and spiritual security.

Table of Contents

1. The Security of the Believer	5
2. The Problem of Sin, Its Result, and How to Overcome It	11
3. The Need for Hope and Spiritual Security	17
4. Eternal Life - A Possession True Christians Can Hold.....	23
5. Why Is This Issue So Important?	29
6. We Can Know We Have Eternal Life, but if One Does on What Is It Based?	35
7. Neo-Pharisaism	41
8. A Treatise on the Word "Walk"	45
9. How to Have Fellowship with God, by Stephen J. Cole	49
(A thorough exposition of the meaning of " <i>walk in the light</i> ")	
10. A Look at a Key Passage as Understood by Some Great Scholars	63
11. List of Areas of Disagreement That Demonstrates That the Neo-Pharisee's Notion That One Can Live Their Entire Life Without Sinning Is Impossible.....	71
12. Can There Be Forgiveness Without Repentance?.....	81
13. Is It True That No Sin Can Be Forgiven Unless It Is Confessed?.....	85
(An exegesis of 1 John 1:9)	
14. Was Jesus, Who Lived a Sinless Life, "Just a Man," and Therefore Anyone Can Live Sinlessly?	95
15. Must We Consider Consequences in Our Biblical Studies?	105
16. What Is a <i>Perfectionist</i> ?	109
17. Categories of Sin, and Are There Degrees of Sin?	113
18. An Exposition of Passages That Teach and/or Support the Bible's Teaching on <i>Continuous Cleansing</i>	119
19. Two Extreme Views Exposed and Why the Truth Is Important to Outreach Efforts	123
20. Passages That Neo-Pharisees Use to Support Their Contention Explained in Context.....	127
21. Questions and Answers	131
22. Some Great Comments	137
23. How to Keep Saved (sermon outline)	141
24. What Is " <i>Sin Not Unto Death</i> "?	145
25. Continual Cleansing Is Consistent with God's Character	149
26. Voices from the Past	157
27. Conclusion	163

Chapter 1

The Security of the Believer

Nothing should interest the child of God more than a study concerning the beliefs and behaviors necessary to continue in a favorable condition in the mind of God. When we study the apostle Paul and see the confidence that he had in God and in the promises He made, we should be encouraged and determined to learn what Paul knew and to be the type of character he was so that we might have the same confidence. Our constant efforts will, day by day, bring us closer to having the degree of confidence that we see from the Scriptures that Paul, the other apostles, and many Christians had.

Paul was indeed an apostle. However, any normal human being can have a confident expectation of heaven. This fact was made abundantly clear by the apostle John when he wrote, *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God”* (1 John 5:13).

We must be confident of our salvation. If we lack confidence in our salvation, we either believe we are lost or doubt our salvation. Webster defines *doubt* as: 1) *“to lack confidence in; distrust; 2) to consider unlikely; 3) an inclination not to believe or accept; 4) uncertainty of belief or opinion; 5) fear (archaic).”*

God is not pleased with doubters. This is apparent from what James teaches relative to prayer:

“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).

Thomas is often referred to as Doubting Thomas. But Thomas’s doubt was not inexcusable. After three days in the grave, Jesus arose from the dead. Some disciples came to where Thomas was and told him that Jesus had risen. Then Thomas said,

“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger in the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. Then after 8 days the disciples came with Jesus, and he asked Thomas to do as he had said. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God” (John 20:24-29).

At first, Thomas doubted. He doubted because he was a man who would not accept what he heard without putting it to the test. He thought of a way to confirm and checked it out. It was then that he could say, “I believe.” If we Christians doubt whether we will receive eternal life in heaven, it is due to one of two reasons. It is either because we know that we are not diligent in living according to God’s word and are therefore not faithful, or we don’t have confidence in God or His promises. If we have doubts,

rather than criticize Thomas for his doubts, we should do what he did and seek proof that we might be fully convinced. Jesus said to Thomas, *“Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 20:29).

If you doubt, picture Peter walking on the water toward Jesus. Peter begins to sink because of fear of the wind and waves, and cries out to the Lord to save him. Jesus, after catching him and keeping him from sinking, tells Peter, *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt”* (Matt. 14:31). Jesus rebuked Peter and asked him, *“Why do you doubt?”* You see, there was no reason for doubt. Immediately before this incident, Jesus had performed a miracle that would have left no doubt in the minds of those who saw or heard from reliable sources. Jesus had turned five loaves and two fishes into enough food to feed more than 5000 people.

Some will not accept proof when they see it. The Jews had seen Jesus's work, and they had been told that Jesus was the Christ. But they still asked, *“How long dost thou make us to doubt if thou be the Christ? Tell us plainly. Jesus then said, I told you, and ye believe not the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me”* (John 10:24-25). They did not believe at all. They were not disciples of Christ but were looking for an opportunity to destroy Christ and His followers. Through the centuries, multitudes have professed to be believers in Christ. But many of these do not believe all of what He says. The apostles spoke of such as *“Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof”* (2 Tim. 3:5). They deny part of the gospel, the plan

of salvation. Thus, they deny the gospel, which is the *“power of God unto salvation”* (Rom. 1:16). They may be convinced that they are saved, having been taught the doctrines of John Calvin; but they cannot be saved because they haven't obeyed the gospel to get into the Lord's church, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Jesus taught: *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”* (Mark 16:16). But they don't believe it. They're denying the power thereof, which is the gospel.

But what we are more concerned with in this study are the doubts of brethren in Christ. Peter doubted, and Jesus rebuked him for it, because there was no reason for him to doubt. What reason do we have for doubting? We are taught to study, that we might *“Show ourselves approved unto God”* (2 Tim. 2:15) and to *“prove all things and hold fast that which is good”* (1 Thess. 5:21). If we doubt God's existence, it is most likely because we haven't given sufficient study of the evidence that attests to the inspiration of the Scriptures.

There are degrees of faith. The gospel preacher who is prepared to debate the atheist is going to have more confidence that God exists than the new convert who has learned only the first principles. That's just common sense. No matter how much faith a man might have, he began with a small amount and built upon it by an open-minded study of the evidence.

Do you have doubts but want to do away with them? If so, then study evidence for the Christian faith. There are dozens of good books that will be greatly helpful; and if you have

doubts, the time you spend reading them will prove invaluable. You can build your confidence by studying evidence, and when you do, you'll see a difference – a change in your life. Your prayers will be made more fervently and with confidence of being met with acceptance and approval because you will have whipped a great enemy of Christianity, namely, doubt.

God wants and expects us to be confident that upon our death or at Jesus's return, we will receive eternal life as He promised to *“all them that obey Him”* (Heb. 5:9). Let's examine 1 John. 4:17,18:

“Herein is our love. Made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love. But perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”

Fear moves one to obey the Lord, and one who obeys *loves*. One who is perfect in love no longer fears God. The passage tells us that fear has *torment*. Certainly, God doesn't want us to experience this torment. If we fear, which is evidence of unbelief, we are not made perfect in love.

The importance of this study is apparent when we examine what Paul teaches in 2 Timothy 4:6-8:

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is

laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Regarding this passage the well-known and respected scholar Albert Barnes wrote,

"It is one of the characteristics of a true Christian, that he sincerely desires the return of his Savior, and would welcome his appearing in the clouds of heaven."

Many brethren feel insecure about their spiritual condition. They cannot confidently say "I'm going to heaven." If you can't do this, something is wrong. God wants and expects us to be faithful and then confident that we will receive what He has promised. This confidence can be obtained by learning from God's revelation what is expected of us that we might continually walk in His grace and love. Such is attainable without our thinking that we are righteous and deserving of God's amazing grace. As a believer in Christ, you can be secure, but it is conditional based on your continuing to do that which God requires of you. If you are a Christian, you are on a road, but it is not a "one-lane highway" with no troubles. You will experience trials and tribulations, but you must be *"faithful unto death"* to receive the *"crown of righteousness"* (Rev. 2:10). Don't be scared off by those who perceive the word *faithful* to refer to a sinlessly perfect person. We cannot think this and at the same time honestly have the Christian's hope.

Chapter 2

The Problem of Sin, Its Result, and How to Overcome It

The first sin was committed by Adam and Eve, who needed only to refrain from disobeying just ONE command – not to *“eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”* (Gen. 2:17). This sin resulted in Adam and Eve’s being *separated* (the meaning of *death*) from the Garden of Eden, where they had eternal life available as they ate of *“the tree of life”* (Gen. 2:9). Others who reach the age of accountability (as God judges) and who sin are separated from God. *“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear”* (Isa. 59:2). Since man’s fall, God has been gracious in providing means for man to be redeemed and to stand justified in his sight continually.

Virtually all heroes of faith (Heb. 11) were men with faults – sinful men. Yet these men were considered faithful by God who *“will have all men to be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth”* (1 Tim. 2:4). The means God used to give people the opportunity to be saved was not fully realized or known by all (it was a mystery, Rom. 16:25) until the coming of Christ and preaching of the gospel. Moses was the lawgiver whom God’s chosen people, Israel, could follow to ensure they were pleasing God. But even Moses was not perfect, and the consequence of one noted sin was his not being permitted into the promised land. When he

failed to obey as commanded, God said: *“Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.”*

God’s law, given through Moses, was a *“schoolmaster to bring us to Christ”* (Gal. 3:11-25). The *“schoolmaster”* was the Old Testament – a covenant between God and Israel. But this covenant was temporary (Jer. 31:31). Paul concluded the chapter by saying, *“But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”* Thus, that system is no longer applicable either to Jews or to Gentiles (1 Cor. 12:13, Rom. 10:12). The Law had no capability to forgive sins (Heb. 10:4), but those who were faithful could be forgiven because of the future sacrifice God would make in giving *“his only begotten son”* (John 3:16) *“as a ransom for all”* (1 Tim. 2:6).

Jesus overcame sin by living a sinless life under the Law of Moses. *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Cor. 5:21). Paul wrote, *“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life* (Rom. 5:18). Jesus said, *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

Jesus was righteous His entire life. He overcame sin and the world, which is something no man can do through works alone, without faith in Jesus. Israel tried, but Paul wrote,

“For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3). It was impossible for them to be righteous by the Law alone. Paul noted, *“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain”* (Gal. 2:21). Thus, if man is to be righteous, he must look to Christ, *“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God”* (Rom. 3:25).

Paul, in speaking of Abraham's justification by faith, wrote, *“Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification”* (Rom. 4:23-25). Paul's words found in Romans 8:1 seem to be the conclusion of his teaching on how to overcome sin: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”*

Albert Barnes Commentary on Romans 8:1

There is, therefore, now - This is connected with the closing verses of Rom. 7. The apostle had there shown that the Law could not effect deliverance from sin, but that such deliverance was to be traced to the gospel alone; Rom. 7:23-25. It is implied here that there was

condemnation under the Law, and would be still, but for the intervention of the gospel.

No condemnation - This does not mean that sin in believers is not to be condemned as much as any where, for the contrary is everywhere taught in the Scriptures; but it means,

(1) That the gospel does not pronounce condemnation like the Law. Its function is to pardon; the function of the law is to condemn. The one never affords deliverance, but always condemns; the object of the other is to free from condemnation, and to set the soul at liberty.

(2) There is no final condemnation under the gospel. The function, design, and tendency of the gospel is to free from the condemning sentence of law. This is its first and its glorious announcement, that it frees lost and ruined people from a most fearful and terrible condemnation.

Who walk - Who conduct, or live. **Not after the flesh.** Who do not live to gratify the corrupt desires and passions of the flesh. This is a characteristic of a Christian. What it is to walk after the flesh may be seen in Gal: 5:19-21. It follows that a man whose purpose of life is to gratify his corrupt desires, cannot be a Christian. Unless he lives not to gratify his flesh, he can have no evidence of piety. This is a test which is easily applied; and if every professor of religion

were honest, there could be no danger of mistake, and there need be no doubts about his true character.

But after the Spirit - As the Holy Spirit would lead or prompt. What the Spirit produces may be seen in Gal. 5:22-23. If a man has these fruits of the Spirit, he is a Christian; if not, he is a stranger to religion, whatever else he may possess. And this test is also easily applied.

To overcome sin, we have God's promise of *continuous cleansing*.

(See chapter 21 "How to Keep saved.")

Chapter 3

The Need for Hope and Spiritual Security

Hope could be our most valuable possession. An Arabian proverb says, "He who has hope, has everything." A Russian proverb states, "In the kingdom of hope, there is no winter." Psychiatric authorities cite loss of hope as one of the primary causes of suicide. Dr. Karl Menninger described *hope* as "the major weapon against the suicide impulse." Without hope, there is no reason to live. Look at the sad description of the Gentiles:

Ephesians 2:12 (NKJV) *That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

Look at the last phrase: *"Having no hope and without God in the world."* A person without God can have no expectation that things will improve. Yet Christians can face almost any obstacle with the knowledge that a crown of life is waiting for us after this life is over. John wrote to one of the churches of Asia:

"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

Like those disciples in the first century (Smyrna), many of God's people have been persecuted and mistreated through the ages. Many were tortured. Many were killed because they would not deny Christ. Their persecutors were amazed at their steadfastness. What kept them committed and faithful? Hope! The Lord had promised them a crown of life, and they were determined to receive it.

Hope in Christ is based on the truth that He is the Son of God (Matt. 16:15-16). Jesus made many claims that only the Son of God could truthfully make. Note some passages below from the NKJV:

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

"Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25).

If Jesus is not what He claimed to be, He is the greatest imposter the world has ever known. But impostors are not described in detail by many prophecies written by different men hundreds of years previously; they cannot perform miracles as Jesus did, and no imposter has or will ever exhibit the loving and flawless character Jesus demonstrated.

Hope in Christ is based on the role of Jesus as the perfect High Priest.

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession” (Heb. 4:14).

Jesus offered a perfect sacrifice. It was certainly better than the sacrifices offered by the Old Testament priests.

“Now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26).

His blood continues to work, cleansing us of sins.

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

While some are deeply and unfortunately deceived, it remains a fact that we cannot live lives free of sin. Was not John clear when he said, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8)?

As Christians, we need Christ's blood to cleanse us continually for spiritual security. 1 John 1:7 indicates that the blood of Christ keeps cleansing us from all sin.

Of course, God set forth conditions that must be met for the blood of Christ to keep us pure and clean in God's sight. His message is clear: *"If we walk in the light"* (1 John 1:7). This includes several things: 1) our daily practice of seeking truth in God's revelation, the Bible; 2) looking into the mirror of our soul (James 1:23, 24); and 3) confessing sins to God as opposed to denying them, knowing that *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). Many read this text wrong. It is not "when" we (Christians) confess our sins that the blood works to clean us; it is "if" we confess them. Confession of sins is a practice of Christians – it is part of the "walk" that results in *continual cleansing* by the blood of Christ. See chapter 13 for further discussion of this key text.

Hope in Christ is based on His assurance that life is beyond the grave. Man has always been concerned about what comes after death. Christ's resurrection is central to our faith and our hope. No other person in the world who is looked upon as a savior or prophet was resurrected from the dead.

Hope is one of the components involved in salvation (Rom. 8:24). Saving hope is one of the great spiritual blessings available in Christ. It is vitally important that we understand how to get into Christ and how to stay in favor with God.

After obedience to the gospel through faith (Heb. 11:6), repentance (Luke 13:3), and confession (Rom. 10:10), we are baptized into Christ (Rom 6:3, 4, 17, 18; Gal. 3:27). This is to get into the “church,” which is simply those whom the Lord saves (Acts 2:47), after which we must stay faithful in Christ and not return to the world if we are to keep our hold on the hope we can have in Christ. Spiritual security is based upon our faith in God, the grace of God, our hope, and our continued manner of life that pleases God, which is described as a *“walk in the light.”*

Adapted from material by John Gaines

Chapter 4

Eternal Life - A Possession True Christians Can Hold

Is eternal life something that we merely *hope* for and, therefore, cannot have or *hold* until we reach heaven? Paul wrote to Timothy, "*Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*" (1 Tim 6:19). When you *lay hold* on something, you are in possession of it – you have it. But don't be fooled by the thought that since we hope for heaven and know that the Scriptures teach that it is possible to turn from God and be lost eternally, we cannot have eternal life presently.

First, Adam and Eve had eternal life. In the book of Genesis, we read of the creation of man and of his home, the garden of Eden. This couple had life without end so long as they did not eat the forbidden fruit. God said, "*In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die*" (Gen. 2:17). Nevertheless, they disobeyed, and the consequence was as God said it would be.

Those who think the word *die* in the above passage means *absence of life* will not see the true picture. They will likely conclude that since the couple continued to live, God must have decided not to do as He warned. But the word *death* usually means *separation*, and the day they disobeyed God, they were separated from Him. The *separation* was man's

being driven from the Tree of Life that was in the Garden of Eden. This death was both of a physical and spiritual nature.

Did Adam and Eve have eternal life? Perhaps you are thinking: *How could they since they lost it?* Well, fellowship with God was what they lost. They lost the highest quality of life, which would have had no end so long as they kept God's favor. The tree of life, of which Adam and Eve were permitted to eat, was of great significance. When Jesus alluded to the tree of life, was this not the exact source of life (John 6)? That which many of His disciples took as a *hard saying* was merely an allusion to the *life* that Adam and Eve had as they were privileged to eat of the *Tree of Life* (John 6:53-60).

Our primary concern is whether the child of God today has eternal life. Just as one must understand the meaning of death to see the true picture of what happened when Adam sinned, one must understand the meaning of eternal life to know if it is a present reality or simply something Christians hope to obtain when they die. Incidentally, eternal life is *not* the Christian hope. Eternal life is included in the promise, but no matter what meaning we ascribe to it, it is not the Christian hope. We hope to meet Christ at the resurrection, be changed as unto His glorious body, and live with Him in heaven eternally (Acts 24:15).

If the meaning of *eternal life* were easily determined, we would have no difficulty with the question under study. However, there is a problem in defining these words because respectable scholars differ. A popular doctrine called "once saved always saved" has undoubtedly

influenced scholars in defining terms and giving of their exegesis. The argument for the doctrine just mentioned is that since the Christian *has* eternal life (Jn. 3:36, 5:24, 6:54; 1 Jn. 5:11, 13), and since the definition of *eternal* is purported to be *life without end*, then when one is saved, he will always be saved. The problem is that those who teach "once saved always saved" have accepted the definition that we give to the English word *eternal* and have not searched the Scriptures to determine how the word is used in the Bible.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. One brother, in dealing with the same question that we are discussing, wrote: "Since life is a relationship with God, and eternal means never to cease, then we must conclude that eternal life is a relationship that never ceases." Of course, he doesn't believe the "once saved always saved" doctrine, and neither do I. Therefore, he went on to try to explain why he believes that Christians don't really have eternal life presently. But was he consistent and correct?

The word *zoe*, translated *life* in our English Bible, has a wide variety of meanings. For our present discussion *life* is that which is given by God to those who please Him by their faith and obedience. "This life is a present possession and has also a glorious future fruition" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*). This definition is in harmony with the inspired definition of *eternal life*. Jesus said, "*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*" (Jn. 17:3). Our Lord clearly teaches that those who know God have life

(*zoe*), and that this *life* is *eternal*. In the above passage *eternal* is used as an adjective describing the quality and character of *life*. Our English word *eternal* is a translation of the Greek word *aionios*. Just as the word *death* and the word *life* have more than one meaning, so the word *aionios* has more than one meaning. The only way to determine the true meaning is by studying the context in which it is used. The word *aionios* may mean never ceasing, etc., or it may have to do with quality rather than duration.

