

Truth or Chains



Confession of Sin

The purpose of this study is to set people free. This is God's goal for those who are lost and bound by sin and Satan. This is also His purpose for His children, those who have been reconciled to Him through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, but who have fallen under some legal system that has destroyed their joy and peace.

There is no greater illustration of the need for freedom than Christ's statement found in John 8:32, 36. Jesus said, "then you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free," and "so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." It is truth that the Lord Jesus uses to set a person free. Thus, it is error that places people under bondage. Jesus also said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). If the need is truth to break the bonds that are enslaving people, and Jesus Christ is the truth, then the need is Jesus Christ, no less and no more. This is why Paul wrote "And ye are complete in Him (Jesus), which is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:10, emphasis added).

OUR SUBJECT

It is our conviction that the teaching regarding the need to confess one's sin to God for the purpose of forgiveness, restoration, cleansing, or in order to restore ones fellowship with God is an error. This error keeps believers in Christ under bondage and denies the very grace of God and the salvation that God has provided for the lost through His grace. This teaching enslaves people and dooms them to a lifetime of a legalistic ritual of dredging up past sins and remembering recent sins. The error is the confession of those sins for the purpose of gaining forgiveness and reinstatement into fellowship with God. Besides promoting a never-ending emphasis on self-examination which leads to discouragement and self-centeredness, it can also cause Christians who are weak in the faith to doubt their salvation. While it is not the same as the Catholic teaching regarding confession of sin, it is still a denial of the doctrine of salvation found in God's Word. Catholic doctrine denies the finished work of Christ, teaching that a part of the work of redemption is left to us. Confession of ones sins to a priest is one of the means of grace and is absolutely required for the expiation of ones sins. Although the confession of sins as it is taught in many protestant churches is to God alone, it is taught as a necessity for the purpose of forgiveness from sins and a restoration of fellowship with God. It is equally as false as the Catholic doctrine of confession of sin to a priest. It promotes the work of man for that which only Christ can do. In truth, it promotes the work of man which Christ has already accomplished! Christ alone provides an eternal relationship with God based on the free pardon of all our sins.

It seems clear to me that the reason for this error is twofold:

- (1) It is a failure to interpret 1 John 1:9, upon which this teaching is based, in light of its context.
- (2) It is a flawed understanding of the complete work accomplished by Christ for our salvation.

I know very well how important it is to carefully interpret a passage within the context of the surrounding verses. I know that the full understanding of God's amazing salvation will protect the student of the Scriptures from false conclusions based upon one passage of scripture, or, in this case, one verse of scripture. In the past I too taught Confession Of Sin in the traditional way. I also know how damaging it can be. A personal illustration will help to underscore the need to "rightly divide the word of truth."

"It is our conviction that the teaching regarding the need to confess one's sin to God... is an error that keeps believers in Christ under bondage and denies the very grace of God and the salvation that God has provided for the lost through His grace. "

Truth or Chains



A TRUE LIFE DILEMMA

Years ago a lady in our church made a statement that astounded me. She said that she had stopped confessing her sins to God. It had become a burden that was just too much for her to bear any longer. I was shocked and concerned for her because I felt that she was playing rather loose with the clear injunction of scripture which, I believed, instructed the child of God to confess his sins. After all, was that not what 1 John 1:9 clearly commanded us to do? And wasn't that what so many of the well-known preachers and teachers of the Word of God taught? Was it not necessary to do so in order to be forgiven and reinstated into God's fellowship? It was all so clear to me, why couldn't she see it? My eldest son added to my consternation when he too admitted that he had stopped confessing his sins. According to him his Christian life never changed whether he confessed his sins or not. This was too much. I determined that I would teach on the subject the next Sunday. I simply had to do something in order to get these sheep back into the fold and to keep others from defecting from this truth.

"My problem was obvious: if the confession of sins was so very important, why was their only one verse in the New Testament that taught it?"

