

Seasonal Preaching Tract

Walking in the Light
~ 1 John 1 ~



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Walking in the Light – 1 John 1 – Context

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 1:5-7)

It is my intention with this tract to address the idea expressed in 1 John 1:7 of walking in the light as He is in the light. It is central to Christian living, and therefore fellowship with the Father. Despite the fundamental nature of this concept, some have used this verse as a proof text for error. Additionally, there is a popular approach to this text which is inconsistent with its context, and the remote context of scripture which yields great potential for harm.

However, to stress the points alluded to which I consider to be of great importance, I think it necessary to first deal with the text exegetically. Establishing the context of 1 John 1 will help us further understand the proper application of it in our lives today.

General Purpose

A great foundation for understanding the scope of 1 John is the gospel bearing the same name. A reading of the upper room discourse spanning from John 13 to chapter 17 would greatly benefit the reader of this article. Shortly before con-

cluding his gospel account, John noted its main purpose:

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30-31)

The gospel revealed the Man Jesus in such a way that unequivocally put Him on even plane with the Father. One must believe this Man was not simply a man, but the great “I AM” (John 8:58). By believing this profound truth, and acting in obedience of faith, one “*may have life in His name.*”

Similarly, John ended his first epistle with a statement of its main purpose:

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:13)

That which was necessary for them to obtain spiritual life had been declared to them at a previous time. John’s first epistle was one of reorienting them toward a knowledge of their relationship with God. One of Satan’s greatest devices is sowing the seed of doubt in one’s mind. It was John’s intention to bestow knowledge which would kill that seed, and prevent it from further germination.

John accomplished this purpose by first revealing the nature of God disclosed in the life of His Son, along with the implica-

Conclusion

1 John 1 reveals a fundamental truth about God and man’s relationship with Him so that we can be assured of our fellowship with Him. It is foolish to mince the words of the Holy Spirit in any way to find assurance that is not there. Instead, we must become fools that we may become filled with the wisdom of God. His plan is the only plan that is effective to the saving of the soul. When a Christian sins, even if it be one isolated sin amidst a solid life of faithfulness, he is separated from God, and cannot be reconciled unless the sin is repented of, confessed before God, and forgiveness is requested. What assurance is there for such a one? *“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” (vv. 20-23). According to the apostle, Simon’s isolated sin placed him in a position before God that would perish; he no longer had a part in the work of the church; his heart was not right with God; he was one with wickedness; he was once again in the bondage of sin.

After committing his sin, Simon was no longer walking in the light. His soul was in danger! Peter did not hold back the truth of his condition. He did not seek to make a distinction between a “walk” and a “step.” Simon had committed an act of darkness, and God cannot have fellowship with darkness, so Simon was lost in sin. There was no assurance for Simon’s salvation in the fact that the action was uncharacteristic of his life since becoming a Christian. There was no assurance in the idea that he “stepped,” not “walked.” The assurance of fellowship with God that the apostle offered him was repentance and prayer (v. 22)! Why would we seek assurance in anything else?

What benefit does one stand to gain by making a distinction between a “step” and a “walk” in 1 John 1? What need is there for such a distinction? If anything, the distinction potentially leaves one with a misunderstanding that their sin is not as significant as they might have originally thought it to be. After all, they have generally walked in the light, and God has fellowship with those who walk in the light. However, what is needed is a conviction of sin, and the separation from God which it caused so that the offender can do what needs to be done to mend their relationship with Him.

tions of such for us, His creation. Thus, 1 John serves as a dissertation on fellowship with God, and the preservation of it. Albert Barnes described the purpose this epistle serves:

“The author seems to have felt that those to whom he wrote were in danger of embracing false notions of religion, and of being seduced by the abettors of error. He is therefore careful to lay down the characteristics of real piety, and to show in what it essentially consists. A large part of the Epistle is occupied with this, and there is perhaps no portion of the New Testament which one could study to more advantage who is desirous of ascertaining whether he himself is a true Christian. An anxious inquirer, a man who wishes to know what true religion is, could be directed to no portion of the New Testament where he would more readily find the instruction that he needs, than to this portion of the writings of the aged and experienced disciple whom Jesus loved. Nowhere else can a true Christian find a more clear statement of the nature of his religion, and of the evidences of real piety, than in this Epistle.” (Barnes, Albert, “Introduction to 1 John,” *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*)