"In the use of *aion* and *aionios* there is evidenced a certain enlarging or advancing import till they come so to express the high and complex fact of the Divine life in man.... Our Lord decisively set the element of time in abeyance, and took His stand upon the fact and quality of life - life endless by its own nature. Of that eternal life He is Himself the guarantee - 'Because I live, ye shall live also' (Jn. 14:19). (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*).

"Therefore said Augustine, 'Join thyself to the eternal God, and thou wilt be eternal.' The essence of the Christian life is eternal life. What, then, is eternal life, and what are its gifts and characteristics?... The word for *eternal* is *aionios*. It means far more than simply lasting forever. A life which lasted forever might well be a curse and not a blessing. There is only one person to whom the word *aionios* may properly be applied, and that one is God. In the real sense of the term it is God alone who possesses and inhabits

eternity. Eternal life is, therefore, nothing other than the life of God Himself. What we are promised is that here and now there can be given to us a share in the very life of God" (*The Scheme of Redemption*, by Warton: Quotation from William Barclay).

"If we '*walk in the light*' we have '*fellowship with God*' (1 Jn. 1:6-7). Fellowship means, basically, *to share, or communion*. This is the idea that Paul had when he said, '*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*' (Eph. 5:11). When we, through faith, obey Him and thus '*walk in the light*' He shares with us His *life* which is of an eternal quality. When we have fellowship with the life of God we participate in the eternal life which he shares with all those who are in Christ Jesus the Lord. All others are dead! Separated from the life of God. This is spiritual death" (*Ibid*).

If we argue that man cannot have eternal life as a present possession, in essence, we are arguing that we cannot and do not have "*the gift of God*"! Paul wrote, "*The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life*" (Rom. 3:23).

Peter promised the "*gift of the Holy Spirit*" to those who would repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; compare 3:19). The gift of the Holy Spirit is simply the "*gift of God*" (Rom. 6:23). So, if we do not have *aionios zoe* in this life, we have not received "*the gift of*

God" that is given to those who obey God's conditions to be saved.

Some argue that one cannot hope for something that he already has. That is true, but *aionios zoe*, as used in Titus 1:2; 3:7 and 1 John 2:25, has a different meaning than the *life of God*. In these passages there is reference to duration rather than just quality. It is not unusual for a word to have more than one meaning. When such is the case, the student must determine the meaning by the context. This is exactly what we must do in our study of eternal life.

We hope to live forever but no one will enter heaven who does not already have eternal life. Eternal life is a present possession of those who are in fellowship with God. It is to be understood, however, that that which God shares with us in this world is conditioned upon our walking in the light, and that God withdraws His life or fellowship from those who cease to so walk. Those who have eternal life watch and pray lest they "*become a castaway*." Christians are motivated to a life of service by love and the hope of continuing to share the life given by God on through the ages in heaven.

1. Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:49; Phi. 3:21; Col. 1:5.
2. Jn. 3:36, 5:24, 6:54; 1 Jn. 5:11, 13.
3. *Guardian of Truth*, Vol. XXVf, No. 17, p. 259.
4. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. III, p. 1889.
5. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 1011.
6. *The Scheme of Redemption*, by Warton.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
8. *Guardian of Truth*, Vol. XXV, No. 17, p. 259.
9. *Ibid.*

Chapter 5

Why is this Issue so Important?

Brethren on both sides of this issue pertaining to forgiveness see the study as being important, but for very different reasons. In this chapter, we shall set forth the reasons each of the proponents gives for its importance.

Position A (Continual Cleansing)

Those holding this view believe that God looks at the life and judges if a Christian is faithful, rather than looking for a sin for which to condemn. We believe the Bible teaches that He deals with His children like a loving parent who is patient, forgiving, and always ready to help them go forward in the word and in character to become valuable in His kingdom.

This position is important because those who believe it can have hope and real spiritual security as they *“walk in the light”* from day one to their last day on earth. We understand that God’s laws are given for our benefit and that we must be diligent to follow them. We know we are not going to live above sin because we do not have full knowledge, we are weak, and imperfect people. We know Jesus committed no sin, but He is the ONE exception. And of course, we know that to say (or even think) *“...that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*

Position B (neo-perfectionism)

This is the notion that upon committing any sin, regardless of its classification or the heart of the Christian, the result is automatic spiritual death.

The arguments against position A:

Those holding position B say *continual cleaning*, which they often refer to as “automatic forgiveness,” teaches that one does not need to repent or confess sins and that “it tends to cause people not to be as careful to avoid sin.” One brother quoted E.M. Zerr (commentary) on 1 John 1:7 and portrayed his words to sound like he did not believe a Christian should have any concern for sins he might commit in ignorance or inadvertently. The observation was a lie, slander, for I’m sure brother Zerr was aware of the need for prayer such as *“Who has full knowledge of his errors? make me clean from secret evil”* (Psa. 19:12). And for the need to listen to anyone who calls attention to any “mistake he made.”

Here is his quote:

“... Hence if a man is a worker in the Lord's vineyard and his life as a whole is one of obedience to the law of Christ, he does not need to worry about the mistakes he might make which he does not realize, for the blood of Christ will take care of it and wash them away...”.

Taking issue with what is said above about not needing to “worry” is to say you believe you SHOULD “worry” about such things, Zerr noted. You can’t repent of them, and you can’t confess them, but you can and should WORRY they say, which is sinful (Matt. 6:25-34). Instead of accepting Zerr’s reasonable statement that would benefit them and all, they attack his words and reputation and contend that “worry” is a good thing and must be done. This brother sinned by taking such a stand against the word of God. But when this is pointed out to him, will he repent and confess it? Or will he deny his sin by arguing that it was not sin? He will not admit it was a sin for him to do so, which would reveal that he had been lost because of it and would have been eternally lost had it not been brought to his attention, which is just ONE of numerous things like this. (Chapter 33 deals with the question of whether some sins are greater than others.) Nevertheless, this fellow relentlessly and persistently contends that no sin is forgiven without it being repented of and confessed.

Repentance and confession of sin are a major part of what is involved in “walking *in the light*.” But it is common sense that one cannot repent and confess a sin of which he is unaware, and we all have them. To contend that one is lost unless he does the impossible is a consequence that is totally unacceptable because it would mean that no one is saved. A basic rule of hermeneutics that we all know is “Do not draw a conclusion that has unacceptable consequences”. But my opponents on this issue are unwilling to apply it to their teaching.

Does position A tend to cause people not to be as careful to avoid sin? Certainly, it is a position that allows the Christian to not constantly be in a state of anxiety, worry, and hopelessness, as does position B. It allows for Christians to be humble like the publican who said, *“God be merciful to me a sinner”* (Luke 18:13, 14). There is no indication in the text that the publican thought he needed to worry, which is a sin (Matt. 6:25-34).

Arguments against position B:

Aside from the many Scriptures that teach against position B (provided in another chapter), there are some observable negative characteristics of those who hold this view, such as impenitent dispositions and self-righteous attitudes. Those who hold this position tend to develop the attitude of the Pharisees who *“trusted in themselves that they were righteous”* rather than accepting they are sinners and offer the humble prayer like that of the publican (Luke 18:9-12).

There are serious consequences to this view that are totally unacceptable. This position leaves not only the babes in Christ hopeless, but also all honest individuals that believe it but have yet to convince themselves they have no sin in their life, no sins of ignorance, no doctrinal sins, no inadvertent sins, no sins of weakness, no sins of thought, selfishness, pride, greed, and no sins of omission.

(See chapter 19, “Two extreme views exposed...”)

The position of continuous cleansing advocates as articulated by Leslie Diestelkamp

*I affirm that (a) continuous cleansing is an absolute necessity for the faithful Christian because he does sin and even may be unaware of some of his sins; (b) continuous cleansing for the faithful Christian is a genuine reality because God has promised that, through the blood of Jesus, we have full forgiveness as we walk in the light; (c) continuous cleansing for the faithful Christian is without any satisfactory alternative because if such is not so, then there is no hope at all for any of us. If the blood of Christ does not keep us cleansed (while we walk not after the flesh) but unless we die with a prayer upon our lips we may indeed die lost, and every hour of every day and night would be a day and an hour of misery and fear. (Leslie Diestelkamp, **Patton-Diestelkamp on Continuous Cleansing**, p. 7)*

This issue is important because the alternative leaves us with no hope except maybe to “die with a prayer upon our lips,” but because many of these guys contend for only a specific confession of sin, the prayer, “God, forgive me of all my sins, even my secret sins,” is not good enough.

Chapter 6

We can Know we have Eternal Life, but if one does, on What is it Based?

There are many passages in John's first epistle that assure us that we can know we have eternal life. The clearest is undoubtedly chapter 5, verse 12:

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

In the previous chapter, we showed that eternal life can be an actual present possession, yet something that can be lost. But our concern in this chapter is what teaching from the word of God can we look to determine whether we are standing faithfully or living in jeopardy of being lost eternally. Some are looking at various passages and drawing the wrong conclusions, while ignoring, overlooking, or perverting the passages that teach the truth.

Eternal life, if one has it, is not based on one's works. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, made it clear that one cannot save oneself by one's works.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8, 9).

He made it very clear that one cannot be saved without faith in God, who saves through grace. Unfortunately, while the teaching is that one cannot save oneself by “works only,” many have jumped to the conclusion that God saves by “faith only.” Others derive from this passage that the message is salvation by “grace only.” As if this is not strange enough, others insist that salvation is by “grace only” AND “faith only” as if more than one ONLY is taught in the passage. Is there a new meaning for the word “only?”

Some Christians who need and seek spiritual security base their having it on their being able to know everything the Bible teaches against (sin), recognize them all, and avoid them. They contend that if they do sin, they always know it and immediately repent and confess it. Even if this were true, which is so unlikely we could almost use the word “impossible,” they would still be in and out of salvation, which is a thought (doubt) that is highly detrimental to hope and spiritual security. This doubt itself is sinful, for God wants us to trust Him and have faith. Doubt is in opposition to faith. It is sinful. Regarding the eating of meat under the Law of Moses Paul said, *“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin”* (Rom 14:23). One could confidently eat the meat sacrificed to idols without sin, but if he did not eat through faith, i.e., that the Old Testament was abolished and no prohibition was made in the New Testament, then it was sin.

The point being made here is that the position of some brethren in rejecting *continual cleansing* and asserting that there is no forgiveness without specific repentance and

confession lends to doubt and is itself sinful. We should have faith as the apostle Paul did. Near the end of his life, he wrote,

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

We should have no doubt that the “crown of righteousness” shall be given to those *“that love his appearing.”* At this passage, the well-known and respected commentator **Albert Barnes** observes that, “It is one of the characteristics of a true Christian, that he sincerely desires the return of his Savior, and would welcome his appearing in the clouds of heaven.”

One needs to understand that it is possible to THINK you have eternal life when you don't. The scriptures make this abundantly clear. The wise man wrote, *“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”* (Pro 16:25). Add to this Jesus' statement:

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I

profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Mat 7:22-23).

This being true, many who thought they were Christians living in such a way as to have eternal life, hope, and spiritual security, were never even Christians. I direct the reader at this point to Romans 6:3,4; 17, 18 where Paul provides the answer as to the exact point that one becomes a Christian and which leaves no reason for doubt. If Paul’s teaching regarding what to be saved is true, and it certainly is since he was an apostle inspired in his writing, then anything ordinary men teach that is contrary to his teaching as to what to do to be saved (to begin the new “walk of life”) must be rejected.

Our belief that we have eternal life must be based on Jesus as Lord and our own life, as God sees it, and as we judge by our fruits (Matt. 7:2). The condition is that one “*walk in the light.*” There are two places one can walk according to John: 1) “*in darkness,* and 2) “*in the light.*” Christians don’t jump back and forth. A *step* is not a walk. Certainly, there is not “automatic” death when a faithful Christian sins. But neither is sin for those who walk in the light “automatically” forgiven for God is the Judge of our lives and he is merciful and will “*Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth*” (Rom 9:18). Sadly, some brethren seem to have been “hardened.” Because of their need to think they are living above sin they cover or hide their sins by claiming such things that they fail to know of, repent of, and confess, are not sins at all, but as one preacher said, “That was just unfortunate.” They need to accept that “*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but*

whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Pro 28:13). Their saying they have no sin, which they do through their arguments against *continual cleansing* and their "basis" for spiritual security, is unmistakably sinful and sheds a very dark cloud on their profession as a gospel preacher, or even a Christian. John said, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8).

Men who have convinced themselves they have no sin in their life; no sins of ignorance, no doctrinal sins, no inadvertent sins, no sins of weakness, no sins of thought, selfishness, pride, greed, and no sins of omission, are deceived, and the truth is not in them. Fortunately, children of God who are in the habit of confessing their sins, as opposed to denying them, as they *"walk in the light,"* are continually cleansed by the blood of Christ.

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). This is far from being the only text that gives the faithful Christian confidence of sharing God's life, which is eternal. We will closely examine others in other chapters.

Chapter 7

Neo-Pharisaism

We who earnestly contend for the idea of *continuous cleansing*, as taught in 1 John 1:7 (supported by several other passages), must constantly deal with brethren who object to this teaching. They are a new or modified version of Pharisaism. A well-known passage involving the Pharisees is Matthew 23:13-39. Here, Jesus criticizes them for various things, not the least of which was their abuse of the Law by replacing it with tradition.

In “the seven woes,” Jesus calls the Pharisees and teachers of the law:

- Hypocrites, six times (verses 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, and 29)
 - Children of hell (verse 15)
 - Blind (verses 16, 17, 19, 24, and 26)
 - Whitewashed tombs (verse 27)
 - A brood of vipers (verse 33)
- He also accuses them of:
- Leading people astray (Matthew 23:15–22)
 - Straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel (verse 23)
 - Cleaning “the outside of the cup and dish” while the inside is full of greed and self-indulgence (verse 25) www.overviewbible.com

The Pharisees were not all bad. We know the apostle Paul had been one. He said, “*after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee*” (Acts 26:5). We know that, unlike the Sadducees, they believed in life after death – a resurrection. But when it came to being accurate in teaching

and following the Law they were colossal failures. This is evident from Jesus' condemnation of their false notions on numerous things. Often, he notes what they were teaching, as opposed to what the Law taught, by saying, "*It has been said, but I say unto you.*" The Pharisees of Jesus' day thought they were righteous based on their perfect knowledge of the law and their ability to keep it. But because they had deviated from the written word, Jesus accused them of teaching "*doctrines and commandments of men*" and of being "*blind teachers of the blind.*" They had gotten to the point that they were not capable of receiving the truth because they did not love it (but rather loved human tradition) and had come to believe the lies and associate them with truth (2 Thes. 2:10,11).

Our neo-perfectionist brethren do not fit the mold of the ancient Pharisee in some respects but do in others. By their contention that their spiritual security is based on having no sin in their life – that any sin causes spiritual death, they have caused countless lost souls to reject or turn from the Lord's church to some human denomination that does not even properly teach God's plan of salvation.

Some who oppose *continuous cleansing* deny they believe as I have alleged. They may even say things that indicate the opposite of that for which they have contended. Such as, "God is patient and gracious and gives us time to repent." How true! But you cannot have it both ways. You can't have your cake and eat it too. If the above statement in quotations is true, then there must be some basis for it – some scripture that teaches it. And there is, it is 1 John 1:7. Those who we refer to as neo-perfectionists refuse to embrace John's teachings. But why? Have they become incapable of seeing the truth or are they just afraid of one another – afraid to buck their tradition and be shunned, ostracized, and treated like a heretic? The Neo-Pharisees

have much the same problem that the “*chief rulers*” of the Jews had, who refused to confess Christ for fear of being cast out of the synagogue (John 12:42).

Those who hold the Neo-Pharisee doctrine must convince themselves that they are right on everything or else they are lost. This despicable doctrine promotes arrogant attitudes and impenitent dispositions. You see, it is difficult, if not impossible, to get one of these fellows to admit they have been wrong because to do so would be to admit that their doctrine is flawed and that they have sinned (and do sin) and were destined for hell according to their own teaching. Their attitude is such that they are not capable of admitting they have failed to live perfectly, which they say we can all do, and must do.

I close this chapter by leaving you with a post that Crate Meade made to an Internet list, decades ago. It is the purest example of a classic “STRAW MAN” I have ever seen. The post was a personal attack on me that is full of misrepresentations, and it demonstrates the Neo-Pharisee’s closed-mindedness, attitude toward truth, and toward other brethren who dare to challenge them.

Crate Meade here,

This is at the very least consistent with all your other teachings--especially on MDR. It seems that you are of the assumption it makes a big difference as to whether one is a Christian or an alien (i.e., aliens not amenable to the laws of Christ), because the moment one becomes a Christian, sin no longer is sin and those things that would separate one from God are now acceptable because they are covered by his

blood. **THUS, ADULTERY AND FORNICATION ALL OF A SUDDEN ARE COVERED AND GOD'S GRACE HAS WIPED IT ALL CLEAN AND ITS NOW ACCEPTABLE.** Not one of your verses quoted in the post are in anyway meant to be tolerations for sin, and you greatly deceive yourself and all who would listen to you by attempting to make out like they all of a sudden are alright. In the 6th chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul begins the chapter with a complete condemnation of all you teach about continual cleansing- *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that Grace may abound? God FORBID! How shall we, that are dead to sin, LIVE any longer therein?"* We are either "DEAD" in sin (Eph. 2:1), or "dead" to sin (Rom. 6:2). You would have the brethren believe that sin is alright sometimes, and I believe it's never alright and it will always separate us from God. In all your rhetoric you have never once discussed the consequences of this separation and how much sin it takes to eternally separate one. In other words, how much sin can I get away with and still be pleasing to my God?

SIGH.

Chapter 8

A Treatise on the Word “Walk”

by Wesley L. Gerig

The verb "walk" in its literal sense of going along or moving about on foot at a moderate pace is found numerous times in the Gospels. However, this same verb is more often used throughout the Old Testament and the epistles of the New Testament in a metaphorical way. In this sense it means to follow a certain course of life or to conduct oneself in a certain way. Many times, the verb translated "walk" is present tense in the Greek of the New Testament, which means that the writer is referring to a continued mode of conduct or behavior. In fact, the infinitive "to walk" can be translated, in a Hebraistic way, "to live." Such a use is common in the Old Testament and the writings of Paul and of John but is not found in those of Peter or James.

Throughout the New Testament, the verb "walk" is qualified in various ways to ensure that the reader understands what correct Christian living or conduct is and what it is not. Christians are not to continue to walk in darkness ([1 John 1:6](#) ; [2:11](#)). What John means is that Christians should not continue living in ignorance of divine truth, an ignorance that is associated with sin and its evil results. Along with this, their walk should not be characterized by craftiness and cunning ([2 Cor 4:2](#)) or by such sins as immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, sins, the writer says, which used to characterize their continual living before salvation ([Col 3:5-7](#)).

To the contrary, Christian living should be characterized by newness of life ([Rom 6:4](#)), good works ([Eph 2:10](#)), love

([Eph 5:2](#)), wisdom ([Col 4:5](#)), truth (3 John 4), and obedience to the light received from the apostle ([1 Thess 4:10](#)).

The standard of victorious Christian living is stated two different ways by the apostle Paul. His dominant theme in Romans 8 is that the Christian is not to continue walking *"according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit"* (v. 4; see also vv. 12-13). The sinful nature in this expression is not bodily, material flesh but that ethical flesh, which refers to the sin dwelling in the Christian, as referred to in Romans 7:17, 20, 21, 23. It is the nature of humankind, apart from the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit; and this corrupt sinful nature, the core of which is selfishness, must not govern our conduct. In other words, Paul writes that the Christian should not live in accordance with the age to which this world belongs ([Eph 2:2](#)). The mature Christian will walk in accordance with the Holy Spirit's leading ([Rom 8:4](#)) via the Lord's commands given to him in the Scriptures (2 John). This leading is not some ethereal, mystical kind of guidance but comes in the form of clear "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt nots."