A PROBLEM WITH THE CONTEXT

The next week of study did not go well. For the first time, I actually studied the context of 1 John 1:9. I found some real problems for which I had no answers.

Problem number one was the subject of confession of sin itself. It was true that in the Old Testament God instructed His people to confess their sins. With that confession there was always the necessity to bring an offering to the priest so that the confession would be accepted by God. But in the New Testament only 1 John 1:9 seemed to teach the believer to repeatedly confess his sins in order to be forgiven. My problem was obvious; if the confession of sins was so very important, why was there only one verse in the New Testament that taught it?

The second problem dealt with the forgiveness of sins. This had seemed to be at best a paradox in the Bible. After all, I had taught what I saw to be so clear in the Scriptures, that the believer, in Christ, was fully forgiven of all his sins (Colossians 2:13). Yet 1 John 1:9 seemed to teach that one was only forgiven as a Christian when he confessed his sins. How could both teachings be true? The inconsistency was too obvious for me to ignore any longer. But I had no clue how to resolve the dilemma. I always had a fear that someone would ask me why they should confess their sins if they were already forgiven from those sins. The disturbing fact is that no one ever did.

"I always had a fear that someone would ask me why they should confess their sins if they were already forgiven of those sins. "

A LIFE-CHANGING DISCOVERY

At the end of a week of study I had a stack of notes but was no closer to understanding 1 John 1:9 and confession of sin than when I started. Then, in utter defeat, I looked to the Lord in prayer and said, "Lord, I do not know how to interpret this passage, but You said 'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, Who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him', and I need Your wisdom right now." I went back to study the passage again, and in a few minutes the Lord in His faithfulness began to unravel the mystery. As a result of teaching this passage as it was meant to be understood, people have been set free. As it is presented again, I trust that others will be released from a bondage that God never intended for His children to be under. May you also discover much more of God's amazing grace and freedom in Christ.

Truth or Chains



A STUDY OF THE TEXT

The immediate context upon which an understanding of the popular doctrine on the confession of sin rests is 1 John 1:1-10; 2:1,2. A careful study of these verses will give us the message that the Holy Spirit wants to convey. As we will see it is a far different message from the one that is being taught.

An eyewitness testimony about Jesus Christ – 1 John 1:1, 2

John, in these verses, proves beyond any doubt that Jesus Christ was a real person, not a phantom as some false teachers (probably Gnostics) were teaching. John's first-hand account of Christ's life before and after the resurrection is crucial to the message of this epistle. If Jesus was less than genuine, then the testimony of 1 John (indeed all of the New Testament) is a fraud. But John, the last living eyewitness among the apostles, confirms the genuineness of Jesus Christ, His person, and His work.

The immediate purposes of the epistle – 1 John 1:3, 4

In order to appreciate the two purposes for the writing of 1 John chapter 1, it is important to first understand the overall purpose of the epistle. That purpose is found in 1 John 5:13 which says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." Because of false teachers the apostle John wrote the epistle for the saints to understand what constitutes genuine salvation, who has it, and who does not.

These "seducers" (1 John 2:26, KJV) apparently not only taught that Jesus had not been a real person with flesh and blood, but also that salvation had no identifying and distinguishing features about it. Therefore, throughout the epistle, John presents the evidence that certain traits do identify one as having an eternal relationship with God the Father and with Jesus Christ, God's Son. Furthermore, it proves that those who have this relationship with the Father and the Son also have a relationship with those who follow Christ.

The issue of fellowship – 1 John 1:3

In verse 3, John states that he wants his readers to have the same fellowship with the Father and the Son that he and the other apostles have. In order to understand what John means we must examine the Biblical meaning of fellowship, especially with God.

The word fellowship means joint-participation. It is used in two separate ways in the New Testament:

(1) Fellowship between people. It is the result of a common bond and for a common purpose. The context determines whether the purpose is good or evil and whether it is permanent or temporary. (See Acts 2:42-46; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 John 2:19.)