There was a pressing matter which urged John to pen these words as he was guided by the Spirit. Lurking in the midst of John’s audience were malevolent enemies of the cross of Christ, workers of Satan, antichrist’s bent on destroying the faith of others. The valiant apostle grasped the weapons

mighty in God, and wielded them with expert precision to destroy the doctrines of the great Deceiver, and eradicate doubt in the minds of his brethren.

The Fallacies Troubling John's Readers

While there are differing ideas about who specifically the false prophets John referred to were, it is generally believed they were those known as the Gnostics. "Gnostic" is from the Greek, *gnosis*, meaning knowledge. The Gnostics boasted of a superior knowledge. They viewed themselves as the initiated. In chapter 2, John wrote of the "anointing from the Holy One" (v. 20) which his readers enjoyed as Christians. Because of this anointing they "know all things." This language was likely used because the Gnostics claimed a special anointing that others did not have. This gave them their superior knowledge. This knowledge they claimed was additional, and superior to that disclosed in the gospel message. Therefore, the ones only equipped with the knowledge of the gospel were not only lesser, but not even children of God, for the Gnostic plan of salvation was through illumination. John refuted by emphasizing that if the message heard by them in the beginning abided in them, they would have the Father and the Son abide in them (vv. 24-25); that the Gnostics were trying to deceive them concerning a special knowledge, but the anointing received from the Holy One teaches all things (vv. 26-27). If God's word dwelt in them in a practical way – i.e. practicing righteousness – they would be assured they were born of Him (vv. 28-29).

Additional to the claim made by the Gnostics to a superior anointing of knowledge were their flawed views of the rela-

hands. The apostles alone had this ability. For this reason, Peter and John came to Samaria *after* they heard about the conversion of the people there. In antiquity, before modern transportation and communication, Peter and John had to receive word of the conversions in Samaria, and travel 30 miles to the city. It was during this length of time that Simon "*continued with Philip*" in the things which he taught concerning the gospel. Was Simon walking in the light? Was the whole round of the activities of the converted Simon characterized by light? We have no reason to think otherwise. Was the sin committed by Simon uncharacteristic of his post conversion life? If he was walking in the light it was. When Simon made the carnal request to Peter and John, did he walk in darkness? Some would say he did not; that his isolated sin was a "step" in darkness, but not a "walk." This logically implies that, because he was not "walking in darkness" despite his isolated act of darkness, he was still "walking in the light." If Simon would have perished before repenting of his sin would he have the assurance of salvation? Would God's grace have somehow covered Simon's sin without any action on his part because he had generally walked in the light after initially obeying the gospel?

Peter was clear about the condition of Simon's soul after he made the request. It mattered not that he was a new convert. It mattered not that, since his baptism, Simon was characterized as one who walked in the light. "*Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if*

Hearing Philip and seeing the miracles he performed, many believed the gospel, Simon along with them (vv. 12-13). Simon's life was changed by the gospel. Before, he lied to the people, calling on occult powers and practicing sorcery. After hearing the truth, he followed the one and only true God of omnipotence – *“and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done”* (v. 13).

By verse 20 of the same chapter, a drastic change occurred in Simon's spiritual journey. Having heard of the conversion of the Samaritans, the apostles Peter and John came to impart spiritual gifts to those who had believed (vv. 14-17). Seeing this ability to give the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, Simon offered Peter and John money that they would give him the same power (vv. 18-19). Peter's words clearly indicate the request was sinful (vv. 20-23). Simon had his sins washed away in baptism, but found himself guilty of sin once again.