In addition to writing the instruction given above, the New Testament writers do not leave maturing Christians in the dark as to the manner of walking that is expected from them. They are not to keep on walking as the nations or Gentiles outside Christ do ([Eph 4:17](#)). The apostle Paul thereby lets his readers know that he expects a different lifestyle from Christians than from non-Christians. They are not to conduct their lives in an unruly or disorderly fashion, deviating from the prescribed kind of life or rule given by the apostles in the Bible ([2 Thess. 3:6](#) [2 Thess. 3:11](#)). Some Christians in Thessalonica, because of wrong beliefs about the second coming of Christ, had given up their Jobs and were sponging off the other church members. Paul reminds the church that this should not be tolerated and that the

one who does not work should not be allowed to eat at the expense of the others.

To the contrary, the members of the faith should continue walking decently and properly, as in the daylight ([Rom 13:13](#)), not in carousing, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, or jealousy. The deeds of darkness must be put away and the armor of the light needs to be put on ([Rom 13:12](#)). They should walk worthy of their calling as Christians ([Eph 4:1](#)). They should walk as children of the light who have the lamp of the Bible for their guidance ([Eph 5:8](#)). Furthermore, they should walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil. They should behave circumspectly and with great care and understanding of what the will of the Lord is ([Eph 5:15-17](#)). In addition, they ought to walk in a manner that is suitable and worthy of God, whose children they are ([Eph 4:1](#)). A Christian should continue walking decently and properly with reference to those outside the church ([1 Thess 4:12](#)). Finally, the Christian should continue behaving in this world, as much as possible, as Christ behaved ([1 John 2:6](#)) and as Paul, in his own life, exemplified a pattern of Christian living ([Php 3:17](#)).

In 2 Corinthians 5:7 Paul described the means of the Christian's walk or behavior which he describes in his epistles. He succinctly says, "We live by faith, not by sight." To walk by faith means to rely on Christ for one's own salvation and to trust that the promises found in the Bible, God's Word, are dependable and will be faithfully fulfilled. Paul also wrote the Galatians that they should continue walking by the Spirit ([Gal 5:16](#)).

From both the Old and New Testament references, it is clear that the metaphorical or figurative use of the English verb,

"walk," refers to conduct or behavior which, it is insisted, should support one's verbal testimony. The metaphorical use of the word "walk" in the Bible refers to the way in which an individual lives or conducts his or her life; and regularly, the Christian's walk will be in stark contrast to that of the unbeliever's.

Chapter 9

HOW TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

1 John 1:5-10

(by permission from Steven J Cole, from his book on 1 John.)

For many years, polls have shown that about one-third of Americans claim to be born again. So-called “seeker” churches are thriving, with thousands flocking into their huge auditoriums each week. You would think from the numbers that Christianity is alive and well in the United States.

But in his booklet, *The Bleeding of the Evangelical Church* [Banner of Truth], David Wells reports that in 1993, pollsters added a few questions to, “Are you born again?” They also asked, “Do you go to church with some regularity, do you pray with some regularity, and do you have some minimal structure of formal Christian belief?” The number claiming to be born again dropped from 32 percent to 8 percent. Wells goes on to speculate, based on research, that if you added a few more basic questions (such as, “Are you regenerate?”) the numbers would drop to one or two percent. (I highly recommend Wells’ books, *No Place for Truth; God in the Wasteland*; and, *Losing Our Virtue* [all Eerdmans].)

The apostle John opens his letter by asserting that one of the main aims of the Christian message is we may enter in to the apostolic fellowship, which is “with the Father, and

with His Son Jesus Christ” (1:3). Such fellowship with God is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. Christianity is not, at its core, the observance of rituals or rules. Rather, it is a walk of personal fellowship with the living God.

But before we all sign up for the program, John makes it clear that fellowship with God is not a matter of being chummy with your good buddy in the sky! He asserts that God is absolutely holy (1:5). To have genuine fellowship with the holy God, we must walk in the light, as He Himself is in the light. It’s easy to *claim* to have fellowship with Him, but to be mistaken or deceived. The false teachers were claiming to have fellowship with God, but their claims were patently false. There was in John’s day, as there is today, the peril of profession, the danger of claiming to know God, but of being deceived. John’s message is:

To have fellowship with the holy God, we must not walk in the darkness, but walk in the light.

John begins with the apostolic message, that God is light (1:5). Then he develops the implications of that message as it relates to having fellowship with this holy God (1:6-2:2). He does this against the claims and consequences of the errors of the false teachers (“If we say...” 1:6, 8, 10). He then gives God’s remedy (1:7, 9; 2:1-2).

1. To have fellowship with God, we must recognize that He is absolutely holy (1:5).

John writes (1:5), “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” Note two things:

- A. To have fellowship with God, we must begin with God and His authoritative revelation of Himself.

John is not sharing with us his speculations on what God may be like. He doesn't throw out an idea and suggest that his readers discuss what they think about it. Rather, John says, "We heard this straight from Jesus and we announce it to you." It wasn't a discussion point; it was an authoritative pronouncement from Jesus through the apostles to the readers. To have fellowship with God, we must start with His authoritative revelation in His Word.

Note, also, that John does not begin with his hearers felt needs. He doesn't discuss where they may be hurting, or bring up how this message will help them have a happy family life or a successful personal life. Rather, John begins with God and he brings us face to face, not with God's love, but with His holiness. Coming after verse 3, about having fellowship with God, you would expect John to say, "To have fellowship with God, you need to know that He loves you very much." But, rather, he bluntly says, "God is light." Then, so that we don't dodge the uncomfortable implications of that, he states the negative, "and in Him there is no darkness at all."

Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes this point (*Fellowship With God* [Crossway Books], p. 100), that we must *always start with God*. He argues that our main problem is our self-centeredness, and so we come to the Christian faith looking to have our needs met. I'm not happy; can God make me happy? I'm looking for something that I don't have; can God

give it to me? How can Christianity help me with my problems and needs? But to approach the Christian faith in that manner is to cater to our main problem, which is self! He says (p. 101), “The first answer of the gospel can always, in effect, be put in this way: ‘Forget yourself and contemplate God.’” He adds (p. 102), “The way to be delivered from self-centeredness is to stand in the presence of God.”

The entire church growth movement, including one of its most famous leaders, blatantly contradicts this. Robert Schuller, in his heretical book, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* ([Word], p. 64), argues that classical theology “erred in its insistence that theology be ‘God-centered,’ not ‘man-centered.’” So he calls for a new Reformation that puts man, not God, at the center!

Following his lead, other church growth leaders have started with the “religious consumer.” They have gone to people with the question, “What would you like in a church? What would get you to come back and try the church again?”

People have responded, “We’d like a church that is a happy, upbeat place. We don’t want to hear about sin or a holy God who threatens sinners with His wrath. We want help on how to have happy families, how to be successful in reaching our full potential, and how to recover from divorce, drug addiction, and sexual addictions. We don’t want sermons that make us uncomfortable. Give us more drama and less preaching. In fact, don’t preach at us; share with us. Tell more stories and jokes. Don’t bring up controversial

issues. Make it positive.” So, the church marketers go back to the drawing board and re-design the church to meet the felt needs of the consumer. The result is amazing growth. But, have people come face to face with the living God?

John says, first, to have fellowship with God, we must begin with God and His authoritative revelation of Himself, not with ourselves.

B. To have fellowship with God, we must begin with His holiness.

The church marketers would say, “‘God is holy’ won’t sell. That’s just not popular. If you want to draw the crowds, begin with, ‘God is love.’ Everyone wants to hear that!”

But John begins with, “God is light.” In Scripture, “light” may refer to God as the source of knowledge, illumination, or guidance. It may point to God’s glory and that He is unapproachable, infinite, unchangeable, and omnipresent. But here, the main idea is that He is holy. This is indicated by the negative explanation, “and in Him there is no darkness at all.” It is this moral connotation that Jesus brought out when He said (John 3:19), “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.”

You may ask, “But why start with God’s holiness? Why not start with His love, which is more inviting?” Dr. Lloyd-Jones answers these questions (pp. 108-109). I can only summarize his main points. First, if you don’t begin with

God's holiness, you will never understand God's plan of salvation through the cross of Christ. If God is only love, then the cross is unnecessary and meaningless. Second, if we start with God's holiness, it exposes all false claims of fellowship with God. In our day, as in John's, many claim to have fellowship with God, but often this is an empty claim based on their own imagination with a false god that they have made up. True fellowship is with the holy God, not with a good buddy god.

Third, starting with God's holiness saves us from the danger of blaming God in times of trouble. We're all prone to ask, "Why is God allowing this? I didn't deserve this!" But if we start with God's absolute holiness, we will see that we deserve nothing but His wrath, and we won't challenge and criticize God when trials come.

Lastly, Lloyd-Jones points out that starting with God's holiness is the only way to true joy. It's easy to have a false peace if you have a "user-friendly" god. If you bring God down to man's level, then you can enjoy peace with God without dealing with your sins. But, it's a false peace that will not hold up in the day of judgment. True peace and joy come from being truly reconciled to the holy God through the blood of His Son Jesus (1:7). So, John begins with God. He says that to have fellowship with God, we must recognize that He is absolutely holy.

2. To have fellowship with God, we must not walk in the darkness (1:6, 8, 10).

To understand this paragraph, we must see that John is writing against the false claims of the false teachers. Their

claims are introduced by the phrase, “if we say...” (1:6, 8, 10). John here shifts the “we” from the apostles to a hypothetical group that may include anyone, but especially targets the false teachers. Their first claim was, “We have fellowship with God” (1:6), but John says that their lives did not back up their claim. They walked in darkness, they lied, and they did not practice the truth.

“To walk” points to the general tenor of one’s life. Since to walk in the light involves confessing our sins (1:9), to walk in the darkness means ignoring or denying our sins. It is to block out the light of God’s holiness, as revealed in His Word, and to live as the world lives, making up your own ideas about right and wrong apart from God (see Eph. 4:17-19; 5:7-12). It is to justify your own behavior either by redefining sin, by blaming it on other factors, or by doing away with the entire concept of sin. To walk in darkness is to try to hide from God, rather than to expose your life to Him.

Apparently these false teachers were doing this, because John’s next hypothetical statement is (1:8), “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” They may have been claiming that they had achieved a state of sinless perfection. Or, perhaps because they believed that the body could not touch the spirit, they were claiming not to have a sin nature.

They said, “You’re just seeing my body. My spirit is without sin.” John says, “You’re only deceiving yourselves!”

The heretic's third claim was (1:10), "We have not sinned." This is the most blatant of the three, as seen by John's consequence, "we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." It goes further than the other claims by saying, "We have not sinned in the past and we are not now sinning." Perhaps they were claiming that their enlightenment had led them to see that they were basically good at the core, not evil sinners.

Robert Schuller redefines sin to mean something other than what Scripture declares. He says (p. 65) that to define sin as rebellion against God is "shallow and insulting to the human being." He redefines sin as a lack of trust, which "is another way of saying that we are all born with a negative self-image...." He says (p. 67), "By nature, we are fearful, not bad. Original sin is not a mean streak; it is a nontrusting inclination." So, he redefines being born again (p. 68): "To be born again means that we must be changed from a negative to a positive self-image—from inferiority to self-esteem, from fear to love, from doubt to trust." This, in turn, changes us from shame to self-esteem, so that we can now pray (p. 69, italics his), "Our Father in heaven, honorable is *our* name. So, the foundation is laid for us to feel good about ourselves!"

John would say, *"That man is walking in the darkness, deceiving himself and anyone who believes him. Worse, he is calling God a liar and God's word is not in him!"* But we need to apply this personally. If, as a way of life, I am not allowing God's Word to confront my sinful thoughts, attitudes, motives, words, and deeds, I am walking in darkness. If I dodge my sin by blaming others or making up

excuses for why I sin, I am walking in darkness. And for John, to walk in darkness is not describing a “carnal” Christian. It describes an unbeliever, regardless of how much he claims to have fellowship with God. To have fellowship with God, we must recognize that He is absolutely holy. And we must not walk in the darkness.

3. To have fellowship with God, we must walk in the light, as He Himself is in the light (1:7, 9).

(First John 2:1-2 also describes what it means to walk in the light, but we will examine those verses next time.) Walking in the light is not a description of a class of spiritual believers, who have achieved perfection or some high state of sanctification. Rather, it describes all true believers. Believers walk in the light; unbelievers walk in the darkness. There are three aspects of walking in the light:

- A. To walk in the light is to live openly before God, seeking to be holy and hating all sin.

To walk in the light is to walk “**as He Himself is in the Light**” (1:7). This is to say the same thing as 2:6, “**the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.**” Or, in the words of 1 Peter 1:15-16, “**but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’**” Or, in Jesus’ words of John 3:21, “**But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.**” This is in contrast with the evil person who loves darkness

and hates the Light, who “does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed” (John 3:20).

This does not imply that the person walking in the light never sins. 1 John 1:7 indicates that the blood of Jesus is cleansing (present tense) from all sin the one who is walking in the light. So, walking in the light does not mean to be sinless, which no one can do. Rather, it points to a habitual pattern of living openly before God, who examines the heart. To walk in the light is to seek to be holy as God is holy. But, what about when we sin?

B. To walk in the light is to confess our sins, experiencing God’s forgiveness and cleansing.

A person walking in the light does not deny his sin or try to cover it up. He does not blame others for it or make excuses about it. Rather, he confesses it (1:9): *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* To confess means to agree with God that our sin is sin. It means to accept responsibility for it and to turn from it. God’s wonderful promise is that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive and cleanse us.

Forgiveness and cleansing are somewhat overlapping, except that forgiveness relates to the guilt of sin being pardoned, whereas cleansing points to the defilement of sin being removed. The forgiven person does not need to fear God’s judgment. The cleansed person is free to draw near to God in worship, because the defilement of sin has been taken away.

But this verse creates a difficulty, in that other Scriptures teach that we are forgiven totally at the point of salvation, including all future sins. For example, Romans 8:1 states, *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Why, then, do we need to be forgiven again when we sin after salvation?

Some explain this as “family” forgiveness that is necessary for fellowship, not forensic forgiveness that is required to deliver us from God’s judgment. While that explanation may be okay, to me, it does not take into account the terms “faithful and righteous to forgive....” God’s faithfulness relates to His new covenant promise to forgive all our sins through faith in Christ, which happens at salvation (Heb. 8:12). His righteousness (or, justice) relates to His strict demand that the penalty for sin be paid. In the case of the believer, Jesus Christ paid this at the cross.

So I prefer to explain verse 9 differently. In verse 9, “confess” is in the present tense, but “forgive” and “cleanse” are the Greek aorist tense, focusing on an action as a totality or as complete. So confession points to an ongoing action, but the forgiveness and cleansing are completed actions in the past.

Let me use an analogy. John uses the word “believe” in the present tense to refer to the means of how we get saved (John 1:12; 3:16; *et al.*). When a person first believes, he receives all the benefits of salvation. Does he stop believing then? No, he continues to believe in what Jesus did for him on the cross. As he continues to believe, he does not

receive the benefits of salvation repeatedly, but he does experience them repeatedly. So the Christian is characterized by a lifestyle of believing in Christ. As he goes on believing, he repeatedly enjoys the benefits that he received at salvation.

In a similar way, the believer's life is marked by continual confession of sins. It begins at salvation, when he acknowledges his sin to God and asks for forgiveness and cleansing. He experiences ongoing forgiveness and cleansing as he continues confessing his sins. Verse 7 ("cleanses" is in the present tense) indicates that there is an ongoing sense in which the effects of the cleansing of Jesus' blood are applied to us. Thus, when a believer sins, he does not lose the forgiveness and cleansing that took place at salvation. But he does not experience it in his walk until he confesses his sin. Ongoing confession of sin and the experience of forgiveness and cleansing characterize those who walk in the light.

C. To walk in the light results in fellowship with God and His people.

Does the reference to "one another" (1:7) refer to fellowship between God and the believer or between believers? In the immediate context, verse 6 refers to fellowship with God, and thus verse 7 would seem to point in that direction. But verse 3 also referred to fellowship with other believers. So I think that in 1:7 John's primary emphasis is on fellowship with God. But fellowship with God and fellowship with other believers is always linked, as verse 3 makes clear. Since the heretics had withdrawn from the church (2:19), John wants

us to know that true fellowship with God always brings us into fellowship with others that know Him. If someone can't get along with other believers, he may not be in true fellowship with God.

Conclusion

In the 18th century, an abbot was disciplining two monks for some infraction of the rules. He imposed on them the rule of silence. They could not talk to one another. They tried to figure out some way to fill the long hours.

Finally, one of them gathered 28 flat stones from the courtyard. Putting different numbers on them, he devised a new game. By using gestures, the men agreed on certain rules, but the most difficult part was keeping silent when one of them scored a victory. Then they remembered that they were permitted to say aloud the prayer, "Dixit Dominus Domino Meo." By using the one word of this Latin expression meaning "Lord," the winner was able to signal his triumph by yelling, "Domino!" The monks gave the impression that they were *praying*, but really, they were *playing*. Thus, the game of dominoes was born (From "Our Daily Bread" [8/77]).

It's easy to put on a religious veneer by claiming that you have fellowship with God, when really, you're walking in the darkness and deceiving yourself. John doesn't want us to play spiritual dominoes. He wants us to experience genuine fellowship with the holy God by walking in the light, as He Himself is in the light.

Application Questions

1. To have fellowship with God, we must begin with His holiness, not with His love. Why?
2. Can you find a single instance in the Bible where evangelism *begins* with God's love? (If so, please let me know. I can't.) Should we therefore modify our evangelistic approach?
3. How can we avoid the deception of thinking that we are walking in the light, while really we're walking in the darkness?
4. If we're forgiven at the cross, why do we still need to be forgiven?

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Chapter 10

A Look at A Key Passage as Understood by Some Great Scholars

“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults” (Psalm 19:12).

Albert Barnes:

Who can understand his errors? - The word rendered errors is derived from a verb which means to wander, to go astray; then, to do wrong, to transgress. It refers here to wanderings, or departures from the law of God, and the question seems to have been asked in view of the purity, the strictness, and the extent of the law of God. In view of a law so pure, so holy, so strict in its demands, and so extended in its requirements - asserting jurisdiction over the thoughts, the words, and the whole life - who can recall the number of times that he has departed from such a law? A sentiment somewhat similar is found in Psalms 119:96, “I have seen an end of all perfection; thy commandment is exceeding broad.” The language is such as every man who has any just sense of the nature and the requirements of the law, and a just view of his own life, must use in reference to himself. The reason why any man is elated with a conviction of his own goodness is that he has no just sense of the requirements of the law of God; and the more anyone studies that law, the more will he be convinced of the extent of his own depravity.

Hence, the importance of preaching the law, that sinners may be brought to conviction of sin; hence the importance of presenting it constantly before the

mind of even the believer, that he may be kept from pride, and may walk humbly before God. And who is there that can understand his own errors? Who can number up the sins of a life? Who can make an estimate of the number of impure and unholy thoughts which, in the course of many years, have flitted through, or found a lodgment in the mind? Who can number up the words which have been spoken and should not have been spoken? Who can recall the forgotten sins and follies of a life - the sins of childhood, of youth, of riper years? There is but one Being in the universe that can do this. To Him all this is known. Nothing has escaped His observation; nothing has faded from His memory. Nothing can prevent His making a full disclosure of this if He shall choose to do so. It is in His power at any moment to overwhelm the soul with the recollection of all this guilt; it is in His power to cover us with confusion and shame at the revelation of the judgment-day. Our only hope - our only security - that He will not do this, is in His mercy; and that He may not do it, we should without delay seek His mercy, and pray that our sins may be so blotted out that they shall not be disclosed to us and to assembled worlds when we appear before Him.