(2) Fellowship with God. The use of this word regarding a relationship between a believer and God is that it is eternal, changeless, and for the believer's good. Fellowship with God is found only four times in the New Testament; three times in this chapter and once in 1 Corinthians 1:9. It is in 1 Corinthians 1:9, when taken in its context, that we discover what the New Testament teaches about the believer's fellowship with God.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2-8 Paul identifies those to whom he is writing as having an *eternal relationship* with God. He does so in the following ways:

Verse 2 - They are identified as sanctified in Jesus Christ, called to be holy, and those who have called upon the name of the Lord Jesus (Romans 10:12-13).

Verse 6 - They gave testimony that they had believed the message Paul had preached.

Verse 7 - They gave evidence of having received spiritual gifts, and they were eagerly awaiting the return of the Lord.

Verse 8 - Paul's assurance that they were believers is underscored when he assures them that they will be blameless "on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Verse 9 - Paul reminds them that all these things are true of them and will be true because

Truth or Chains



God had called them into fellowship with His Son. This must mean therefore that fellowship with God is an eternal relationship. And, because “the gifts and callings of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:29), Paul’s statements at the beginning of this epistle are to encourage the saints that their salvation is secure. This eternal relationship with God guarantees it.

The popular notion that one loses his fellowship with God when he sins is simply not supported by the Scriptures. Broken fellowship with God is impossible for the one who is “in Christ.” But then, that only makes sense when one considers all of the scriptures and uses the words in scripture as the Holy Spirit uses them. Thus, the child of God does not bounce in and out of fellowship with God. The salvation that Jesus provides is far more wonderful than that.

Obviously, what the teachers of *confession of sin* are referring to is a loss of present communion with the Lord. But according to those who teach confession of sin for fellowship, the reason for the child of God to confess his sins is in order to restore the sinning saint to the fellowship he enjoyed before he sinned. And they conclude that restoration can only come about if their sins are forgiven. But now we see that broken fellowship is impossible between the believer and God. One would have to lose his salvation for that to happen and that is impossible.

It is vital that we use Biblical words accurately, and this *is not* an example of the proper use of the word fellowship.

There are those who believe that one can lose his salvation and, because they base that teaching on 1 John 1:9, it shows the danger of the present-day popular interpretation of that verse. If one could lose his salvation then the accepted teaching regarding the loss of fellowship would support that belief. If, when I fail to confess my sins, I am not forgiven and therefore not in fellowship with God, then I would be lost. This fact underscores the importance of this subject and the need to get it right.

The basis for John’s joy – 1 John 1:4

The joy of John and those with him is another reason John is writing the epistle. Without an agreement between saints regarding the basic truths of salvation, it is impossible to have a close and mature spiritual relationship with one another. The joy of the child of God is increased greatly when he sees other saved brothers and sisters come to the place of understanding God’s grace. Understanding God’s grace results in close spiritual fellowship. Fellowship that is so precious to God’s children.

What a different understanding we have of 1 John 1:4 when we clear up the first error regarding fellowship with God. Fellowship with God, we find, is not on a human level, but is used here of a relationship that perfectly resembles one who is born into a family. We have been erroneously taught that sin in the life destroys our fellowship with God, and only confession of sin restores that relationship. Now we see that God’s Word does not refer to daily communion with God, but rather, an eternal relationship. It describes God’s work of joining the sinner, who is now identified as a believer in Christ, to God forever. Gone is the fear of not being in fellowship with God because of some forgotten sin that was not confessed. It is no longer seen as a relationship that depends upon whether we keep “short accounts with God”, but rather on what God did when He placed us in Christ forever. This will have further implications as we consider the next error in the current teaching on confession of sin

The fundamental truth – 1 John 1:5

“This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.”