The Scripture says that Simon *“continued with Philip”* after initially obeying the gospel. It is not simply that he followed Philip around, but that he continued to witness the miracles, and continued in the message they affirmed. Similarly, those converted on the day of Pentecost *“continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine”* (Acts 2:42). Simon raised from baptism to walk in newness of life which was molded and characterized by the eternal wisdom and will of God. Having been convinced of the gospel truth, he continually submitted himself to it.

The sin Simon committed was in connection with the imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles'

relationship between the material and spiritual realms. Despite Moses' inspired record of the nature of creation – that God beheld the goodness of His work, man included (cf. Genesis 1:31) – the Gnostic view of matter was that such is essentially evil. From this thought branched out two logical implications: 1) the incarnation of the Son of God was not possible (cf. 4:1-3; 2 John 7), and 2) morality is a matter of indifference, for the body is a mere envelope of the spirit, and the spirit is unaffected by its activities (cf. 3:7-9). Both beliefs are at variance with the most fundamental truths of Holy Scripture. Jesus did come in the flesh (cf. John 1:14), His life was without sin (cf. Hebrews 4:15) – meaning flesh is not inherently evil – and His disciples not only must, but can become like Him (cf. 3:3; Romans 8:29). With these matters in mind, one can understand why John began his first epistle in such a manner.

The Text – 1 John 1

Chapter 1 of John's first epistle is the bedrock for the admonitions and exhortations that follow in the latter four chapters. It can be divided into three parts: 1) John has witnessed, is declaring what he witnessed, and why (vv. 1-4); 2) the message John heard (v. 5); 3) the logical spiritual implications from the message John heard regarding man and his relationship with God (vv. 6-10).

1) John has witnessed, is declaring what he witnessed, and why.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled,

concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” (vv. 1-4)

The central theme of the Bible is the redemption of man, and the essential component in execution of that plan is the revelation of God to mankind. All have sinned (cf. Romans 3:23); sin separates man from God (cf. Isaiah 59:2); and that separation is spiritual death (cf. Romans 6:23). To have fellowship with God is to have spiritual life, but for that to occur one must have knowledge of Him. Peter explained, *“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”* (2 Peter 1:2-4). It was God’s plan to reveal Himself through His Son.

John began his epistle in the same way he began his gospel – *“the beginning.”* *“In the beginning God”* (Genesis 1:1) is how the inspired record of creation commences. *“God”* is the translation of the Hebrew word, *elohiym*, which is a plural noun.

debate about the start of human life with those who advocate abortion, the arbitrary and ambiguous nature of their argument for the start of human life is exposed. Conception is the only logical and consistent answer for the start of human life. Any other answer is completely subjective, and without supporting evidence. The same can be said for that which constitutes a “walk.” If the first step is not the beginning of a “walk,” how many steps does it take? The only logical answer is that a “walk” begins with the first step. Any other explanation is completely arbitrary. What ratio of steps in darkness to steps in light constitutes a “walk” in darkness or light? The very nature of such reasoning is asinine. God was black and white about the matter: *“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light **and in Him is no darkness at all”*** (1 John 1:5). Any darkness, even just a “step” in darkness, places one in darkness and severs fellowship with God.

The Bible is clear about the severity of one isolated sin. Regardless of whether one has generally walked in the light over an expanse of time an isolated sin severs them from God, and until they return to the Lord in penitence, their soul is in danger of eternal separation from Him. Consider the case of the sorcerer of Samaria, Simon (cf. Acts 8). Simon was a man of great influence. With his sorcerous trickeries he *“astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great”* (v. 9). Yet, while he practiced pseudo miracles, a humble man full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom healed the paralyzed and lame of Samaria, and cast out unclean spirits (v. 7). Philip was preaching the gospel, and God was bearing witness with miracles.

change their label as *“imitators of God?”* No. Like John, he would warn, *“He who does not love his brother abides in death”* (1 John 3:14). He would call them to repentance, for they no longer have God because they no longer *“walk in love.”*

It is valid to note that an isolated sin does not characterize an individual’s whole round of activities as darkness. However, it is wrong and dangerous to imply in any way that an uncharacteristic “step” in darkness is anything less than destructive; that it accomplishes anything less than severing fellowship with God. Is an isolated sin darkness? Yes. Then it is *“darkness at all,”* and *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”* Therefore, fellowship is severed because that one is now in darkness. There is no benefit in harping on the word *“walk.”* Only harm comes from doing so.