Cleanse thou me from secret faults - The word here rendered secret means that which is hidden, covered, concealed. The reference is to those errors and faults which had been hidden from the eye of him who had committed them, as well as from the eye of the world. The sense is, that the law of God is so spiritual, and so pure, and so extended in its claims, that the author of the psalm felt that it must embrace many things which had been hidden even from his own view - errors and faults lying deep in the soul, and which had never been developed or expressed. From these, as well as from those sins which had been manifest to himself and to the world, he prayed

that he might be cleansed. These are the things that pollute the soul; from these the soul must be cleansed, or it can never find permanent peace. A man who does not desire to be cleansed from all these “secret faults” cannot be a child of God; he who is a child of God will pray without ceasing that from these pollutions of the soul he may be made pure.

John Gil:

Who can understand his errors?.... Sin is an error, a wandering out of the way of God, swerving from the rule of his word; and many mistakes are made by the people of God themselves; even so many that they cannot number them; they are more than the hairs of their head; they cannot understand, find out and express, neither their number, nor their evil nature, nor the many aggravating circumstances which attend them: this the psalmist said, upon a view of the large extent, glory, and excellency of the word of God; and upon comparing himself with it, in which, as in a glass, he saw how far short he came of it, and what a disagreement and want of conformity there was in him unto it; see Psa_119:97; and he suggests, that though the word he had been describing was perfect, pure, and clean, he was not; nor could he expect any reward of debt, but merely of grace, for his observance of it; and that it was best, under a sense of sin, to have recourse, not to works of righteousness done by men; but to the grace and mercy of God in Christ, as follows:

cleanse thou me from secret *faults*; by which are meant not such sins as are done in secret, and are unknown to men; such as David's sin with Bathsheba, 2Sa 12:12; nor the inward motions of sin in the heart, to which none are privy but God, and a man's

own soul; not but that each of these may be properly enough included in such a petition; but sins, which are unknown to a man himself are meant: there are some actions, which, though known when committed, are not known to be sinful ones; and there are some sins which are committed unadvisedly, and through carelessness, and pass unobserved; not only many vain and sinful thoughts pass to and fro uncontrolled, without being taken notice of; but many foolish and idle words are spoken, and many evil actions, through infirmity and inadvertency, are done, which, when a good man, at the close of a day, comes to reflect upon the things that have passed in it, are quite hidden from him, are unknown to him, being unobserved by him; wherefore such a petition is highly proper to be inserted in his address at the throne of grace: and which also supposes the person sensible of the defiling nature of sin, and of his own impotency to cleanse himself from it; and that God only can do it, who does it by the application of the blood of his Son, which cleanses from all sin; for this respects not regenerating and sanctifying grace, but pardoning grace; a manifestation of it, a view of acquittance from sin by Christ, and of freedom from obligation to punishment for it.

Adam Clark:

Who can understand his errors? - It is not possible, without much of the Divine light, to understand all our deviations from, not only the letter, but the spirituality, of the Divine law. Frequent self-examination, and walking in the light, are essentially necessary to the requisite degree of spiritual perfection.

Cleanse thou me from secret faults - From those which I have committed, and have forgotten; from

those for which I have not repented; from those which have been committed in my heart, but have not been brought to act in my life; from those which I have committed without knowing that they were sins, sins of ignorance; and from those which I have committed in private, for which I should blush and be confounded were they to be made public.

“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression” (Psalm 19:13).

Adam Clark:

From presumptuous sins - Sins committed not through frailty or surprise, but those which are the offspring of thought, purpose, and deliberation. Sins against judgment, light, and conscience. The words might be translated, Preserve thy servant also from the proud; from tyrannical governors, i.e., from evil spirits - Bishop Horsley. So most of the versions understand the place.

Let them not have dominion over me - Let me never be brought into a habit of sinning. He who sins presumptuously will soon be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Then shall I be upright - Let me be preserved from all the evil that the craft and malice of the devil or man work against me, then shall I continue to walk uprightly, and shall be innocent from the great transgression - from habitual sinning, from apostasy, from my easily-besetting sin. He who would be innocent from the great transgression, must take care that he indulge not himself in any. See Bishop Horne. Most men have committed some particular sin which they ought to deplore as long as they breathe, and

on account of the enormity of which they should for ever be humbled.

Albert Barnes:

Keep back thy servant also - Restrain thy servant; or, do not suffer him to commit those sins.

From presumptuous sins - The word used here is manifestly designed to stand in some respects in contrast with the secret faults mentioned in the previous verse. The word - זָד *zéd* - means properly that which is boiling, swelling, inflated; then proud, arrogant; with the accessory notion of shameless wickedness or impiety. Gesenius, Lexicon. The word is rendered proud in Psa 86:14; Psa 119:21, Psa 119:51, Psa 119:69, Psa 119:78, Psa 119:85, Psa 119:122; Pro 21:24; Isa 13:11; Jer 43:2; Mal 3:15; Mal 4:1. It does not occur elsewhere. The prevailing thought is that of pride, and the reference is particularly to sins which proceed from self-confidence; from reliance on one's own strength. The word does not mean open sins, or flagrant sins, so much as those which spring from self-reliance or pride. The prayer is substantially that he might have a proper distrust of himself, and might not be left by an improper reliance on his own power to the commission of sin. This also is said in view of the extent and spirituality of the law of God - expressing the earnest desire of the author of the psalm that he might not be left to violate a law so pure and holy.

Let them not have dominion over me - Let them not reign over me; that is, let them not get the mastery or the ascendancy over me. Let me not become the slave of sin; so subject to it that it shall domineer over me. Sin often secures that kind of triumph or mastery over the mind, making a slave of him who yields to it. The pious man alone is a true freeman.

He is emancipated from the dominion of sin, and walks in true liberty: see Joh 8:32, Joh 8:36; Gal 5:1.

Then shall I be upright - Hebrew: I shall be perfect. On the meaning of the word used here, see the note at Psa 19:7. It means here that he would be truly a servant of God; or, that he would have this evidence that he was a friend of God, that he was kept from the indulgence of secret faults, and from open transgressions - that is, his piety would have completeness of parts; or, it would be shown to be true and genuine. It cannot be demonstrated from the use of the word that he supposed that he would be absolutely perfect or free from all sin. See the note at Job 1:1.

And I shall be innocent - This does not mean that he would be absolutely innocent, or free from all sin; but it means here, as it is explained in the following phrase, that he would be innocent of the great transgression, or would be free from that.

From the great transgression - Margin, as in Hebrew, much. It does not refer to any one specific offence, but it means that he would be free from the transgression which would exist if he were not cleansed from secret faults, and if he were not kept back from presumptuous sins. He would be saved from the great guilt which would ensue if he should give unchecked indulgence to secret faults, and if he should be allowed to commit the open sins which were the result of pride and over-weening self-confidence.

Clearly, the Psalmist is teaching that sins are different; some are not fatal, but others are. He also teaches that we cannot know every sin we commit and that we need to pray for God's grace to

continually cleanse us of “secret faults” and help us avoid great transgression.

Chapter 11

List of Areas of Disagreement That Demonstrate That the Neo-Pharisee's Notion That One Can Live Their Entire Life Without Sinning Is Impossible

In this chapter, I'm sharing with you a noncomprehensive list of questions that pertain to highly controversial matters. The accumulation of these questions, when honestly considered, should make all understand that being right on every doctrinal issue is about as likely as being hit by a meteor in the next thirty minutes. Much could be added to this list.

Is gluttony a sin? Does a church sin if those guilty are not disciplined?

Eldership: Is a man qualified if he has only one child? Is a man qualified if he is weak in one area? What is the procedure for setting in elders? Can a church have elders without deacons?

MDR: Did Jesus contradict the Law of Moses when He said, "But I say unto you" or was He taking issue with the false notions of the Jews? Does *apoluo* mean *divorce*, as defined and used by God, or must we assume the word means divorce because some, who did not believe in God or respect the Scriptures, have used it to mean divorce, and some versions translate it as divorce? May the innocent

divorced spouse remarry? Is "mental adultery" (lust) a scriptural cause or reason to divorce? Can a man and woman who are not married to each other live together if they do not have sex?

Are there Old Testament teachings that are timeless – for instance, regarding marriage and divorce?

Is God's definition of divorce, found in Deut. 24:1,2 and Jer. 3:8, applicable since there is no such definition in the New Testament?

Hair: Are women in our day, where there are no prophets, required to keep their heads covered if they have hair? Is it a sin for a man to have long hair? If so, at what length does it become sinful?

Authority: Is the church authorized to take the Lord's Supper twice – at night, for instance, for those who cannot attend the morning service? Is CENI a hermeneutic? Is there such a thing as "necessary inference," and should it be used to establish authority? Do elders have authority? Is the preacher not to be questioned because he is "called to preach"?

Is it a sin to pay some organization to do the work of the church?

Does a church sin if it uses money for the support of non-members?

Are singing schools in church authorized? Is it a sin to pay a song leader to teach singing?

Is it a sin for a Bible college to exist? Is it a sin for a church to contribute to one?

Is it a sin for a congregation to pay for a young man's tuition to go to a college to learn to preach?

Is it a sin to observe holidays, like Christmas and Halloween?

Is it a sin to pray to Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

Must public prayers always be ended with "In Jesus' name?"

Use of alcohol: Is it a sin to drink beer or wine in moderate amounts? Is any amount sin? If converts are made in Italy, where wine is typically consumed with meals, should they be informed that they cannot continue this practice? Can a Christian work at a store where alcohol is sold? If alcohol is bad, is it a sin to be involved in the production of wine or whisky barrels, such as cutting stave bolts that are used to make whiskey barrels? How about working at a store where it is sold?

Stewardship: Am I using my time and resources wisely? Am I lazy? Am I diligent? Am I lukewarm? Do I always do what I know I should do (James 4:17)?

Is a church sinning by putting its money in the bank and letting the bank invest it and make money? Or is it a sin not to put money in an interest-bearing account?

Health Issues: Is it a sin to smoke? What about consuming drinks loaded with unhealthy substances? What about failure to exercise? Etc.

Attitudes: Is having a bad attitude toward those with whom you differ a sin, especially when displayed to all using sarcasm, putdowns, and hurling insults?

Does a church sin if it sings songs that teach error? (At least one preacher has been on a mission to highlight the songs that teach denomination doctrines and their danger.)

Do Christians walking in the light have eternal life now, or is it something they only hope to obtain?

Is it a sin to eat meat when someone else in the church thinks it is wrong?

Is it always a sin to take someone to court?

In trying to teach Muslims, do we tell them their “god” is evil or that we agree on the one God – the God of Abraham?

May a Christian kill for his country as a military or police officer when the government requires it? If it is, is it not a sin to worship in a church where other members disagree?

Is it a sin not to rebuke elders *before all* when they sin? Is it a “sin of omission” to not do it?

What about self-defense? Should we turn the other cheek and let some thug take our stuff, hurt our family, etc.?

Can we always be right on the New Testament withdrawal requirement: when to do it, for what to do it, and how to do it? Do all in the church sin if the command is ignored or not done correctly?

Is one sinning if he does not open his mind to the truth on some subjects?

Is it a sin to take an oath before testifying in court?

Do the saved go to Hades or directly to heaven when they die?

Is it a sin to use women translators in preaching?

If during “announcements,” may a woman be asked to give a report (from her seat) on someone without her usurping authority?

Is announcing birthdays contrary to the teaching about “observing days?”

Does a preacher sin if he is in another country that allows polygamy, and he baptizes a man who has more than one wife and intends to keep them and be faithful to them?

What shows, movies, and concerts are sin to watch? Who gets to decide? 😊

Should a person who is a member of the UNPC who baptizes *for the remission of sins* be required to be baptized again? Is their teaching that baptism “in Christ’s

name” only, rather than in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, enough to require being baptized again?

Does a Christian sin by giving money to a man who refuses to work?

Is it a sin not to correct our teaching brethren regarding character issues, performing acts in the assembly that are not *“decently and in order,”* misusing a passage, etc.? When is it to be done? How long do we wait? Who is responsible for doing it, and who is not?

Was Joseph a type of Jesus?

Does 2 John 9 refer to any sin or a person who does not honestly look to the Bible for answers but is determined to “go onward” and preach what he wants?

Is the *“gift of the Holy Spirit”* receiving Him as a person or a gift He gives?

Is it a sin to raise hands in prayer or clap hands on occasion? If so, is it a sin not to rebuke those who do it?

Does the preacher sin by talking about himself too much - things that appear to be boasting, and if he does, are those who fail to rebuke him committing the sin of omission?

Is it a sin to use someone’s sermon in preaching but not give credit for it?

Does *“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all”* (James 2:10) refer to trying to keep the Law of Moses or does it teach that any

sin one commits causes him to be lost? Is it sin if one misapplies this passage?

Does “context” always explain a passage? For example, does *“Train up a child in the way he should go, and he will not depart from it”* (Prov. 22:6) refer to what it seems to apply to or is it about economics, which is the context?

May women work outside the home and be in authoritative positions?

Is it a sin for a man to turn over authority to his wife?

Are those who do not assemble during midweek services sinning? If so, should they be disciplined?

Is singing “gospel songs” with an instrument at home sinful?

Is it sinful to make announcements about social functions, or to talk about people’s birthdays, etc.?

Where do we draw the line on “immodest dress”?

Is it always a sin to dance – even square dancing?

Is “the birth control pill” a form of abortion? What about the “morning after” pill?

Brethren differ on whether private foundations like Florida College and Guardian of Truth Foundation have a scriptural right to exist.

What versions of the Bible should and should not be used?

Are all forms of gambling sinful: lottery, stock market, playing golf for prizes, or for who buys dinner?

Is the wearing of makeup and jewelry sinful?

Have you sinned if your parking meter runs out of time before you return?

Is the practice of a church using a "creed-like" questionnaire for selecting a preacher sinful?

May weddings and funerals be conducted in the church building?

May women comment in public Bible class before the church assemblies?

Is it a sin to pay support to women teachers or secretaries?

What does "*only in the Lord*" mean? Does a widow sin if she marries someone not a Christian? If she does, and it is, what should she or the church do about it?

Where is the line to be drawn on passion of the unmarried when dating?

What about voting in business meetings without elders, or not voting and allowing the minority to decide?

May women be allowed to attend business meetings and give their opinions?

Is it a sin to spank children? Is it a sin not to spank children when they need it?

Are euphemisms and bywords sinful to use?

This list could go on and on, but should be sufficient to make the point that because there is so much to know, the idea that if we draw a wrong conclusion on something, and especially express (teach) it, then we automatically fall from grace, means no honest person can have any hope of going to heaven.

Decades ago, when I was fighting the Neo-Pharisees on the Internet, Tom Couchman sent me a list of doctrinal issues brethren often disagree on. Had I made the list I might have included some things Tom did not and I might have left out some he included. Certainly, my list above and things he has listed contain topics that are "gray" areas as to whether they are sin or not. When all is considered, is it realistic that a Christian can keep from sinning and always know if or when he sins? This list makes the neo-Pharisee's claims of not sinning by teaching error to be seen as absurd, futile, and sinful. Below is the letter from Tom:

Robert,

I finally got the "disagreements" lists done. I revised the Old Testament list, now 100 items. I put together a NT list with 300 texts on it. And I compiled a list of 100 "issues" which do not directly overlap with the others. I am thinking about posting these to ML to show how totally ridiculous the demand for "perfect doctrinal unity" is.

Here's something to consider: Assume that for every one of the 400 texts I cited there are an average of 3 plausible explanations--that is, 3

explanations that might be held by someone who takes a "conservative" approach to exegesis and accepts the plenary inspiration of scripture. Actually, an average of 3 is probably, well, "conservative"; for many of these texts there would be many more than three. But assume 3 as an average. How many possible plausible positions are there on a total of 400 issues? The number is found by raising 3 (average number of positions on each text) to the 400th power (3^{400}). I asked my son the other day to use his fancy and expensive calculator to compute 3^{200} . The problem produced an overflow in the memory--the calculator could not do it. The closest he could get was about 3 to the 150th, which is something like 6×10^{95} . To put that number into perspective, astronomers estimate there are 7×10^{22} stars in the observable universe.

And of course, I didn't include all the differences I might have, just "major" ones. And I'm sure other people could have thought of others.

In other words, there is no way everyone is going to agree on every doctrinal issue.

Tom Couchman

The list Tom sent me is too long to include in this book. Therefore, I'm providing a link to it:

<https://www.totalhealth.bz/disagreements.pdf>

Chapter 12

Can There Be Forgiveness Without Repentance?

The idea that “there can be no forgiveness without repentance” might seem to be a sound concept, but let’s put it to the test. It might not be as simple as you have thought or been led to believe.

First, we all know Jesus told the Jews, *“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3, 5). Thus, we understand that repentance is a requirement for salvation. In Acts 2:37-38, we see that “repentance” was given in answer to those who asked, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* The parallel passage is Acts 3:19:

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

It should be noted that both Jesus’ teachings and the passages in Acts speak of rebellious people who needed to turn their lives around, back to God. Thus, repentance of specific sin was not at issue.

In Acts 8, we read about a man named Simon who had been a sorcerer, deceiving the people. He obeyed the gospel (“believed and was baptized”), but when he saw the apostles’ power to transmit spiritual gifts by laying on of hands, he offered them money that he might have it. Peter said to him,

“Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” Young’s Literal Translation reads, *“reform, therefore, from this thy wickedness, and beseech God, if then the purpose of thy heart may be forgiven thee.”*

Two thoughts must be considered regarding the above passage. Both pertain to the nature of the sinful behavior.

First, Simon’s action was no ordinary sin. He expressed (out loud) the idea that the *“gift of God could be bought with money.”* It was also said that his heart was not right, that he was bitter and in iniquity. Clark explains: “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness – St. Peter did not suppose his case to be utterly hopeless; though his sin, considered in its motives and objects, was of the most heinous kind.” “The sin was a very grievous one” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Second, there is *“sin unto death”* and sin *“not unto death,”* as noted by John (1 John 5:16, 17). The example we just considered could be *“sin unto death.”* On the other hand, Peter’s actions, for which Paul rebuked him, could be an example of sin *“not unto death.”* Peter ate with Gentiles but withdrew himself when he feared those who might take offense (Gal. 2:11, 12). This was a sin worthy of a rebuke to the face, but not one that warranted the need to tell Peter his heart was not right and that he was in iniquity. In other words, Peter had not committed *“sin unto death.”* He needed to accept the rebuke for his actions and deal with it

properly, but he did not need to turn his life around, for he had not turned from God.

Simon's rebuke (Acts 8) was a case wherein a Christian was told to repent, but it should be noted that the sin was not merely a sin of weakness or ignorance, or a sin committed inadvertently. Unfortunately, many use this passage to contend that no sin can be forgiven unless one learns of it and repents. But is this the conclusion that we should reach from this example? The answer is obviously "no" because other actions recorded in the Bible – when the sin was not a "heart" matter, if you will – were dealt with differently.

Isaiah wrote,

"Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

It is apparent that Isaiah makes repentance applicable to those who have taken on an evil heart and have therefore left the Lord – not one whose heart is right but commits a sin through ignorance or weakness, or commits a sin inadvertently, and who is in the habit of confessing sins rather than denying them.

A saved Christian walks in the light and is continuously cleansed by Christ's blood because God approves of his life. If a Christian ceases to *"walk in the light,"* he must repent. But if he *is* walking in the light, he does not need to repent (in the general sense, as the word is commonly used), and repenting would be turning his life around. This would

mean he would *cease* to “*walk in the light*” and, therefore, be “walking in darkness.”