This is the key verse of 1 John. The fact that God is light means that He is utter holiness, righteousness, and purity. There is no darkness at all in Him. That is to say, no sin, no unrighteousness, and no taint whatsoever. There is no grey area with God. Verses 6-10 are measured by the standard presented in verse 5: God’s righteousness and holiness.

"The popular notion that one loses his fellowship with God when he sins is simply not supported by the Scriptures."

Truth or Chains



Biblical context: contrastive verses

Verses 6-10 are contrastive verses. Verses 6 & 7 are contrasts, while verses 8 & 10 are contrasted with verse 9. These are all descriptive verses. They do not command anyone to do anything, but rather, describe the condition of a person if certain things are true of him. This is a **very important** truth to keep in mind if we are going to understand the message taught in these verses.

The truth about light and darkness

In response to 1 John 1:5 which tells us God is light and in Him is NO DARKNESS, 1 John 1:6, 7 deals with light and darkness in a person's life and how that identifies him. This, like the use of the word fellowship, is critical to the proper interpretation of this passage. As we shall see, the proper understanding of the teaching of light and darkness in the New Testament will establish a very important truth, namely, that the believer *always* walks in the light and *never* walks in darkness. Contrariwise, the unbeliever *never* walks in the light but *always* walks in darkness. Although the believer may do the deeds of darkness, he is still in the light. His position in the light never changes. Because he is in Christ Who is light (John 8:12; Colossians 1:12-13), he will never walk in darkness. It is amazing that so many have taught that, since the epistle was written to believers, verses 6, 8, and 10 are describing the child of God and therefore prove that he walks in darkness when he sins. On this basis they find in this chapter the instruction to confess ones sins before they can walk in the light again. This misunderstanding could easily have been avoided had they searched the New Testament regarding the teaching of the believer and his relationship to light and darkness, something I failed to do for years.

Below are some of the basic scriptures that form the teaching regarding light and darkness.

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, I am the light of the world, whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him Who called you out darkness into His wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9

"But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness." 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" 2 Corinthians 6:14-15

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)." Ephesians 5:8-9

The truth is obvious:

When one believes in Christ he receives Christ's life which is light. He is placed into the body of Christ. Because Christ is light, the believer, having been baptized into Christ, is *always* in the light. So to say that a child of God can ever be in darkness denies the truth that Christ is light.

Biblical context: conditional statements

Each of the last five verses in 1 John 1 begins with the words "if we." In the Greek these are called third class conditional statements. In effect the statement means: "if we, and we may or may not." In other words, the things about which John is writing may or may not apply to the particular reader. The apparent reason for this is that among the true believers there were those who were not genuine children of God. What applied to the unbeliever in verse 6 would not apply to the believer. The opposite would be true in verse 7 and so on.

Many have erroneously concluded that the wording proves that everything that is said in

Truth or Chains



these verses refers to true believers. As we have seen and will continue to see this cannot possibly be true. The Apostle John is using a literary device. He does so because some were unsaved among the believers (1 John 2:19, 26; 4:1), while others were undecided about what constitutes salvation. Hypothetical propositions are presented for each person to decide objectively whether he is saved or not. The writer to the Hebrews uses this same device in Hebrews 3:7-14 and 10:22-31.

The Biblical context is descriptive, not prescriptive

As we have noted, the only scripture used to teach confession of sin to God in the New Testament is in 1 John 1: 9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." By no measure can this verse be used to prescribe a remedy for the sin of the believer because it is not an imperative in the Greek and is not so even in the English. *God is not commanding a person to do something*. Rather, he is describing the actions of someone who comes to the conclusion that he is a sinner and is guilty as charged by God. This teaching is far different from what we have been taught and led to believe. 1 John 1:9 addresses the unsaved person who finally agrees with God about his sin and then places trust in Christ as his sin bearer.

The truth about the context

Having established the foundational truth that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all, John presents two general categories of people. Those who walk in darkness and are unsaved (verse 6), and those who walk in the light and are saved (verse 7). A closer examination of these two verses establishes the basic interpretation of them.

