

Continuous Cleansing

Introduction. The term "continuous cleansing" signifies an idea that was developed a few decades ago as to whether or not man must sin when he is tempted, whether he can live a sinlessly perfect life as Jesus did, what confession of sin involves and in what manner the blood of Christ is applied when we sin. Some confusion has arisen concerning what it means to "walk in the light," "automatic forgiveness" and "sins of ignorance."

It is to be hoped that we do not lose sight of the practical exhortation that a full understanding brings concerning how we are cleansed by the blood of Christ. We must always allow truth to build us up and encourage our daily conduct. Each of us has hope for salvation because of the cleansing blood of Christ. Either as an alien sinner or as an erring Christian, we depend on blood atonement. Our goal is to be in fellowship with God and to maintain it in spite of the fact that we do sin.

I. **"Walking in the Light"**

- A. What does "walking in the light" in 1 John 1:7 mean?
 1. A consideration of the context.
 - a) 2:3 -- "if we keep his commandments."
 - b) 2:5 -- "keepeth his word."
 - c) 2:6 -- "walk even as he walked."
 - d) 2:10 -- "he that loveth his brother abideth."
 - e) 2:29 -- "doeth righteousness."
 - f) 3:22 -- "keep commandments," "do things pleasing."
 - g) 4:6 -- agreeing with the message of the apostles.
 2. "Walking in the light" is not just a "penitent" attitude -- one must actually repent. It is not just a "good" attitude -- one must actually do good.
 3. However, "walking in the light" is not a sinless walk (vss. 6-10; 2:1).
 - a) Sin is possible (Galatians 6:1).
 - (1) We do not become an apostate by committing a single sin; we have not turned our back on "walking in the light."
 - (2) A momentary weakness is not our normal walk or conduct. By repentance and confession, we return to our godly walk (Acts 8:22; James 5:16).
 - (a) However, must recognize that even one sin can condemn us without forgiveness (James 2:10).
 - (b) Every sin is charged to the transgressor and must be dealt with according to the law of pardon.
 - b) A "continual" walk in sin is not "walking in the light" (Romans 6:7-8).

4. It is wrong to classify sins in such a manner that teaches that some sins are not as sinful as others.
 - a) Catholics classify "mortal" and "venial" sins.
 - (1) A serious, grave or "mortal" sin is the willful violation of God's law in a serious matter; for example, idolatry, adultery, murder or slander.
 - (2) "Venial" sins are slight sins. They do not break fellowship with God, although they injure it. They involve disobedience of the law of God in slight or "venial" matters. Examples would include stubbornness without good reason, speaking badly about parents or the theft of small or inexpensive items.
 - b) Some speak of "sins of weakness," "sins of ignorance," "willful sins," "incidental faults," "momentary lapses," etc. as though some are not as sinful as others.
- B. "Walking in the light" requires knowledge of God's will.
 1. Some suggest that it is impossible to know or understand everything, therefore we are not accountable.
 - a) All truth revealed has been revealed (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 John 2:20, 27; Jude 3).
 - b) All truth is knowable (John 8:32; Matthew 7:21; 12:50; Ephesians 3:4; 5:17).
 2. This puts a premium on ignorance instead of knowledge.
 - a) What can we not know? What can we not understand? These sentiments suggest that we are not responsible for anything because of ignorance.
 - b) Can we know everything about first principles? Can we know everything about morality? Can we know everything about work and worship?
 3. Some misuse Philippians 3:16.
 - a) Some try to make it say, "Just live according to the level of your understanding and it will be okay."
 - b) For example, the NEB says, "Only let your conduct be consistent with the level you have already reached."
 - c) This advocates allowing sinful practices to continue on the basis that such is the level to which you have attained with God and it is acceptable. How would this apply to polygamy, denominationalism, etc.?
- C. Paul is saying that what we "have attained" is a state of fellowship with God. We must continue to follow that same rule as we press on.

II. **Automatic Cleansing**

- A. No one will deny that there is cleansing from sin. Our hope is based on forgiveness, not perfect law-keeping.
 - 1. Some have stated that God “forgives us even as we sin,” or that Christians are in a “state of forgiveness” wherein sins are not charged or imputed.
 - 2. Back in the 1970s, someone used the analogy of the blood of Christ working like a windshield wiper, constantly wiping rain from the windshield. They stated that Christ’s blood continually cleanses the Christian who walks in the light.
- B. The reason why these kinds of illustrations were pressed was the belief that anything less than automatic cleansing produces an “in and out of grace” condition. However, John is speaking of one who “continually” sins!
- C. All sins can condemn if they are unforgiven, and there is no forgiveness of sins in which we persist.
 - 1. A sin unto death and not unto death speaks of a sin that is repented of and a sin not repented of (1 John 5:16-17).
 - 2. A persistent lifestyle of sin removes our advocate (1 John 2:1) and involves us in “walking in darkness.”
 - 3. “If any man sin” refers to a specific sin, not a sinful lifestyle. John teaches us what to do when we sin (1 John 1:8-10).
- D. Some say, “Christians sin every hour, every day, and have many, many sins.”
 - 1. However, this describes what John condemns: “walking in darkness.”
 - 2. Some misuse Romans 7:14-24 to teach human depravity, but Paul described himself as one who lived under the law of Moses.

III. **Sins Of Ignorance**

- A. Ignorance is a state or condition of not knowing.
 - 1. Sin is lawlessness or a transgression of the law (1 John 3:4; Romans 3:20; 5:13; 7:7); everyone is accountable to the law of Christ (Ephesians 3:4; 5:17; Matthew 28:18-20).
 - 2. If men can be saved in ignorance, we owe it never to teach them the will of Christ and let them be saved, lest they learn the truth, reject it and be lost (Romans 3:23; 1:16)!
- B. What causes one to be ignorant?
 - 1. Lack of opportunity (Matthew 28:18-20).
 - 2. Closed hearts (Matthew 13:15).
 - 3. No love for truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11).

- C. Sins of ignorance (unwitting or unintentional sins) in the Old Testament required sacrifices, meaning that the person was guilty (Leviticus 4:1-2).
 - 1. Ignorance crucified Christ (Acts 3:17; 1 Corinthians 2:8).
 - 2. Saul persecuted Christ because of ignorance (1 Timothy 1:13-15).
- D. Ignorance is no longer acceptable (Acts 17:30). Rebellious sins have no sacrifice (Numbers 15:30; Hebrews 10:26-29). God never forgives a sinner in rebellion. This should not encourage sins of ignorance or any other kind of sin.
- E. How long does "ignorance" or being a "babe in Christ" apply?
 - 1. God is longsuffering (Romans 2:4; 1 Timothy 1:16; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 3:20).
 - 2. God demands growth and maturity (Ephesians 4:13-15; Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:9; 1 Timothy 2:4; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 3:7).
 - 3. Can those in denominations or immorality, etc. claim ignorance? Should we extend fellowship to those in ignorance?

Conclusion. The assurance of salvation through forgiveness is comforting to every Christian. Yet this assurance must not be twisted or perverted into any theory which suggests that a single sin is impotent or that forgiveness is automatic "even as we sin." Such ideas tend to make us complacent about sin and encourage the acceptance of false doctrines and sinful lifestyles.