Let’s see if we can reason together to understand what it means to “*walk in the light*.” John tells us, “*If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth*” (1 John 1:6 ESV, NKJV). Surely, we can agree that “*walk in the light*” means the opposite of “*walk in darkness*.” We should also all agree that one who “*walks in darkness*” does not “*practice the truth*” – does not “*walk in the light*” and that one who *walks in the light* “*practices the truth*.” Since the meaning of “*walk in darkness*” is to not “*practice the truth*”, then the phrase “*walk in the light*” must mean that one who does it *practices the truth*. Now we have narrowed it down and only need to determine what it means to “*practice the truth*.” This will tell us what is meant by “*walk in the light*”.

When a physician says that he is “practicing medicine,” what does he mean by it? Does he mean for it to be understood that he never makes a mistake in his practice? Certainly not. They are human and they make mistakes like everyone else. They will even make numerous mistakes that they will never become aware of. However, if a physician makes a mistake that those in authority over him consider to be serious enough, he may be stopped from practicing medicine. The same sort of thing is true when a Christian “misses the mark”. But in this case, God is the Judge. When the physician says, by “practicing medicine,” he means that he is a certified or licensed medical doctor dedicated to the profession of healing. In like manner, one who *practices the truth* is a Christian who is dedicated to serving the Lord. Just as a practicing physician is expected to study and follow the rules and procedures laid down by those in authority over him, so is the Christian. But no one should expect perfection because it isn’t possible.

Chapter 13

Is It True That No Sin Can Be Forgiven Unless It Is Confessed?

An Exegesis of 1 John 1:9

While 1 John 1:7 is one of the most important passages in the New Testament, it is one of the most ignored, and 1 John 1:9 is one of the most abused passages. It tells us that if we confess our sins, God will forgive us. The abuse comes from a few in the Church of Christ who insist that sins are forgiven *only* when they are specifically and verbally confessed. One consequence of such thinking is that honest Christians can have no confidence that their sins are forgiven (and therefore that they are in the grace of God) unless they “think” they have no sin, i.e., that they are living above sin. Ironically, this passage is right in the middle of passages that teach the opposite. Another consequence of this teaching is that it is virtually impossible to reach people who believe the “once saved always saved” doctrine because it goes to the other extreme. The first teaches that a Christian can never be lost, but the latter has all of God’s children lost. The absurdity of this position is easily seen by simply reading the context (passages before and after verse 9). Let’s look at the context to determine the true meaning of verse 9:

6 *“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:”*

The intent of John's teaching is set forth at the very beginning of this context. It is about one's "walk," i.e., one's manner of life.

Thayer on the word "walk": 1) *to regulate one's life*, 2) *to conduct oneself properly*

Wesley Gerig explains:

"The metaphorical use of the word 'walk' in the Bible refers to the way in which an individual lives or conducts his or her life; and regularly, the Christian's walk will be in stark contrast to that of the unbeliever's."

7 *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."*

This text sets forth the criteria or conditions for being cleansed of all sin, which is continuous. The cleansing does not stop so long as one continues his "walk" in the light instead of leaving the light and walking in "darkness." The idea that any and every sin negates this continuous cleansing by the blood, resulting in one's automatically switching over to a walk in darkness, is irrational and unreasonable, and those who promote it demonstrate a Pharisaic disposition and attitude. In other words, if you are sinlessly perfect and in God's graces, but you commit any sin, whether it is a sin of presumption, ignorance, thought, inadvertence, or weakness (makes no difference), you are walking in darkness and *"do not the truth"* and continue

there, with no real hope, until you learn of the sin(s), repent, and confess it/them to God.

8 *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*

If someone thinks he is in a saved relationship based on the thought that he has perfect knowledge of the Scriptures and is living above sin, including sins of omission, he is saying he has no sin. This verse condemns those with this attitude in no uncertain terms.

9 *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

A misunderstanding and misapplication of this one text, applicable only to Christians, is probably the root cause of the brethren's conclusion that no sin can be forgiven unless *confessed*. But the text does not say what they need it to say. It says *if* we confess our sins, not *when* we confess them. Christians are forgiven as we *“walk in the light,”* a truth that is undeniable, as John clearly stated in the two previous verses. Nevertheless, the contention is that one is forgiven only *when* he confesses, so this passage is not the place for anyone to go for support of this hope-destroying notion. The text says *if* we confess our sins, which sets forth the idea that it refers to the general practice of confessing sin.

This verse teaches us to be in the habit of confessing our sins rather than denying them. It certainly is not to be interpreted in a way that is totally out of context and has

spiritual security contingent upon something that is impossible. This goes against an established and accepted rule of hermeneutics: "Do not interpret a passage in a way that results in unacceptable consequences."

10 *"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."*

This might be interpreted to apply only to someone who says he has *never* sinned. No one is using those words. Indeed, given Romans 3:23, if a man made this statement, he would be a liar. But what about those who say they don't sin or think they don't, or say or think they have not sinned since their last known and confessed sin, or that they cannot remember when they sinned last?

The Christian's *"walk in the light"* is a manner of life that includes confessing sins as a practice. Thus, any charge that I don't believe 1 John 1:9 is a false accusation. I do not believe the conclusion some have reached regarding its interpretation.

That the blood of Christ can cover sins, like sins of ignorance or inadvertence, before they become apparent and confessed, is confirmed by the apostle James:

"Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15 and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him"
(James 5:14,15).

The above passage tells us that the elders' prayer for someone who is sick can result in sins being forgiven him. The fact that the perpetrator's specific confession of sin is not listed should lead the prudent to accept and understand that confession, as taught in 1 John 1:9, does not in any way support the teaching that no sin is forgiven until it is confessed.

This chapter would not be complete without including the teaching in 2 Peter 1:5-11, where we find the Christian graces that we are commanded to *"give diligence"* to add to our faith. The pertinent part of the passage is verse 10b: *"for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."* Now, since we have the promise that *"if we do these things"* we will never fall, how can we give any credence to the teaching that we fall if/when we sin, every time, automatically, no judging on God's part, and no matter the sin?

Below is another passage that shows that the idea that God does not forgive sin until it is confessed is a false teaching:

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. 17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death" (1 John 5:16).

In this passage, someone else does the asking, yet the guilty one is forgiven if the sin is *"not unto death."* In stark contrast to the false teaching noted, that all sin is unto death, John says, *"There is a sin not unto death."*

When we consider the context (both forward and backward) the intent of John's message becomes apparent. It is about two walks of life: a *"walk in darkness"* and a *"walk in the light."* When one becomes a Christian, he makes up his mind to *"walk in the light."* (He does not regularly jump back and forth.) He knows he is assured of *continual cleansing* of sin if he keeps on walking in the direction he started. An important part of this *"walk"* is the realization that we all sin and that we must be in the habit of confessing sins to God and other Christians with the intention of overcoming them as best we can. As we do this we are growing *"in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"* (2 Pet. 3:18a).

To help ensure that someone did not misunderstand and misapply verse 9, John first made a statement that *should* have been understood throughout the ages. He said, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). Because my opponents on this issue *think* they are in a saved condition, and they believe that to be saved there must be no sin in their life that is not repented of and confessed, then in essence they are saying, *"We have no sin."* This is doing the exact opposite of what the text requires. It is *denying* sins rather than confessing them. The text says these brethren deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them. Then John added verse 10, which says, *"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* Occasionally, my opponents are confronted with a sin they committed. Invariably, they deny they have sinned by either arguing that it was not a sinful act or that they were not guilty. One well-known preacher misapplied a passage in a gospel meeting. When I

pointed it out to him in private and asked if he sinned, he denied that he did, saying, "That was just unfortunate." This is the very disposition and attitude condemned in 1 John 1:9, and, again, it is ironic that this is the passage these brethren use to support their teaching.

The passage that is often referred to as "The Lord's Prayer" (Matt. 6:9-12) is a model prayer for Christians. Included in it is "*forgive us our trespasses.*" How can the Neo-Pharisees harmonize this with their decree that no sin is forgiven unless it is confessed? Jesus teaches us to pray for general forgiveness of all trespasses, not just individual ones, which aligns with John's teaching: "if we confess our sins."

Those who contend for the idea of automatic spiritual death upon committing any sin don't really believe it. They are often heard to make comments like "God looks at the life" or "God is merciful and gives men time to repent," etc. And they are exactly right, but they refuse to accept the passages that teach this. They must *first* give up their erroneous thinking about what 1 John 1:9 is teaching, and the rest will naturally follow. This notion has so many problems that it is seen by those who know the truth as being irrational and absurd, because to believe it leaves one hopeless unless he thinks he has indeed confessed every sin and has no sin in his life, which expresses an attitude that is sinful. While these brethren accuse *continual cleansing* brethren of minimizing sin, they themselves are the guilty ones.

It must be understood that this blessing (continuous cleansing) is for Christians only – not alien sinners. Christians are told in verse 7 that *“if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.”*

To defend their position on 1 John 1:9 these brethren seek to force the phrase *“walk in the light”* to support their interpretation of verse 9. They note the phrase *“as he is in the light”* and endeavor to get across the idea that this means something different from “one’s manner of life.” They contend that it means living above sin as did Jesus.

Albert Barnes well explains the passage:

“In the same kind of light that he has. The measure of light which we may have is not the same in degree, but it is of the same kind. The true Christian in his character and feelings resembles God.”

In discussions in which sins of ignorance or sins committed inadvertently are asserted to be included in the phrase *“all sin”* found in 1 John 1:7, the *automatic death* brethren refuse to accept it. But they have no argument. All they do is ask a question that may go something like this: “What about murder, or adultery? Can these be forgiven without repentance and confession?” (And the question is usually asked in a *sharp* tone after saying their opponent’s name.) Since this is a question, surely it is okay for me to answer with a question. What category of sin does murder and/or adultery fall into? Not sins of ignorance and not sins

committed inadvertently. Rather, they fall into the category of *willful sin* that is *known*, and if persisted in without repentance and confession will result in God's seeing the person as having rebelled against Him and ceased the walk that was pleasing to Him.

Is the spiritual death automatic or does God give time to repent? Let's not be guilty of "whittling on God's end of the stick." Remember, David was guilty of both adultery and murder. Did God give up on him? No, He looked at David's life and saw it was good except for the two sins that every Bible scholar considers to be great sins.

"David did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5).

David repented and confessed his sin, but because of the magnitude of the sin there were earthly consequences.

The teachers who oppose *continuous cleansing* refuse to consider that there are different kinds or categories of sin and that even the "little" things that we do, or don't do, make us guilty of transgression or "missing the mark" (sin). This attitude, brethren, is what is undeniably condemned in 1 John 1:9.

The "argument" most used by those promoting neo-Pharisaism is just a question: "What sins can we commit that we don't have to repent of and confess?" This is not an argument at all. It is a foolish question. Christians who "*walk in the light*" don't seek to know what they can get by

with. They endeavor diligently to learn and to conform their lives to the word of God that they might continually *“walk in the light”* and thus be *continuously cleansed* of *all* sin by the blood of Christ.

I'm confident that many of the guys that teach this hopeless doctrine, based on a perverted notion of what 1 John 1:9 teaches, don't really believe it. They say things that indicate they do believe it, yet they say things that indicate they don't believe it. That they refuse to debate it with a proposition that accurately reflects that for which they contend, is puzzling.

Chapter 14

Was Jesus, Who Lived a Sinless Life, “Just a Man,” and Therefore Anyone Can Live Sinlessly?

In the previous chapter, we discussed the consequences of the false doctrine that teaches one must repent and confess every sin before forgiveness is granted, and concluded by noting that perhaps the worst was the digression (departure from truth) of men who hold this Pharisaic position. The following is an example:

The following is a post I made to Mars-list in 2001:

From: robertwaters@yahoo.com
To: mars-list@frank.mtsu.edu
Fri, Aug 10, 2001 at 9:04 PM

Greetings listers,

While going through some old articles I ran across an article by Edward Bragwell in GOT (Jan. 7, 1988) with the subject title, “Where Are They Now?” The article mentioned a few men who have taught Continual Cleansing (CC) but who were alleged to have gone liberal. Well, if placing the spotlight on their present location was any proof that something they earlier taught was error then this article will likewise prove the same regarding another matter.

Where Are They Now? I’m now talking about men like John Welch, Keith Sharp, Jeff Asher,

Wayne Greeson, and virtually the entire list of Faith and Facts writers. The idea, as taught in 1 John 1:7, that a Christian can be in a saved condition even though he has faults that he is working on, sin if you will, began to be called Continual Cleansing. The men described above not only took offense at the teaching just described but charged that those who taught CC were false teachers of the Calvin variety.

But where are they now? In their incessant struggle to win battles on the CC versus perfectionism front lines, it became necessary to attempt to affirm that one can live sinlessly his entire life and thus, be saved without the blood of Jesus. In their effort to prove this heretical doctrine they deemed it necessary to teach that JESUS WAS JUST A MAN, while on earth – no different than any other man. You see if they could prove that Jesus lived a sinless life, being “just a man,” anyone and everyone could do it if they “put forth a super effort”.

Brethren, we see where they are now. They have lowered themselves to the level of the most contemptible of denominations or cults. Indeed a few who have taught *continual cleansing* have gone the way of what could be called liberalism. But look at the number of perfectionists who began by denying their sins by claiming to be saved while affirming that absolute sinlessness is required for grace, who now deny the clear teachings that Jesus was both man and God.

If some of the men named above have not gone the way of Welch and Sharp, then I would like to

know it. I would also like to know why they continue to be associated with them in their heretical teachings.

Brotherly,
Robert Waters

Eugene Britnell, a giant in the gospel preacher circle, made a statement that resulted in no small reaction. In talking about the impossibility of man's being able to live a perfect life and, therefore, be saved without Christ, he said, "Man has to sin." He was saying that it is inevitable – it will happen because Scripture declares that no one can live a sinless life. Unfortunately, some took this to mean that man cannot resist temptation when it comes. And they regularly assert that sin happens only when tempted, but that is false. We commit sins we were not "tempted" to commit, for they did not come to our knowledge, whereby we could choose to do them or not. While these brethren began a campaign to teach that man could live his entire life without sin because Jesus did and He was just a man, they falsely accused Britnell of teaching that man cannot resist a particular sin when tempted. The foolish idea that one can live without sin is seen in the following illustration: Man can tread water with no floating device for an hour or so – perhaps a day, but certainly not weeks. It is no more possible for a man to go without sinning his entire life than it is for a man to tread water for ten years.

Keith Sharp was once a highly respected gospel preacher and debater – sound in the faith and a great orator. But in reaction to Britnell, he went with the **Faith and Facts** party. Here is one comment he made: "Either man has to sin, or he has the ability to live without sin. There are no other

alternatives.” But then he said, “We must not be ‘obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth.’” The statement was a bold admission that he believed man could live without sin. He used “has to sin” (Britnell used) as legitimate language. Yet, he and others continually berated Britnell for allegedly teaching that man cannot resist temptations that confront us.

If some may live their lives without sinning, then how do we know some do not? If a man approached the church and said, “I have never sinned; therefore, I do not need Christ nor to be baptized “for the remission of sins,” for I have none,” should he be accepted? Why not if it’s possible that he hasn’t sinned? I think it’s safe to say that the church, regardless of their position on continual cleansing, would hit him with a barrage of questions designed to show him he has indeed sinned.

Was Jesus Just a Man?

“Almost everyone who has heard of Jesus has developed an opinion about Him. That’s to be expected, as He is the most famous, and controversial, person in world history. Was Jesus just a man — or, as Jesus Himself claimed, God in human form? The controversy about Jesus extends to this core identity. On the one hand, Christians believe Jesus is the divine Son of God, the fulfillment of ancient biblical prophecies, the promised Savior of the world. Skeptics, on the other hand, assert that Jesus was neither divine nor claimed to be. He was possibly a great teacher — just one among many who claimed to possess the truth. But Jesus’ claims of power and authority, they say, were proved exaggerated when the Romans nailed His body to a cross.

Anyone who claimed to see Jesus alive afterward, they add, simply experienced grief-induced visions.”

<https://www.josh.org/jesus-just-man/>

“Jesus claimed to be equal to God, empowered with the unique characteristics of God (sovereignty, judgment, divine authority, forgiveness of sins, and preexistence), and thus worthy of worship.” Skeptics, along with some modern-day Pharisees, claim otherwise, but the evidence that Jesus was not just a man, but both God and man, is clear and powerful. The notion that Jesus was just a man is easily proved to be a false doctrine, and one of great consequence. Those teaching it put themselves into the category of the skeptic, if not worse.

Who finds it strange that conservative preachers of the gospel would take the position of skeptics who for centuries have contended that Jesus was just a man?

Going into depth in presenting scripture to soundly defeat this doctrine is beyond the scope of this chapter and book. Therefore, I'll be brief.

Jesus Claims His Deity Directly

(Mark 14:61-64)

Jesus Allowed His Disciples to Call Him Lord and to Worship Him

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified” (Act 2:36).

“To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:7).

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:3).

Clearly, Paul speaks of God the Father and Jesus as equal.

“For this cause therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only brake the sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phi. 2:6-11).

Many passages attest to the fact that Jesus' disciples worshipped Him, and He never rebuked them for it.

Jesus Claims His Deity Indirectly

In addition to these direct claims, Jesus did and said many other things that implied His divinity. Let's look at some examples:

Jesus forgave sins.

Jesus healed a man with the palsy and said unto him, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Mark 2:5). The Jewish scribes took issue with this and asked, *"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (Mark 2:7). Jesus concluded the conversation saying, *"The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins"* (verse 11).

Jesus claimed to be "life."

"I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Jesus claimed that He pre-existed.

"And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory that I had with You before the world existed" (John 17:5).

The Christian Pharisee's Plea at Judgment Day

Lord, before you pass judgment on me, know this:

I truly thank you for letting me live long enough to achieve doctrinal perfection before that last breath. It is so fortunate that I didn't die when I was just a babe and had all those doctrinal

errors in my life! You know I never spoke where the Bible does not speak, and I always spoke where the Bible speaks. I never failed, at any time, to discern every doctrine taught in your revelation. You know I was careful and got it right the first time. I was meticulous in making sure all those I could influence understood that Jesus' teaching trumped Paul's and in showing how Paul's teaching didn't say what it appeared to say.

I'm glad I'm not like that fellow next to me in line here, who was wrong on divorce and marriage and other issues. He was just too sympathetic and spineless to stand with us in forbidding marriage for all those who were divorced. The guy behind me could barely read! How could he begin to discern your will? Why, you know, Lord, he was so dumb, we had to spoon-feed him to receive every doctrine he ever believed! He's just lucky he had someone like me to make sure he understood every single doctrine perfectly. And that kid over there who was baptized just last week! I'd be happy to give you a list of how many doctrines that kid never even heard of, let alone could discern properly! Please consider these things when you judge who is worthy to receive the rewards you promised to those few who obeyed, without fail, in everything.

I must remind you of all the so-called Christians that didn't understand your truths and how I made sure they had no place to worship, after I contacted all the congregations they ever tried to go to. You know this was my life's work! I want you to know that I never failed to do my

duty to call someone out who taught a false doctrine, and I made sure everyone knew he was a "false teacher." And I remind you of all the so-called churches that I helped divide, especially where the preacher was wrong on something.

So, Lord, you just must save me! I was always right!

Just a minute, Lord. What is this guy behind me saying?

God: **Listen to him.**

Sir, do you not know that *"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again"* (Matt. 7:2)?

Adapted from a post by Jim Perkins to Mars-list, decades ago, before I was removed from it for teaching the truth that the dictatorial owner was not able to hear.

Chapter 15

Must we Consider Consequences in Our Biblical Studies?