In verse 6 we see that no matter what a person may say, if he is walking in darkness he does not have an eternal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Walking in Darkness - The Characteristics

The book of 1 John gives us some descriptive traits of one who is walking in darkness:

- 1.He gives no evidence of loving God - 4:20.
- 2.He does not love the brothers in Christ - 4:20; 2:9,11.
- 3.He does not keep Christ's commandments - 2:29; 5:2-3.
- 4.He loves the world - 2:15.
- 5.He deserts the brothers - 2:19, 24; 3:14; 4:20.
- 6.He denies the Son - 2:22-23.
- 7.He sins as he did before - 3:8,10.
- 8.He denies that Jesus had a human body - 4:3.
- 9.He does not believe the record that God gave of His Son - 5:10-12.

Conclusion - These are the traits of an unsaved person - one who is walking in darkness.

In verse 7 we see the continual work of the blood of Christ. The ones who "walk in the light", like the ones walking in darkness, will have certain distinguishing characteristics about their lives:

- 1.They will carry out the commands of Christ - 2:3, 5, 6.
- 2.They will love the brothers (fellow believers) - 2:9, 11.
- 3.They will not love the world for the love of the Father is in them - 2:15; 4:7, 16, 19.
- 4.They will not desert the brothers - 2:19; 3:14; 4:7.
- 5.They will continue to believe what they started out believing - 2:24.
- 6.They will keep themselves pure - 3:2-3.
- 7.They will not sin as they used to - 3:9.
- 8.They will have compassion on the brothers - 3:16, 19.

Truth or Chains



9.They believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh - 4:2.

10.They believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God - 4:15.

Conclusion - These are the traits of saved people, the ones who are walking in the light, because they are in the Light eternally. That fact means that when they sin they are being cleansed of that sin automatically. That cleansing, just like the cleansing at the point of salvation, takes place apart from any self-works or merit on their part.

Note - The truth that the believer is always being cleansed from sin finds its authority from the Greek text. 1 John 1:7 states: "and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." The word purifies (cleanses in the King James Version) conveys the idea in the Greek of a work that begins at a point in time and continues without stopping. Thus the believer never experiences a time, day or night, when he is not being cleansed from all sin. The cleansing work of Christ never depends on, or waits on, something that the sinning saint is required to do. Nor does sin cause the saints fellowship to be broken with God. In other words, God is not waiting to restore fellowship, because it was never broken to begin with.

The Implication of Constant Cleansing

This glorious truth illuminates the greatness of God's plan of salvation. in his salvation but to believe in Jesus, so the believer has no part in remaining forgiven and justified. His position is always a child of God who is righteous and free from sin—all sin (Hebrews 10: 14; Colossians 1:22-22).

"The cleansing work of Christ never depends on, or waits on, something that the sinning saint is required to do."

Verse 8 - The Unserved Person's Resistance to The Truth

This verse is a description of an unsaved person. He does not believe that he is a sinner. He does not believe he is guilty of sin. He is deceived and denies the truth about his condition. Not having Christ, this person does not have the truth. The moment a person believes the truth about himself he turns to Christ by faith and is saved.

Now, as one can see, this verse could not be a description of a saved person. In context we can clearly see that verse 6 describes an unsaved person, verse 7 describes a saved person, and verse 8 describes an unsaved person. Each verse beginning with verse 6 alternates in its description between an unsaved and a saved person

Verse 9 - The Only Remedy For Forgiveness

This verse, to be consistent with the flow of the text, should refer to a saved person, and it does. But it also shows the reason he is saved. It shows the absolute necessity for an unbeliever to come to the acknowledgment that he is a sinner and is guilty of sin. In fact, John says the moment a person acknowledges his sin, he is forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness.

Is This The Plan Of Salvation?