Let's begin by defining the word *consequence*. It is *"Something that logically or naturally follows from an action or condition."* Good hermeneutics demands that consequences be considered before determining what a passage teaches. If the consequences of taking a particular view or position on a passage are unacceptable, the view or position should be rejected.

For example, you read that Judas was sorrowful for his sin of betraying Christ and went out and hanged himself. One might immediately think that to obey the teaching through example, he should go and hang himself when he commits a grave sin. But when the consequences of that position are considered, it must be rejected.

Most preachers in the Lord's church understand this basic hermeneutical rule but refuse to apply it to certain doctrines for whatever reason.

That sin has consequences is not in question. Paul said the *"wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23). Jews who had become totally rebellious and corrupt and were worshipping other gods were told: *"Your sins have separated between you and your God"* (Isa. 59:2). Sin has both earthly and eternal consequences. When God says don't do something or do something, it is for our benefit, and when we fail, our quality of life may diminish, depending on the sin, both physically and spiritually. But Jesus made it possible for

man not to have to suffer the consequences of our sins so that we might live in peace, hope, and joy.

When we, who are Christians, became accountable and committed our first sin, we then became dependent on Jesus' blood to have life abundantly. This we gain the benefits of when we are buried with Him in baptism and rise to walk in newness of life – being then made free from sin, we become the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:3, 4; 17, 18). Whether this blood keeps us clean depends on whether we “*walk in the light*” or turn from God and “*walk in darkness*.”

Unfortunately, some brethren have failed to grasp the real plan of God: His love for us, His amazing grace, His willingness to forgive, and His patience. The result of this failure is very sad. These Christians totally reject the teaching that allows us to have *hope* – the confident desire and expectation that we are on the correct course to eternal life in heaven. Instead of receiving God's teaching that allows for hope they misapply the Holy Scriptures to teach that when a Christian sins, commits *any* sin (no matter what the category is), the consequence is instant (automatic) spiritual death.

Think about this for a minute. Before that automatic spiritual death could even take place, one must *first* have been living totally above sin – no sins of ignorance, no doctrinal sins, no inadvertent sins, no sins of weakness, no sins of thought, no selfishness or pride or greed, and no sins of commission or omission. Granted, when one is baptized “*for the remission of sins*” God forgives all sin. It is a new start. But this is a brand-new child of God – a *babe in Christ*. This is how we *all* start out. The plan of God is for Christ's blood to take care of people with issues in their life that need correcting. Having no instruction from the word

of God on many things, the *babe*, “*a little one*” that others are warned not to “*cause to stumble*,” is not going to be perfect. Are they lost because they are not perfect? No, God, our Father, deals with *babes* as imperfect children who, when nurtured properly, will grow into mature Christians.

Are you still thinking? I hope so, because you really need to get the point I’m making. Where is the hope and confidence for the new Christian if there is no *continuous cleansing of all* sin by the blood of Christ? His only hope would be to die before he could commit a sin of any kind, which would have to be very soon. If you honestly have thought about this fact, you must see that there is a serious consequence to the teaching that “**no sin is forgiven unless it is repented of and confessed.**” If this doctrine is true, not only is there no hope for the *babe* in Christ, but there is also no hope for anyone because no one has reached, or will reach, perfection.

The following discussion on an Internet forum illustrates what brethren are teaching. I have changed the name of the person who was addressing me:

Frank wrote:

"Robert, sin is sin. Are you implying that some sins do not have spiritual consequences? I ask you because I do not know what you believe. Sin separates man from God. What say you?"

Frank, we agree that sin separates man from God. For instance, when one becomes accountable and sins, he needs the blood of Christ to be reconciled. Also, when God decides to give up on a child of His who has become rebellious and will not repent, I expect He treats them the

same way. However, we are talking about Christians, aren't we?

Now, what do *you* believe, Frank? Do you believe that when *you* commit a sin, and you do (and you probably commit many that you don't even know about), do you fall from grace and are you disinherited and destined for hell until you learn of your sin and repent and confess it? If you believe this, please tell the readers of this thread on what you base your confidence? (What passage?) Please tell the readers how you can have hope and confidence except by thinking you are *without sin*? Why not give up this hopeless doctrine and accept the scriptural doctrine that allows hope for the honest, and is sensible rather than nonsensical, and which is Pharisaic to the core?

Perhaps the worst consequence of the doctrine that "Frank" holds is that he, and men who share his belief, develop impenitent dispositions that will not allow them to accept that they have been wrong doctrinally and otherwise. This is because it would be tantamount to an admission that they were lost, and would be lost, if there are any other sins they have yet to learn about.

Chapter 16

What Is a "Perfectionist"?

To some, a perfectionist is a person who seeks to do everything just right, such as making sure there are no wrinkles in his bed, every "i" is dotted and every "t" crossed, etc. I've been accused of being a perfectionist regarding some things. In this chapter, we examine this word from a religious perspective. When I use the term *perfectionist*, I use it to describe a person who holds to the idea that a Christian is not in the grace of God unless he has learned of all his sins and specifically repented and confessed them.

The word *perfectionist* accurately describes the person who believes as described above. These men are Neo-Pharisees since they fit the same mold (see Chapter 9). One brother uses the phrase *grace busters* to describe these false teachers. Some may conceive this (as well as the term "perfectionist") as being "mean-spirited," but it too accurately describes these men. There once was a hit movie called "Ghost Busters." In this film, some men make a profession of going into homes and places of business, fighting with and seeking to destroy ghosts. And these "grace busters," by their teachings, seek to destroy the grace of God. How so? Well, if you teach that everyone who becomes a Christian must be sinlessly perfect to continue in God's grace, then you are fighting against and seeking to destroy grace. This is evident because the doctrine we are talking about would, if true, eliminate grace for us all because none of us are without sin. (See 1 John 1:8, 10; Ecc. 7:20; Rom. 3:23.) Therefore, the term "grace buster" is fitting.

The words *perfectionist* and *grace buster* might be offensive to those who teach the doctrine representative of these terms. Nevertheless, we have clear statements to back up our charges, especially when there are no explicit denials of teaching their hopeless doctrine. In that case, the guilty should not whine and cry about how they are described. Is it name-calling to use the word *perfectionist*? I don't think so unless it is used in a derogatory way, such as if one were to get angry at someone and cry, "You PERFECTIONIST!" Then that would probably be tantamount to "name-calling," which would be inappropriate behavior.

The following is something that Steve Bobbitt wrote and posted to Mars-list decades ago:

"If our only hope [is] to be sinless when we die, perhaps we should begin to shoot new converts before they dry off. Everyone else will have to be on his own. Evidently some brethren are a lot better off than I realized. With vast knowledge, flawless performance, and impeccable memory, they face each new day with confidence and assurance. All the rest of us have is the promise of grace and mercy. It appears to me that some have so thoroughly reworked grace that the only ones who receive it are they who are so good they don't really need it in the first place.

"God, have mercy on me, a sinner." When one man's prayer was this simple, Jesus said that *"he went home justified"* [Luke 18:13,14]. Once he arrived home, was this justified fellow no longer a sinner and no longer in need of mercy?

Chapter 17

Categories of Sin, and Are There Degrees of Sin?

Some Bible students have come to the conclusion that all sins are equal. How did they come to that conclusion? Perhaps it was a misunderstanding of one passage written by James. We all recognize that one sin, any sin, can cause one to be a sinner and lost once the age of accountability is reached. James appears to convey this perspective in his statement: "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it" (James 2:10). He was talking about Christians who would seek to be justified by the Law of Moses, under which one could not be saved without Christ unless the person committed no sins. Jesus is the only one to ever live a sinless life. So, the passage is simply misunderstood and misapplied to give the impression that all sins are the same.

Generally, those who make this argument are staunch opponents of continuous cleansing as taught in 1 John 1:7. They charge those who teach continuous cleansing with teaching Calvinism. But the false teaching we all abhor is "once saved always saved." Continuous cleansing is based upon the Christian continuing to walk in the light. Calvinism says a Christian can't fall from grace no matter what. Thus, the charge is false.

Before we look at several passages that teach that there are degrees of sin, let us first consider:

Categories of Sin

The existence of categories of sin, as taught in the Bible, is undeniable. However, this fact is often ignored by those

who argue that there are no differences in sin, claiming that “sin is sin” and that no sin is greater than another. Of course, sin is sin, but this is no argument. Some say “oil is oil,” but try using olive oil in your car, or Pennzoil on your salad, and see how it works out for you.

Categories of sin: (some may overlap)

1. attitude,
2. action,
3. neglect
4. intent
5. Ignorance
6. Inadvertence
7. Presumption (willful)
8. When one THINKS something is a sin, but it is not.

1. Sins of Attitude

Sins of attitude include false pride, unjust anger, bitter envy, malicious hatred, presumption, etc.

2. Sins of Action

Sins of action are simply things we might do that displease God, such as getting drunk, committing adultery, telling lies, stealing, etc.

3. Sins of Neglect

Sins of neglect consist of failure to do things we know God has commanded us to do (James 4:17). Examples: Failing to assemble with the saints. Failing to adequately prepare for a Bible class or to teach others one-on-one as opportunity arises. Failing to help someone in need. Neglecting our spouses, parents, children, and pets. The legalists will dismiss such sins and assert that they are simply oversights, inadequacies, and choices that are part of our everyday behavior.

4. Sins of Intent

“A sin of intent is simply a sin committed in wish but not in reality. For example, the adultery committed in a man's heart, which Jesus described in Matthew 5:28. The man does not commit adultery, but would if he could. He is not guilty of adultery. But he is guilty of the intention to commit it.”

Ron Graham

Surely, an evil thought is not as bad as an evil deed.

5. Sins of Ignorance

“...Refer to actions that are wrong, but committed without the knowledge that they are wrong. In other words, they are transgressions done unintentionally due to a lack of understanding or awareness of God's laws. These sins are distinct from willful or deliberate sins, which are committed with the conscious intent to disobey.”

6. Sins committed Inadvertently

...actions that violate religious or ethical codes but are committed without conscious intent or knowledge.

7. Presumptuous sins

“...a sin committed willfully and intentionally when one knows that it is wrong. It involved knowingly acting against God's will or commands, often with an attitude of arrogance or self-will. It's not simply a mistake or an unintentional error: it's a deliberate choice to disobey, sometimes with a sense of defiance or an expectation that God will overlook it.”

8. When one THINKS something is a sin, but it is not.

Rom 14:23 *“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”*

Surely, doing something that is not a sin (you just thought it was) is not as bad as doing something that is a sin.

There are also doctrinal sins, which it seems God considers to be greater sins than others since He says, *“Those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24). And the apostle Paul places a curse on anyone who preaches another gospel (Gal. 1:8, 9). The Galatians who looked to the Old Law for justification were told they had fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). Surely, God sees doctrinal sins as being greater than other types of wrongdoing.

Of course, we commit some sins inadvertently, such as failing to slow down to the speed limit, perhaps because we are distracted and do not see the sign. Surely, God would not consider this sin to be as great as intentionally blasting through a school zone at double the allowed speed. Surely, it would not constitute a change of one’s walk in the light to a walk in darkness.

Then there are sins of weakness. The “weak” Christian sins, but rather than be told they are rejected by God, the strong must support them (Rom. 15:1; 2 Cor. 13:9).

Is anyone ever completely free from guilt regarding all the following: sins of ignorance (whether doctrine-related or behavior-related), sins of thought, selfish behavior in any degree, any degree of pride or boastfulness or greed, or failure to do what should have been done? The latter could include many things. But the legalists do not see such things as sins, and don’t want to discuss the possibility that they themselves might be guilty, and especially that *“continuous cleansing”* is the answer.

In view of the clear teaching that proves there are degrees of sin, one must wonder why someone who claims to

believe the Bible would argue the opposite. Well, the truth does not fit into their narrative. They need to believe that there are only a few things they must avoid, like the Ten Commandments, so that they can convince themselves that there is no sin in their life, and if/when they do sin, they know it and immediately repent and confess. All these lesser sins, to them, are not sins at all, which is to deny one's sins - an action condemned by 1 John 1:9. Ironically, the very passage they think condemns continual cleansing condemns them.

Is MURDER not greater than a slap in the face? Is adultery not worse than a lustful look, something done only "in the heart" (Matt. 5:28)?

Is driving 100 mph in a 20-mph school zone not a greater sin than driving 21 mph at the same location? The answers to these questions are a no-brainer, and the Bible clearly supports this position.

The word "abomination" is found 76 times in the KJV. The word is used to put emphasis on certain sins that God hates more than others (Prov. 6:16-19) *"These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren. Some sins, on the other hand, are not placed in this category."*

Also, there is a class of sins considered *"sins of ignorance"* as opposed to *"presumptuous sins"* or *"willful sins"* (Numbers 15:28-31) *And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin*

offering. 28 And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. 29 Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. 30 But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

Heb. 10:26 - *For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,*

Peter explains that it is better not to be aware that one is sinning than to sin knowingly (2 Peter 2:20-21) *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”*

Even if you don't comprehend that a sin committed in ignorance is not as great as a sin committed presumptuously, the fact that the consequences are different should dispel from the mind the idea that one sin is as great as another. Consequences reach their full extent when judgment is rendered by God, whose decisions are just and fair.

Consider the word "rebellion." It is just a fact that people commit sins against God (and people) that are not acts of rebellion. Such sins don't cause separation between family members. Fathers don't severely punish a child who tells an untruth that he thought was true. Parents don't disinherit children for sinful actions that are not considered rebellious. John made it clear that some sins are *"not unto death"* but there is a sin *"unto death"* (1 John 5:16, 17). Thus, the idea that all sins are the same is a ridiculous concept.

Jesus answered Pilate (the man who turned Him over to the Jews), *"You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore, he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin"* (John 19:11). It was Caiaphas (the Jewish high priest) who perpetrated the greater sin. He was responsible for the mock trial that violated every aspect of the normal procedure for such trials. Also, as a priest, he should have been familiar with the numerous prophecies (more than 300) that detailed Jesus as the Messiah. Pilate sinned by caving to political pressure to turn Jesus over to the Jews, but Jesus said the sin Caiaphas committed was greater.

Moses spoke of bowing before a golden calf as a *"great sin"* (Ex. 32:30-31). God considered it so because He is a jealous God and punishes those who worship other gods (Deut. 5:9).

The Bible makes it clear that teaching error is sin, but some errors are obviously greater than others. A false doctrine that jeopardizes souls is a greater error than advocating a position that technically may be incorrect but has no eternal consequence. As an example, to argue that there is no future resurrection of the body is a teaching connected with "overthrowing the faith" of some and is obviously a sin of

enormous gravity (2 Tim. 2:16-18). Whereas being wrong about whether it is a sin to eat in the meeting house would seem to be of little consequence.

(James 3:1) *“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.”* This passage suggests that teachers who fail to verify the truth and teach only the truth will suffer greater consequences for deceiving others.

Finally, the Bible speaks about degrees of punishment based upon the magnitude of one's sin (Luke 12:47-48) *“And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”*

Conclusion:

Saying all sins are the same can undermine people's confidence in salvation, since many actions could be considered "missing the mark." It's important to recognize that sins differ in type and severity, and this is reflected in divine judgment. Some argue that only intentional acts count as sin, disregarding cases of sins committed inadvertently, sins of ignorance, and sins committed in weakness, but scripture distinguishes between willful and unwilful sin, as indicated in Hebrews 10:26.

Chapter 18

An Exposition of Passages That Teach and/or Support the Bible's Teaching on *Continuous Cleansing*

*Some brethren oppose continuous cleansing as being something akin to “once saved always saved.” However, the common-sense, rational, reasonable position is in the middle of two extreme positions and is solidly supported by Scripture. It is the *only* position that allows an honest person to know that he is saved based upon the grace of God that covers him as he goes about diligently endeavoring to be the kind of disciple God wants him to be.*

I John 1:7 - *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

This passage has already been discussed in at least two chapters.

Romans 8:1-8 *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk*

not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

This passage is what is sometimes called a “parallel passage.” It explains fully what is meant by “*walk in the light*” as found in 1 John 1:7.

Paul contrasts the Law of Moses with the new law – Christ’s law, referred to as “the law of the Spirit of life.” The previous law was “*sin and death*.” This means there is no provision to cover sins to keep one alive as the blood of Christ does for Christians who “*walk in the light*.” Emphasis is put on the word *walk* to indicate “manner of life.” Emphasis is placed on *flesh* and *spirit*, which suggests the kind of life one is living.

2 Peter 1:5-11 *“For if you do these things ye shall never fall”*

This passage lists several things often called “the Christian graces.” It tells us how to keep from falling and assures us of an entrance into the eternal kingdom; perfection is not mentioned. However, it does present some conditions that must be met.

Psalm 19:12 *“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.”*

Since it is questionable whether one can always know when he errs, and God teaches us to pray that our *“secret faults”* be forgiven, it becomes apparent that *continual cleansing* is needed, taught, and required if God's grace is going to save anyone.

Am I mistaken to conclude that those who object to the teaching of *continual cleansing* are holding and advocating for the notion that one always, no matter the sin or the circumstances, instantly and automatically dies spiritually when he sins? Is this not what many have been clearly saying? Indeed, some are separated from God because of their sins, but some are not – it all depends on how God judges the matter. Christians who *“walk in the light”* are not separated from God because of their sins. This we know because John says if/when we continue in our walk the blood of Christ cleanses us of all sin.

Below is a list of questions I asked for which I never received an answer:

- 1) Do you agree or disagree with the two final sentences in the previous paragraph?
- 2) Do you realize that being separated from God is the same as being disinherited?
- 3) Do you think a Christian who sins (no matter the category or circumstances) continues to be disinherited until he learns of the sin and specifically confesses it?

4) Do you believe that God looks at the whole life of a Christian rather than looking for one deed whereby he will automatically be rejected as unfaithful?

5) Do you believe you may be considered faithful by God even though there may be some sin in your life that you are not aware of and have never confessed?

6) Do you believe faithful Christians who sin are lost between "general confessions"?

7) Do you have hope and if so on what is it based: 1) continual cleansing as you "walk in the light"; or 2) your confidence of living above sin by always knowing what things are sin and knowing when you sin, and being certain you have repented and confessed these sins?

Chapter 19

Two Extreme Views Exposed, and Why the Truth Is Important to Outreach Efforts

Two extreme views must be examined closely as we study “the security of the believer.” This chapter will consider both.

One of these doctrines is known as “once saved always saved.” Those who believe and teach it are not reluctant to make it understood that they believe that a child of God cannot think, believe, or do anything that would cause God to sever fellowship; even rebellion does not do it.

Satan first taught this doctrine in the Garden of Eden. *“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die”* (Gen. 3:4). God had told Adam and Eve that if they ate of this one fruit, *“thou shalt surely die.”* Those who believe “once saved always saved” claim that a child of God cannot die spiritually. But this is the same doctrine Satan preached in the Garden of Eden. It is the devil's doctrine, no matter who teaches it.

“Once saved always saved,” also known as “Perseverance of the Saints,” is one of the doctrines promoted by and attributed to John Calvin. His teachings are commonly referred to as **Calvinism**. Calvin's doctrines can be easily remembered because when we take the first letter of each in the correct order, they spell *TULIP*. They are as follows: 1) total hereditary depravity; 2) unconditional election; 3)

limited atonement; 4) irresistible grace and imputed righteousness; and 5) predestination and perseverance of the saints. All these doctrines are false and have done untold damage to the cause of our Lord.

The doctrine called “once saved always saved” is what we’re examining at this time. As we’ve said, it is one extreme in the issue under study. It is a harmful doctrine because it makes people feel secure when they are, in fact, falling from grace (Gal. 5:4), granted they were Christians in the first place. When one thinks he can’t lose salvation, he has no fear of God, which is a motive for obedience. The sad part about it is that such a one will seldom consider the possibility that he might be lost. Therefore, he refuses to study when someone tries to teach him the truth and thus goes to the grave believing a lie.

I believe in *the security of the believer*, but not in the security of those who cease to believe. One who turns his back on God is no longer a true believer. *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God”* (Heb. 3:12).

The other extreme view is the idea that one falls from grace every time he does wrong or sins in any way. As with the first extreme view, a few passages, if not taken in context, appear to teach this. But we must study passages in their context, and the conclusion that we reach must be in harmony with the Bible as a whole.

This has been a very controversial subject among members of the Church of Christ, in the last fifty years. There have always been controversial subjects and there always will be.

It is not wrong to differ. If I'm in error, I'm wrong in teaching it, but controversy is not bad. What is terrible is the un-Christian attitude that some brethren display when something they do not agree with is taught. I'm talking about things like having a closed mind, failing to honestly consider the evidence, making false charges against their opponents, and often displaying an attitude toward anyone who tries to show them the truth that stinks.

Why is this issue important to outreach efforts? Well, first, not only will it be virtually impossible to teach someone who believes "once saved always saved" if the opposite position is presented, but it will turn them off to any truth the Neo-Pharisees might try to teach. Their teaching reflects on the rest of the Lord's church. Second, the truth is always the easiest and best thing to teach. The truth that aliens need to hear is that becoming a Christian and *holding onto the hope of heaven, based on God's revelation, is entirely achievable*. To hear that God has no remedy, no means, to keep Christians *continually cleansed* is simply a faith killer.

Chapter 20

Passages That Neo-Pharisees Use to Support Their Contention Explained in Context

James 1:15 *“Then when lust has conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”*

First, let's look at the definition of the word *tempt*. It means *to entice. To do wrong by promise of pleasure or gain: allure into evil: seduce*. God says that He will not allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). Therefore, when we commit sin that we are tempted to commit, it is a *willful* sin. We know that a thing is wrong, but we are *tempted*, and when we do not put forth ample resistance, we develop *lust*, which is *strong desire*. This lust brings forth sin, and the sin brings forth death. The type of sins that one who walks in the light commits are not sins that one is tempted to commit. This passage does not teach that all sin brings forth death, just those in the context of James 1:5. God chooses which sins do and do not bring forth death.

Leviticus 5:17 *“And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he wished it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity.”*

This command removes any doubt as to whether something was sin if done in ignorance. God said he has certainly

trespassed (v. 19). Atonement was commanded and forgiveness promised to the one who obeyed. When a child of God learns that he has trespassed, even though ignorantly, he must do what God has said to do to be forgiven. The Israelites were commanded to bring an animal to the priest. We are commanded to *repent* and *confess* the sin (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Christians are taught to study, and ignorance does not keep a thing from being sin; but this passage does not teach that every sin causes spiritual death.

Ezekial 18:4 *“The soul that sinneth it shall die.”*

The prophet was dealing with the use of the proverb *“The Fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are on edge”* (1-3). Apparently, the Israelites were not sure whether the son would be responsible for the iniquities of his father. The prophet answers: *“The soul that sinneth it shall die.”* He was simply teaching that one soul does not have to die for the sin of another. The son is responsible for only the sin that he commits.

This passage does not teach that every sin causes spiritual death. One would have to ignore the context to contend that it does.

Isaiah 59:2 *“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God.”*

Certainly, sin causes separation, but is Isaiah saying that every sin does? The next six verses tell of the depraved nature of those to whom he had reference (3-8). The prophet did not say one committed “a” sin and therefore

was separated from God. This is what some of my brethren assert that the verse teaches. Those to whom the passage was addressed had committed many sins. They were rebellious and had clearly turned away from God.

Romans 6:23 *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Sin pays wages to its servants and the payment is death. This payment is the second death or eternal damnation (Rev. 21:8). Contrariwise, the obedient Christian receives the gift of eternal life. Eternal life, as opposed to eternal death, indicating that *death*, in the text, has reference to eternal death. We must conclude that the wage of sin is eternal death. The sinner is paid his wages at the end of life, and the faithful Christian is given his gift at the end as well. When taken in context, we see that the passage does not have reference to specific sins at all.

I know of no other passages that are used by Neo-Pharisees in their fight against continual cleansing. But if there are others, you can be assured that they are misused and clearly do not teach that for which these misguided teachers contend.

Chapter 21

Questions and Answers

I'm presenting these questions and answers mainly to show how the Neo-Pharisees argue. They don't have scripture, so their most often used "argument" is nothing but "*foolish and unlearned*" questions such as follows (2 Tim. 2:23):

Question: "Was Simon the Sorcerer forgiven of his sin without repentance and confession?"

Simon's heart was not right, as the text says. He thought he could buy the gift of laying hands on people and imparting spiritual gifts. His intention was to use that power to make money. The apostle rebuked him for his evil thought. He listened and asked the apostle to pray for his forgiveness. You want *me* to say if or when God determined to remove His grace? You are asking me to judge, which is God's job. I can answer questions based only on what the Scriptures say. The Scriptures do not say if or when God removed His grace.

Question: "If one sin does not cause a Christian to be lost, how many does it take?"

It is not a matter of how many sins one commits; it is the character, disposition, and intention that God looks at as He looks at the *heart*. I ask the querist, "Would you like God to judge you on how you seem to think others ought to be judged?" *"For as you have been judging, so you will be judged, and with your measure will it be measured to you"* (Matt. 7:2 BBE).

Question: “What sins can one commit and be forgiven while walking in the light?”

What we have here is just another example of “*foolish and unlearned questions*” that “*do gender strifes,*” which we are commanded to avoid (2 Tim. 2:2). Christians who “*walk in the light*” do not seek to find out what sins they may commit with impunity. Such thinking is not characteristic of the kind of walk that results in blood continuously cleansing one of sin. Christians who endeavor to be faithful seek to avoid all sin.

Mike’s questions were followed by Robert’s reply:

“Can a Christian who is guilty of sin consider himself/herself to be walking in the light?”

Robert:

First, this question is designed to build prejudice as it is intended for the reader to think of the sin as being something big, which might be considered rebellion. The answer is yes – we are all guilty of sin, but we are not all guilty of *willful sin* that God would consider rebellious. Mike, are you *not* guilty of sin of any kind – sins of ignorance, character flaws that offend others, an evil thought, a sin of omission, etc.?

Mike:

“Let’s say a Christian is guilty of lying, are they walking in the light?”

Robert:

I suppose not all lies are intentional. AAR, a (one) lie, if intentional, would certainly be a *step* out of the light. When a baby takes a step, he takes only one step. He isn’t walking. The condition for continual forgiveness of sins is

that we “*walk* in the light. One who so walks receives the promised blessings regardless of the opposition, protests, and disapproval of those who cannot accept it or refuse to accept it. Remember, Abraham lied twice – the motive being to protect his wife – and God did not condemn him to hell, nor was he even rebuked. David lied to enemies by making them think he was crazy, and he was not rebuked.

Mike:

“In 1 John 1:8, John writes; ‘If we say that we have *no* sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.’ Am I wrong to conclude that John speaks in the present tense? Does this mean that a Christian cannot ever (in his life on earth) say he has *no* sin?”

Robert:

No. It just means that he is deceiving himself and the truth is not in him when he does it. Your question indicates you think it is okay to say, “*I have no sin.*” WOW! Folks, this is what I’m talking about – an attitude that God deplores to such an extent that He says such men do not have the truth in them.

Mike:

“If, at any moment in their life on earth, a Christian said that he/she had no sin, would they be guilty of lying?”

Robert:

If 1 John 1:8 means what it says, the answer is *yes*. Verse 10 will also be applicable if someone is shown that there are sins in his life and he denies them all like my brethren are doing when they fight against *continual cleansing* and contend that no sin is forgiven unless it is repented of and confessed.

Mike:

“Would the sin of lying cause them to cease to be walking in the light?”

Robert:

I take it that you are talking about lying about one's own sins – denying them. Brother, this is what 1 John 1:9 is talking about. When one *lies* about his sins, he is *denying* them.

It seems Mike is trying to muddy the water regarding what sins are forgiven while walking in the light. What does the passage say about this liar? ***“The truth is not in him.”*** Is it an assumption to conclude that one who does not have the truth in him (one who thinks he is saved because he is sinless rather than because he is a beneficiary of the saving grace of God through the blood of Christ) is lost? Mike, does the scripture say anything about being judged by the same judgment in which he judges others? It does, and you should take it as a warning.

These guys *say* that "no one will live above sin," but what spiritual security might they muster when they contend against "continual cleansing" for those who walk in the light? It leaves nothing that works! All that is left is that one must live above sin to be saved, which means there can be no unrepented or unconfessed sin. If this is the case, you are saying you *are* living above sin if you think or say you are saved.

You said that "salvation is conditional upon obedience." This is true, especially for the alien sinner, but security for the Christian is based on his *life*, which is a life of imperfect obedience. His life pleases God. David was not perfect – he sinned. But God said he had a good heart and served God

"all the days of his life." One whose life pleases God walks in the light. A step in the wrong direction is not a walk. It certainly is not a *walk in darkness*. Is this hard for you to grasp? Can one *"walk in the light"* yet not be sinlessly perfect like Jesus, who the text tells us *"is in the light"*? We are to mimic Him, but contending that the blood cleanses only those who are sinless, as He is, is absurd and futile. It destroys the intention of the passage, which is the only hope for honest Christians to feel secure as they look for His glorious appearing.

Chapter 22

Some Great Comments

The comments below were made in response to a post I made on *continual cleansing* in a Facebook group:

Denise

I am thankful for continuous cleansing, but I am also alert concerning "*shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*" God knows our hearts and intentions. It is easy to drift from shore, and eventually sear your conscious. Yes, we are *continuously cleansed* but guard your hearts and be holy. This is not to give us a spirit of fear, but respect for God's warnings.

Scott

I talked to a lady in our congregation once, who had been a Christian for 50ish years.....since she was a young girl....faithful, loving, serving committed Christianshe confessed that she felt unsure and afraid for her salvation....that she hadn't done enough, or that she had some unrepented sin somewhere on her record....this kind of hopeless fear is what window shade salvation theology leads to....it robs one of the joy that God wants us to live with....it's a tool in the toolbox of Satan....

Amy

It's the mindset. Grace isn't a "get out of jail free" card that allows one to sin, it is a constant cleansing for one that is genuinely attempting to avoid sin as much as humanly possible. The trouble many times, however, is the identification of sin. One cannot be freed from the sin one refuses to identify as sin.

Debbie

I've seen the results of this teaching, and it is harmful to the emotional wellbeing of many of our older people. Seems the issue was inadequate teaching of 1 John. Try helping brethren who had this instilled as a great fear and you'll get nowhere. One good thing.... They avoid sin.

Robert Replies:

Debbie, perhaps they do make a greater effort to avoid certain types of sins than we who believe in *continual cleansing*. But they are guilty of perhaps *the* worst sin of all, and that is denying their sins and calling God a liar by denying sin when they are shown to be doing it. John said, "*the truth is not in them*" (1 John 1:8, 10). These guys will watch carefully for the speed limit signs and make sure they are below it when they pass. But the same men often show disrespect and even hate for their brethren who seek to share God's word with them as to what it teaches regarding how to have real hope without saying, outright or by implication, "*that we have no sin.*"

Kyle

There are certainly those who believe one must be absolutely sinless the moment they draw their last breath; else they will enter into eternal damnation. Make of it what we will, but this certainly makes salvation dependent upon man and his good works. It seems there is certainly a demonstrable difference between living in flagrant sin and wrestling with sin and confessing it when you realize you have committed it. While I despise the old "argument" if a man has a fleeting impure thought and in that exact moment drops dead of a heart attack, is he eternally condemned? I'd hardly think so, but rather we commend him to God's grace. There is a difference in falling and getting up and living happily within sin. Salvation is not dependent on my performance of perfection, but upon the grace of God toward me. I agree with and appreciate this article (about *continual cleansing*, RW) and in no way do I sense this as teaching once saved always saved. I do not believe in once saved always saved, but neither do I believe in once saved barely saved.

Robert to Tony

So, is your answer to the question (so it appears) that unless there is no sin in your life you are lost and your confidence, if you have any, is based on your knowing you have confessed every sin you have committed and are living above sin? Do you not see a problem with this? Do you read 1 John 1:9 and not see

confession as a practice to confess sins as opposed to denying them? Do you not see the condemnation of your position in verses 8 and 10? Dear sir, you might want to look carefully at the parable of the Publican and the Sinner and reconsider your position and your life.

Dennis A

We are so worried about being compared to the denominations that we have changed God into a monster that is just waiting for any reason to condemn us for the slightest thing. The Bible clearly makes the distinction between willful sin and sins that were committed in ignorance.

Dennis L

The “th” of *cleanseth* in the KJV of I John 1:7 reveals the present tense in the Greek. The present tense means a continual or ongoing action in the present. Thus, as one walks in the light, the blood of Jesus continually forgives him of the sins he commits as he walks in the light. Rom. 8 agrees, saying there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (v.1), agreeing with I John by identifying them as walking according to the Spirit (v.4). Rom. 8 explains why. We’ve been freed from the law of sin and death (v.2), the law that says, “you sin; you die” (Rom. 6:23). When we walk in the light, walking according to the Spirit, we don’t die when we sin. We are cleansed instead.

Those who have difficulty with this normally object because of 1 John 1:9, which says, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* If we fail to understand the context and reason behind John’s words in I John 1, we risk rendering the passage self-contradictory, much like “onlyists” who make Ephesians 2:8 self-contradictory due to their lack of understanding.

Chapter 23

How To Keep Saved

Introduction

1. To be saved, one must obey the gospel (1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Thes. 1:7-9).
2. Many obey but later turn back to the world (2 Pet. 2:22).
3. Keeping saved is as important as being saved.

Body

- I. Realize that the Christian can apostatize.
 - A. Knowing that one can fall should cause one to be cautious.
 - B. Bible teaches possibility of falling.
 1. Simon (Acts 8:5-24)
 2. Galatia church was warned of falling from grace (Gal. 5:4).
 3. Instructions for those who err (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19,20).
 4. Bible teaches even worse fate to turn from the truth (2 Pet. 2:20-22).
 - C. Watch out for false teachers – don't be deceived (2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Tim. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:1).
- II. Endeavor to avoid sinful or doubtful things.
 - A. Live as a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).
 - B. Walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3,4; 17,18).
 - C. Sow to the Spirit (Gal. 6:7,8).
 - D. Watch associations (1 Cor. 15:33).
 - E. Do not make provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14).

- III. Keep in touch with God.
 - A. Let God speak to you daily (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:2).
 - B. Speak to God daily (Lk. 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:17).
 - 1. Ask for forgiveness (1 Jn 1:9).
 - 2. Ask for guidance and needs (Matt. 6:9-14).
 - 3. As you speak to God, give thanks for blessings, etc. (Eph 5:20).
 - C. Worship God:
 - 1. In truth and spirit (John 4:24).
 - 2. In the assemblies (Heb. 10:25-26).

- IV. Put God first always (Matt. 6:33).
 - A. Don't compromise with error (Heb. 10:23; Eph 4:13-15).
(Does not mean don't question tradition, or the things our parents believed etc.)
 - B. Put God before pleasure, loved ones, company, work, etc. (Lk. 9:23).

- V. Be doers of the word (James 1:22).
 - A. Show faith by works (James 2:14-26).
 - B. Visit the needy (poor) (James 1:27).
 - 1. When this was written I don't think God had in mind churches sending a monthly or yearly check to a home, but rather INDIVIDUALS taking actions as they have opportunity.
 - 2. Same thing in Galatians 6:9-10.
 - C. Meet with the saints or forsake not the assembly (Heb. 10:25).

- VI. Never Quit Growing
 - A. Desire sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2).
 - B. Add to your faith, virtue, etc. (2 Pet. 1:5-11).
 - C. Take advantage of Bible studies, etc. (2 Tim 2:15).
 - D. Avoid lukewarmness (Rev. 3:15-16).

- E. Be faithful – never give up (Rev. 2:10).
- VII. Keep your eye on the goal.
- A. Heaven awaits those who remain faithful (Rev. 2:10).
 - B. Remember the price paid to save us (John 3:16; Eph. 5:25).
 - C. Remember the Lord's promise to return (1 Thess. 4:16).
 - D. Endeavor to be like God (1 John 3:2).
 - E. Endeavor to be like Paul (2 Tim. 4:6-8).
 - F. Be diligent to abound in everything (2 Cor. 8:7).
 - G. *"Give diligence to make your calling an election sure"* (2 Pet. 1:10).

Conclusion

- A. Remember the latter end is worse than the beginning, if we turn away. (2 Pet. 2:20-22)
- B. If you have sinned, then repent of the sin, confess it to God and begin anew (1 John 1:8,9).
- C. Confess your sins in a general sense and for God to forgive you of your *"secret faults."*
- D. Be confident that the blood of Christ is keeping you cleansed of all sins as you *"walk in the light."*

Chapter 24

What is “Sin Not Unto death”?

My brethren who oppose what I'm teaching feel victorious when they point out biblical examples where sin resulted in spiritual death. On this point, we agree. But what they fail to do and cannot do is show that God condemns His children whenever they fall short of perfection.

A denominational preacher can teach that salvation is *by faith*, we agree on that point. But it's when he adds the word *only* that we object. That's teaching something that is contrary to the Scriptures. James 2:24 sets forth teaching that is precisely the opposite. Now, when someone teaches that sin is a terrible thing and causes spiritual death, brethren agree. But when someone says that *every* sin results in spiritual death, this is where we must object because that is teaching something contrary to the Scriptures. First, John 5:17 teaches precisely the opposite. You are probably familiar with James 2:24, which says that we are *justified by works and not by faith only*. We use this passage, press it hard in debate, and expect our *faith only* friends to believe it, and we can't understand why they don't. But some brethren turn right around and deny the meaning of a passage that is just as clear and just as damaging to their doctrine. The passage says, *“There is sin not unto death.”* Why should we quibble and pass this off as our denominational friends do regarding faith? First John 5:17 says what it means and means what it says, and it could not be made plainer.

“Sin not unto death” is sin for which the consequence is not spiritual death. The child of God who sins *“not unto death”*: 1) is penitent and respects God's laws; 2) has not fallen from God's grace; 3) is not separated from God; 4) has not lost his hope of eternal life; 5) continues to have his name recorded in the book of life; 6) continues to *walk in the light* and to be cleansed *of all sin by the blood of Christ*; and 7) has fellowship with God and other brethren. But we have a different situation when one sins *“unto death.”* The child of God who sins unto death: 1) is fallen from grace; 2) is separated from God; 3) has lost his hope; 4) no longer has his name recorded in the Book of Life; 5) has ceased to *walk in the light* and to be cleansed of all sin by the blood of our Savior; and 6) has ceased to have fellowship with God.

The author had a brief exchange with one of the champions of the Neo-Pharisees' teaching, in which this brother argued that the *sin not unto death* is “the sin one confesses and forsakes.” I agree that the *sin unto death* may be a sin that one refuses to confess and forsake, but it doesn't necessarily follow that the *sin not unto death* refers only to those sins that the sinner confesses and forsakes. (This argument won't stand up because these brethren believe that one is dead before he refuses to renounce the sin.) He might not know that he committed the sin and could not confess it. These are the types of sins that we ask forgiveness for when we pray, “Forgive us of all our past sins” even though we named specifically our own known sins in our private prayers.