Although many Christians have used this verse in evangelism, many others object to its use for that purpose because it does not contain the word believe. And, of course, faith is absolutely essential to the salvation of anyone.

While we do not believe that John was using this verse to lead people to Christ, it can certainly be used for that purpose. However, John is actually showing the absolute necessity of one coming to the realization that he is a sinner before he can ever be forgiven and cleansed of sin. So this verse is instructive, not evangelistic. As we examine this verse more closely the truth found here becomes clear.

"If we confess our sins" - The word confess in the Greek means to say the same thing; to agree with; to recognize. It does not instruct us to confess or agree with anyone in particular concerning our guilt of sin. This idea, I believe, is a carry-over from the Roman Catholic Church doctrine. The Reformers, for all the good that they did in leading people out of the bondage of a false system of salvation, never fully divorced themselves from all of the Catholic teachings. In my opinion, the word "confess", has done more damage in the Church of Jesus Christ than any other single word in the Bible. This is not to say that there is any thing wrong with the word—there is not. But because of the false teaching that has

Truth or Chains



been attached to the word confess, it is nearly impossible to get most people to consider a different meaning.

Confess and Repent

If we can see this word in the light of repentance, it will help us to understand this verse.

Repentance means a change of mind. It does not refer to a change of direction, or lifestyle as many have taught. But the idea of a change of mind is crucial to each person if he would have his sins forgiven and become a reconciled child of God.

The injunction to repent is used in the gospel message in a number of places in Acts. In fact, it is used in place of believe in several verses:

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.” Acts 3:19

“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent.” Acts 17:30

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” Acts 2:38

“I preached that they should repent and turn to God.” Acts 26:20

What did these people who heard the gospel have to change their minds about? They had to change their minds about their spiritual condition. First of all, they had to be convinced that they were sinners. Paul, in Romans chapters 3 and 7, establishes the reason for the Law. It was to convict and convince people that they are sinners and that sin is exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:13). In 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Paul shows that the Law was made for the unsaved person. In Galatians 3:23-24, Paul proves that the Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

Now, after the convicting work of the Law was accomplished and the sinner changed his mind and saw himself as he really was, a sinner, and agreed with God (confessed), then he would turn to Christ Who was his only hope for salvation. Therefore, confession, or agreeing with God about our sins, was the evidence of a change of mind or repentance. It was at this time that the person would believe in Jesus as his sin-bearer.

All of this happens at the same time. When one changes his mind about being a sinner he has confessed or agreed with God. But that only happens to those who then trust Christ as saviour; one is inextricably linked to the other.

“He is faithful” – 1 John 1:9

The Lord never fails to forgive anyone who comes to Him through His Son. “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37). After all, this was the whole purpose of His salvation plan.

“And just to forgive” – 1 John 1:9

The word *just* means righteous. Because of His holiness, God could not forgive sin without judging it, or else He would offend His righteousness. If, however, He judged the sinner, the sinner would be lost forever. Thus, the perfect lamb of God died in our place. He was judged for our sins. He became sin for the world and when He died, the world’s sins were judged and God could remain righteous when He forgave a person’s sins. What a plan!

“And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” – 1 John 1:9

Sin forgiven must also be sin cleansed. And this is the first cleansing which happens the moment we agree with God about our sins and believe in Christ.

Note that this cleansing is from all “unrighteousness.” In verse 7, however, we note that the believer is continually being cleansed from all “sin.” Why the difference? The reason is that a believer has been made righteous and can never be charged with unrighteousness. Only the unsaved are unrighteous, having not been made righteous by God at the point of

Truth or Chains



salvation. Therefore the sins of those who are saved are never classified as unrighteousness. That charge is reserved for the unsaved alone.

The cleansing of the believer from all unrighteousness is a once-for-all cleansing. Once he believes in the Lord Jesus he is made righteous and can never again be charged with unrighteousness. See Colossians 1:21-22.