The apostle John tells us that we can pray for another brother whose sin falls under *sin not unto death* and that *he will be given life* (1 John 5:16). Regarding the one who commits *sin unto death*, John says: “*I do not say that he*” (another brother) “*shall pray for it.*” The only way that this brother can be forgiven is if he repents and confesses his sin to God. Unless he repents, he will be forever lost. For further study of this passage, see *The Mission and Medium of the Holy Spirit*, by Foy Wallace Jr., pages 108, 109; Zerr, Johnson, Clark, Vincents word studies; and *Sermons on Salvation* by Guy N. Woods, pages 40 and 41.

Chapter 25

Continual Cleansing Is Consistent with God's Character and It Is Reasonable

Continual cleansing is consistent with God's character. He loves us, He is just, and He is merciful and desires that we be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). If it were not for His mercy and grace (unmerited favor), no one could be saved. Since *all have sinned* (Rom. 3:23), and we cannot save ourselves by meritorious works (Eph. 2:8, 9), our only hope for salvation is through the grace of God.

One needs only to study God's dealings with Israel to know that God doesn't look for an opportunity to *get* us like some overzealous highway patrolman who just waits for someone to break the speed limit by one mile an hour. The quickest way for a patrolman to become very unpopular with the people he's supposed to serve is to be merciless. Likewise, the quickest way for a gospel preacher to become unpopular with his brethren, and *God*, is to begin teaching that perfection is necessary to salvation.

Have you studied *mercy*? **Webster** defines it as: 1) compassion or forbearance shown to an offender or subject; clemency; 2) implies compassion that forbears punishing even when justice demands it. God says, "*I shall show mercy on whom I will*" (Ex. 33:19). "*And the Lord is of great mercy*" (Num. 14:18). *Continual cleansing* as taught in 1 John 1:6-7 is available to *whosoever will* because God is merciful.

Continual cleansing is reasonable. It is unreasonable to maintain that perfection is necessary to *walk in the light*.

Walking in the light cannot mean perfection because no one is sinlessly perfect and, thus, cannot walk in the light. *The walk is literally walking about, indicating the habitual course of life, outward and inward* (Vincent's Word Studies, VII, page 315). Given the meaning of the word *walk*, there must be *continual cleansing*. Without *continual cleansing*, the word *walk* should have been *skip* or *hopscotch*.

Jesus said, "*Follow me*" (Mark 8:34). He is the truth and the light. Paul said, "*Be you followers of me, just as I also am of Christ*" (1 Cor. 11:1). We are here to follow Christ like Paul did, which is necessarily imperfectly, but with diligence and perseverance.

The doctrine referred to as the *yo-yo syndrome* is the idea that the Christian falls from grace or ceases to walk in the light every time he transgresses or misses the mark. According to this doctrine, if one commits a sin of any nature, he turns his back on Christ. Now, is that reasonable? A Christian who has his mind set on following Christ and whose walk is in that direction suddenly and periodically makes an about-face and goes the other way, even while thinking he is diligent in the Lord's work. Who can believe it?

If there is *continual cleansing*, there are types or classifications of sin. On the other hand, if the yo-yo doctrine is true, there is no difference - one is as great as another. There are four classes of sin: 1) ignorant, 2) inadvertent, 3) presumptuous, and 4) willful. My grouping these is not to show which sins we may commit and which we may not but to show that people recognize the classification in everyday life, as does the judge of the righteous and the wicked. Law enforcement officers and judges consider the classifications of sin in their dealings with those who violate the law of our land. They use these

criteria in deciding whether to have mercy and turn an offender loose, give him a warning or light punishment, or make an example of him. Now, who would contend that God does not use the same criteria in making His judgments about the names that He keeps in the Book of Life and the names that He takes out of it?

If it could be shown that the punishment for sin has always been the same, then we could conclude that no sin is greater than any other. However, if we can show that there were different punishments for crimes (sins against God), we will have demonstrated that God does consider some sins greater than others. But first, let's deal with an objection to this point. James 2:10 is frequently quoted to show that all sins are of the same magnitude. *"Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."* The only point that James makes here is that if one tries to be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments, should he fail in one point he has failed completely and is guilty of breaking the whole law or may as well have broken the entire law. Therefore, to be saved, he must look to the *"perfect law of liberty"* (James 1:25), which is a better covenant (Heb. 8:6,7).

Suppose a father hears his twelve-year-old son say an ugly word. Would this anger the father? Not necessarily. He would try to find out if the boy knew it was a bad word. If he didn't realize it was bad, the father would tell him not to say it and maybe warn him not to do it again. If the boy didn't know it was bad, would he deserve a good spanking? Now consider another situation with the same boy and father. The boy slaps the father in the face and tells him, **"You're not going to tell me what to do."** Which of the two sins would anger the Father more? Should the punishment be the same in both cases?

Is it not true that some sins anger God more than others? If it is not true, why then is the word *great* used with the word *sin* in some places (Ex. 32:21, 2 Kings 17:21)? The Scriptures teach that some sins are an *abomination* to God. Note the seven sins in Proverbs 6:16-19. Since some sins are an abomination to God, we must deduct that some are *not* as detestable. No doubt the sins that are *great* and that are an *abomination* are those that are more likely to cause God to remove the offender's name from the Book of Life.

There are degrees of sin, as is apparent when we consider what Jesus said when discussing the matter of judging – the *moat* as compared to the *beam* (Matt. 7:3-5). Israelites who sinned *in ignorance* were allowed to make a sacrifice and live, but those who sinned *presumptuously* were to be *cut off*. Obviously, the latter was greater (Lev. 4-5; Luke 12:48; 1 Tim. 1:13).

A righteous judge considers the attitude of those who appear before him. If you appear before a judge and act as if you are proud of what you did, he will throw the book at you. You make him angry, and he's going to prosecute you fully. On the other hand, if you tell him that you are guilty and convince him that you respect the law but didn't realize you were breaking it, he will show mercy. Friend, this is justice. Where do you suppose man learned it? Yes, from God, and He says, "*I shall show mercy on whom I will*" (Ex. 33:19).

The upright life of a proven law-abiding citizen counts for something to a truth-loving judge who wants to do justice to those who appear before him. First offenders receive lighter sentences than habitual criminals do. This is reasonable, but it is unreasonable to do otherwise. Now to the point: Suppose a man has served God as a gospel

preacher for forty years and has done so faithfully. He has studied his Bible from front to back. He studies the laws of the land to ensure he does not break any of them. However, when the state legislature meets and passes a new law (or amends an existing one), this man breaks it and dies without repenting or confessing his actions. Proponents of the yo-yo doctrine won't admit it, but the consequences of saying that all sins are of the same magnitude or that every sin separates from God would be that this man would go to the same place as the satanic worshipper and Adolf Hitler. Face it, brethren; this is a consequence of this doctrine and is unacceptable. It makes God an unjust god; it is not reasonable, and it is certainly not taught in the Bible.

We're still not through on this point. Please read Numbers 15:27-31. Israelites who sinned ignorantly were commanded to bring an animal to the priest who would make atonement, and the sins would be forgiven. But the one who sinned *presumptuously* was to be *cut off* from among the people. A *presumptuous* sin is "one committed in defiance of law, and with the attitude of doing a thing regardless of law" (Zerr). God recognized these two types of sin. The man who committed the first could be forgiven, but the one who committed the other was to be *utterly cut off*. Someone says, "But he had to make a sacrifice." Yes, he did, and it was because of his good attitude that he was allowed to do this and be forgiven. When we sin ignorantly and learn of it, we don't have to make a sacrifice – one has already been made. We are expected to do what the New Testament teaches, which is to repent and confess. One who walks in the light, being *continuously cleansed*, is one whose heart is right and who always has the intention of repenting of and confessing sins as he learns of them.

Hebrews 10:26 is a passage that teaches the same thing as Numbers 15. God recognizes a difference between a willful or deliberate sin and one that is not. The passage says, “*For if we sin willfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.*” One who sins *willfully*, as those who had given up the faith – evident by the fact that they were forsaking the assemblies – disregards God's law and rejects God's offer for atonement through sacrifice. In doing this, they have apostatized from the faith and fallen from the grace of God because they have rejected the only sacrifice that can atone for sins. There remains no more sacrifice. Some argue that there is no difference between a *willful* sin and an *unwillful* sin. But for that to be true, the passage would have to read as follows: “For if we *sin* after that we have received the knowledge of the truth.” The word *willfully* is there; the meaning is changed if we leave it out.

A sin is committed in ignorance when one doesn't know any better. A *willful sin* is one done deliberately or intentionally. **Webster** says that being *willful* is to be obstinate and defines the word as: “*Pertinaciously adhering to an opinion, purpose, or course, in spite of reason, arguments, or persuasion.*” An *inadvertent* sin is one committed due to an unintentional or unavoidable oversight.

Continual cleansing is reasonable because it is the only way to have hope, especially for the *babe in Christ*. If it is true that we fall from grace every time we sin, then only those who reach the point that they do not sin could have spiritual security or even hope. All others could only wish to get lucky and die immediately after getting forgiveness of all sins by praying a general prayer for forgiveness (which some affirm is not possible unless specifically named) before another sin is committed. Our salvation would be determined mainly by chance. There would be no hope because *hope* means *desire*

plus expectation. There would only be *desire* – no expectation – and thus no hope. To say the least, there would be ample reason for doubt, which is sin. Therefore, we would all be doomed to eternal destruction.

For the sake of argument, let's say one can get to a point where he does not sin at all; what hope could he have during the time it takes to get to that point? A *baby in Christ is unskillful in his use of the Word*, and according to Hebrews 5:14, unlike the full-grown one, he is *unable to discern both good and evil*. If the perfectionist's doctrine is accurate, all *babes* are lost. But that idea is absurd because Jesus warned of causing one of these little ones to *stumble* (Mark 9:42). Obviously, if a *little one* can be caused to stumble, he hasn't fallen. One must be in grace to stumble. If he is already down, has stumbled, or has fallen from grace, he can't stumble. Parents do not expect their newborn infant to be mature, and God does not have different expectations for those born into His family. A *babe in Christ* is not perfect, but he can be in a saved condition; therefore, there must be *continual cleansing*.

John tells us that the commandments of God are *not grievous* or more than we can bear (1 John 5:3), and Jesus said, "*My yoke is easy, and my burden is light*" (Matt. 11:30). But if God condemns us at each failure, then His commandments *are* grievous. Who among the brethren who teach that a child of God must live perfectly to stay in fellowship with God could consciously say that they believe that God's commandments are **not hard to bear** and that the *burden is light*? God expects us to love Him, respect His authority, and be diligent to be obedient. That isn't hard to do; it's not grievous. But if we must constantly live without sin to stay in fellowship with God, then it is more than any Christian can bear. When Jesus said, "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*" (John 8:7). But no one did.

Voices from the Past

The men quoted below were all well-known, respected, and influential men who did their part in teaching the truth and fighting error regarding forgiveness for Christians. Sadly, several seemingly good gospel preachers did not listen but instead fought relentlessly against the truth, and some still do the same to this day.

E.M. ZERR

No man lives who does not make some mistakes and commits some incidentally. But this phrase means a man whose general life is one of godliness, and whose motive principle is the light of the New Testament. This man can truly be said to be walking with the Lord because he is in the pathway that Jesus laid out for him. Being in the fellowship of God, the source of all light, is like being constantly in the stream of the blood of his son. That blood is constantly flowing (figuratively) through the body or Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the natural body of a man whose bloodstream is healthy, if germs slip in through the person, that blood being always present will be like a disinfectant that will destroy the germ. Likewise, the blood of Christ is ever present to cleanse away the mistakes and incidental sins that a true Christian does. Hence, if a man is a worker in the Lord's vineyard, and his life as a whole is one of obedience to the law of Christ. He does not need to worry about the mistakes he might make, which he does not realize, for the blood of Christ will take care of it and wash them away. They will be cleansed by the *"fountain open to the House of David...for sin and uncleanness"* (Zech.13:1). *"There is a fountain filled with blood. drawn*

from Immanuel's veins; and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains." (Volume 6, page 279)

CLEM THURMAN

After Paul had explained how the blood of Christ makes us Christians (Rom. 5:8-10; 6:3-6), he then writes: *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 8:1). Does he mean that we can live without ever coming again into a state of condemnation? Yes! How? The blood of Jesus cleanses us continuously and constantly so that there is no time when we are not justified before God. This is why Paul said in Romans 4:8, *"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."* When we are reconciled to God by the blood of Christ, (Rom. 6. 10), then God is *"not imputing their trespasses unto them"* (2 Cor. 5:19). But as John shows, Christians striving to serve the Lord do commit sin. That God does not impute that sin, because it is immediately removed by the blood of Christ.

Can we know we are saved? Paul knew, and wrote, *"For me, to live as Christ, to die is gain"* (Phi. 1:21). Again, he said in 2 Tim. 4:8, *"I have kept the faith, henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."* So did John know, and he wrote of it throughout First John. Why did he write of the continuous cleansing of the blood of Christ for those who walk in the light? Read it and 1 John 5:13: *"These things I have written, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on his name."* And here is the *"hope, an anchor of the soul"* (Heb. 6:19) for Christians. My being saved is not dependent on my goodness, or on my never committing a sin. My salvation is assured by the blood of Christ: by which I was enabled to become a child of God, and by which I am constantly cleansed as I walk in the light of God into which I was called. (Gospel Minutes, April 18th, 1975.)

Some Christians seem to walk in fear that some “hidden sin” or “impulsive sin” will be on their record (the Bible word is imputed). But the whole point of 1 John 1:7-9 is that the blood of Christ takes away those sins! To walk in the light doesn't mean that we never sin, else there would be no sins for the blood to cleanse. But to walk in the light does mean that we walk with God, with determination to do His will. And as long as we thus “*walk in the light*” the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. It doesn't say that blood will “keep us from sin,” but that it “cleanses us from sin.” An example, although a poor one, is a windshield wiper on your car: it doesn't keep the rain from getting on the windshield, but it does take it off just as soon as it gets on. Just so the blood of Jesus does not prevent one who is “*in the light*” from committing sin: but his blood takes away that sin so it is not “imputed” (put on the record)...Because of the constant cleansing of Christ blood, sin is not imputed to the one who “walks in the light.” (Gospel Minutes, May 5, 1978.)

LESLIE DIESTELKAMP

I do not try to minimize the danger of sin in ignorance. Regarding Christians, I wrote: “If there is no forgiveness of incidental faults (sin, if you please) of which we are not aware, and which we cannot, therefore, specifically confess, then there is no hope at all! We then are all hopeless, helpless and miserable creatures destined to receive nothing but the vengeance of God who made us incapable of perfection and then determined to destroy us without mercy!...The Christian must confess his sinfulness and repent of sins of which he is aware...And he must have a humble, contrite penitent attitude regarding his own inability to identify every sin. Is this not all that he can do (provided he does not deliberately reject or neglect knowledge)?”

It seems to me that anyone who would deny the above paragraph would then be arrogantly affirming his own infallibility in discerning truth and his own absolute strength in applying that truth. Surely no one would be so presumptuous. And, because this is the attitude that seems to prevail with certain brethren and has done so for a few years now, that is the very reason I have repeatedly written on this subject. I love these brothers and do not want them to be lost. But if they do not have the humility to acknowledge sinfulness beyond that which they perceive, then they are the ones who will not properly confess and repent. (Special supplement to Think on these things.)

ROBERT F. TURNER

“Walking in the light” and “confessing our sins” of 1 John 1:7-9 are both present active --indicating continual process. They depict a manner of life or attitude by which we “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5:17). Those walking in the light are imperfect creatures, “in fellowship” with God only through His mercy and the forgiveness of sin made possible by the blood of his son.

Confusion has arisen on this matter because some have said “unwitting” misdeeds would not be regarded as sin -- and that is error; while others have accepted the fanciful theory of Christ’s perfect life imputed to us, so that God sees that life instead of ours – another error. We need not assume either absolute perfection on the part of a saint, or a conscious particular sin and confession, to satisfy the demands of 1 John 1:8-f. We have an Advocate with the Father. He is the propitiation for our sins.

There is nothing in this to excuse sins; nothing to delegate our need to recognize our sins, confess them, and ask His forgiveness. In fact, our need for continual trust, in a

continual sin offering (Heb. 9:14) who “*ever liveth to make intercession*” (Heb. 7:25), is greatly emphasized. (Plain talk)

The continual cleansing that is essential to continued righteousness is available to all who “walk in the light” “confessing our sins” (1 John 1:7-10; 2:1-6). The present, active construction in these passages (see Greek grammar) indicates continuity -- such “walking” and “confessing” is a manner of life; a humble dependent attitude that ever looks to Christ for forgiveness. It is in this way that Christ is to us righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (Plain talk)

FOY E. WALLACE JR.

A variety of daily experiences may come to one's mind as he contemplates the meaning of “walk in the light.” Light makes it possible for one to see and to understand. A person moves about in light with confidence and perception. He can travel a direct route, avoid pitfalls, observe landmarks, and hold a steady course toward his destination...

John makes it quite clear that our walking in the light is not a matter of perfect sinlessness nor absolute flawlessness (1 John 1:8; 2:2). The Christian does not at one moment walk perfectly, in light, and the next moment, because of a sin, walk in darkness. It is not a matter of hopscotching from light to darkness, to light, and back again. Of course, the Christian may indeed cease to walk with the light and enter the domain of darkness. But sins in his life do not necessarily mean he has ceased to walk in the light. Walking in the light is not a matter of absolute moral and doctrinal perfection. (Editorial, 1974.)

R. L. WHITESIDE

And when people walk in the light, not only is there fellowship between them, but they also have the cleansing blood of Christ. This blood cleanses such people from all sin. This would include all those sins of which we may not be conscious. God graciously blots out such sins, as well as those of which we are conscious and of which we repent; and the next three verses of the chapter show that we all sin, whether consciously or unconsciously, and that God is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, if we confess our sins. And that is a blessing for which every sincere disciple of Christ is profoundly thankful. (Annual Lesson Commentary on Bible School Lesson. 1937, page 291.)

Conclusion

If one who disbelieves in *continual cleansing* and teaches against it would say that he knows that he is saved, he would be saying, "I'm perfect. I've been able to recall the sins I've committed, repented, and confessed to them all, and I'm 100% certain that I haven't overlooked any. I know the Bible from cover to cover, and I'm certain I follow it to the letter. I never falsely apply any passage, and I don't commit sins of omission." Anyone holding this position, and they are certainly out there, is a pitiful, sad, and hopeless individual. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican condemns this attitude in no uncertain terms. While these brethren think they are simply teaching what 1 John 1:9 says, they believe and practice the very thing it teaches against.

We can and should be confident of our salvation. If we're not, we are either not faithful regarding our responsibilities or do not believe what God has said. Those who "practice the truth," or *walk in the light*, are Christians who love (1 John 4:7) and have respect for God's word (1 Peter 4:11), assemble with other saints to worship in spirit and truth (Heb. 10:25, John 4:24), study the word of God to grow (2 Tim. 2:15), endeavor to do what they should (James 4:17), are penitent (Luke 13:3), and confess sin to God (1 John 1:9).

The Calvinistic doctrine that the child of God cannot do anything that would cause him to fall from grace is false. But we should not, in fighting it, go to the other extreme and teach that *every* sin separates us from God. Brethren who believe the latter do not comprehend the power of Jesus's blood nor our just God's patience and mercy. God

wants and expects us not just to desire eternal life but to be confident that upon our death or Christ's coming, we will receive it. Perhaps some of us have not been confident because we have considered the possibility of committing an unintentional sin and dying before it is confessed. But if we *"walk in the light,"* we need not fear the possibility of being lost because of such things. Our God wants all to be saved, and He has provided a way for it to happen; it is not only possible but certain if we continue to *"walk in the light,"* which will keep us continuously cleansed.