Again it must be remembered that once the sinner comes to Christ he not only receives forgiveness and initial cleansing from all unrighteousness, but now his sins are continually being cleansed, automatically, by the blood of Christ. See 1 John 1:7.

The Hardened Heart Of Unbelief – 1 John 1:10

This verse, like verses 6 and 8, refers to an unbeliever. The unbeliever is described as one who insists that he has not sinned. The unbeliever denies that he is a sinner and declares that God is a liar. God's Word could not possibly be in him. This also means that the truth is not in him. Without the truth abiding in him he cannot possibly see himself as he really is or see the living God as He is. 1 John 5:10 states, "Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about His Son."

Furthermore, in John 5:38 we read, "Nor does His word dwell in you, for you do not believe the One He sent."

Until they repent (change their minds) and confess (acknowledge the truth) about being a sinner, they will never be saved and are lost eternally.

Notice that "if we say" is the way each verse begins when describing the unsaved. The point we need to understand is that just because a person says something is true does not make it true! The truth must be validated by believing the truth and acting upon it.

The Ongoing Work Of Christ For Believers - 1 John 2:1-2

In order to understand the context of 1 John 1:9, it is necessary to include the first two verses of 1 John chapter 2.

Verse 1 – Just because the apostle John has acknowledged that the child of God does sin (1:7), does not mean he is now free to live the way he chooses. John hastens to exhort the believer not to sin. The Bible never excuses sin or takes it lightly. But if the believer does sin, he has an advocate (a representative before God the Father), Jesus Christ.

The end of 1 John 2:1 declares Christ as "The Righteous." This title shows why He is qualified to be our advocate. Who else could possibly represent God's children when they sin? Only God's Son, the sinless One, Whose blood was shed for the sins of the whole world, is qualified.

The fact that Jesus' advocacy is successful is proven by the cleansing work in the child of God's life. What a thought!

Imagine a salvation so complete that at the moment of salvation it begins to cleanse the sinner and never stops until the saint is taken home to be with the Lord! And the work is automatic and continuous. Only God in His grace could devise such a plan.

Verse 2 - "propitiation" means a satisfaction. Jesus' death perfectly satisfied God's demand for a once-for-all sacrifice for sin. He "became sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). And it was for all, once-for-all.

Nothing is left for the believer to do. It has all been done. It is indeed "finished", just as Jesus said on the cross. (John 19:30)

CONCLUSION

Our study of this passage that has been so misunderstood shows that John is describing both the saved and the unsaved. These are descriptive, not prescriptive verses. In other words, there is no command to do anything in any of these verses including verse 9.

The gauge for salvation is whether one is in the light or in the darkness. The moment one receives Christ as his saviour, he is in the light. And that fact, walking in the light, never

"Imagine a salvation so complete that at the moment of salvation it begins to cleanse the sinner and never stops until the saint is taken home to be with the Lord!."

Truth or Chains



changes regardless of the state of his spiritual walk. He may do the deeds of darkness, but he can never again walk in darkness. This is what makes sin so out of place and out of character in a believer's life.

The wonder of our salvation is that we are continually being cleansed (1:7). Since that is true, it destroys the argument that sin in the believer's life must be confessed in order to be cleansed. In other words, if we are continually being cleansed, why would we seek forgiveness by confessing our sins? If a believer is cleansed from all unrighteousness then he must be forgiven. God would not need to cleanse a person who was already fully cleansed by the blood of Christ.

But when we understand that verses 6, 8, and 10 identify a person who is unsaved and is still in need of Christ's redemptive work, verse 9 then becomes the answer to that need. Since the unsaved person refuses to believe God's assessment, that he is a sinner, the truth declared in verse 9 becomes the key to God's work for forgiveness and cleansing. Indeed, only those who genuinely see themselves as God sees them will believe in the Lord Jesus as their saviour. The unsaved never genuinely and knowingly acknowledge their sin, until the time that they also trust the Sinbearer—Jesus Christ. And it is His sacrifice and His alone that provides forgiveness for anyone.

The fact that Jesus died for *all* means that all are eligible for salvation. The key to "believing faith" for salvation from the penalty of sin is first coming to the place of seeing our bankrupt state before God. That person, is the only one God saves. He always saves the one who acknowledges his sinful condition and believes in Jesus Christ as the Sinbearer.

WHAT DOES A CHRISTIAN DO ABOUT SIN?

Often people get very upset when they hear that the child of God does not have to confess his sins. Some respond, "I suppose then a Christian can go out and live as he pleases?" Well, as a matter of fact, he can. The Father has given the child of God the freedom to make choices, and his choices can be wrong. And beside that, who of us have not lived as we pleased at times? The epistles certainly prove that the apostles had to deal with this problem in the early church. How they dealt with it is instructive.

Paul had his hands full with the Corinthians. Among other things, they were guilty of fornication. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, he addresses the problem. In these verses he shows just how uncharacteristic sin is for the one who had been washed, sanctified, and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." He exhorts them to flee fornication (verse 18) because their bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit and they were no longer their own. Paul reminds them that they had been bought with a price (the precious blood of Christ) and therefore were to glorify God in their bodies (verses 19-20).

In the midst of this teaching, Paul acknowledges that all things are "lawful unto me" (KJV) or within my power, but not all things are "expedient" (KJV) or profitable. How true this is, not only because the word of God states it, but because the experience of every child of God demonstrates it. This is why most of the New Testament epistles are corrective. For instance, in Romans 6:12, Paul says, "Let not sin....reign in your mortal bodies." The thrust of this verse in the Greek is to stop allowing sin to reign in your body. This was actually happening among the saints in Rome. Paul follows this up in verse 13 by saying literally, "yielding your members as instruments of unrighteousness." They could and they were actually yielding their bodies to unrighteousness. But they were to be doing just the opposite in light of their exalted position in Christ.

Does this excuse a believer who engages in sin? Absolutely not! But the word of God anticipates that he will, and has made provision for all sin by continually cleansing him. God has given the believer the resources to NOT SIN. Two passages are proof of this wonderful fact:

1. God always makes a way of escape from temptation - 1 Corinthians 10:13

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also

Truth or Chains



provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

2. We will not sin when the Holy Spirit is in control - Galatians 5:16

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature (flesh).”

So, what is the answer to sin in our lives? Is it to confess that sin to God? What good will that do? He has already forgiven you of the sin and cleansed you. Will confession do any more for the saint than God has already done? No! It may make you feel good, but there is no scripture that instructs you to do anything in order to feel good.

No, the need is repentance, a change of mind regarding ones sin and a turning away from that sin. That will be followed at the same time by a turning to the Spirit who will lead the saint in paths of righteousness. Of course when my sin hurts another person, I should promptly admit it to the person I've hurt and ask his forgiveness. The Bible does teach that kind of confession (Matthew 18:15-17; James 5:16).

The Lord saved us to bring forth righteousness (1 Peter 1:15-16). It was sin that kept us from glorifying God (Romans 3:23). For this reason the heavenly Father is always chastening (child-training) His sons and daughters so that they might bring forth righteousness (Hebrews 12: 5-11).

No, the child of God may grieve over his sins and kick himself for being such a jerk; he may even discuss his sin with the Heavenly Father and tell Him he is sorry (what child of God has not done that?), but he is never instructed to do so, and his position before God never changes whether he does these things or not. God's work goes on in our lives regardless of our response. That is grace, and that is God's amazing salvation. And it is this grace that instructs us regarding our conduct.

Titus 2:11-14 states:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say No to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. While we wait for the blessed hope the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.”

Will you enter into God's marvelous grace and into a more abundant life? A life that is truly free?

Copyright 2004 by James. R. Owen, Sr. All rights reserved.