Consider a logical illustration which shows the folly of the “a step is not a walk” mentality. Suppose that, while patronizing a local business or restaurant, one happened upon a sign in the grass. The sign read, “Do not walk on the grass.” Does the message allow for a “step” on the grass? After all, “a step is not a walk.” Would it be logical to assert that one who took a “step” on the grass had done the very thing the sign said not to do? Would not the owner of said business or restaurant be unhappy with the patron for ignoring his wishes? Or, would the owner watch for a second “step” that would constitute a “walk,” and then rebuke the person?

Consider also the logical inconsistency with suggesting a single “step” does not constitute a “walk.” When approaching the

John’s gospel account gives insight into this concept: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). In John 1:14, a profound and essential truth in relation to the redemption of man is disclosed: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

While the apostles’ understanding of the nature of Christ was slow to reach maturity, Jesus could not have been clearer concerning the subject when Philip asked Him to reveal the Father. *“Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves”* (John 14:9-11). The Man Jesus was God incarnate. He was the embodiment of the Word, which is God. His purpose in coming to earth was to reveal the Father, thus give life to men. Such was done through enlightenment, as John wrote, *“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”* (John 1:4). Jesus taught concerning God, and manifested His relationship as Son through the miracles He performed (cf. Acts 2:22). Some believed the truth, practiced it, thus came to the light, but many did not (cf. John 3:18-21).

It was God’s will to reveal Himself through His Son in the flesh. One who does not believe that God came in the flesh,

and was the Man Jesus could not receive life (cf. 1 John 2:22-23; 4:1-3). Jesus was sure to prove His incarnation during His ministry. On one of the occasions of His post resurrection appearances to His chosen disciples, Jesus explained, *“Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have”* (Luke 24:39). He then proceeded to eat before them, which unequivocally proved His corporeal presence (vv. 40-43). Thus, John emphasized that he and the other apostles had heard Him, seen Him, and handled Him.

The significance of witnessing the Word in the flesh is the effect such has on those who act upon the truth disclosed by Him. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). John and the other apostles had received the life offered through Christ as they witnessed Him, and followed Him. Therefore, John declared to his readers *“that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.”* This was the commission given the apostles by Jesus which was accomplished through the agency of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 15:26-27; 16:5-15). Jesus noted such in His prayer for all believers: *“I do not pray for these alone (apostles), but also for those who will believe in Me through their word”* (John 17:20). It was God’s will to reconcile men to Himself through Jesus. This would occur via the revelation of God in Jesus through the inspired word of the Holy Spirit preached by the apostles (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 3:3-5). It was this word which John declared.

The declaration of this Word of life would bring men into fel-

lated sin is *“darkness at all.”*

Consider other uses of the word *“walk”* in scripture:

- *“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so **walk**, as you have us for a pattern. For many **walk**, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things”* (Philippians 3:17-19). Paul’s *“walk,”* or whole round of activities, was characterized by gaining Christ at all costs, and pressing toward the goal. He encouraged the Philippians to act the same. Those of *“the mutilation”* (v. 2), i.e. the Judaizing teachers, had a *“walk”* characterized by satiating their fleshly appetites, having no restraint, and living to gain the world. Paul discouraged the Philippians to act in that way. Was Paul implying that, if the Philippians’ general character mirrored his own, an isolated act like *“the enemies of the cross of Christ”* was not a *“walk”* like they *“walk?”* Would Paul say, *“Do not worry. A step is not a walk?”* No. Paul would rebuke them, *“Do not walk that way! Repent, and imitate me.”*
- *“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And **walk** in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma”* (Ephesians 5:1-2). Paul encouraged the Ephesians to have their whole round of activities characterized by love. Was he implying that, if the Ephesians’ general character was that of love, an isolated instance of hate would not

“walking in the light.” Regardless of the emphasis placed on the need for repentance in addition to this view, there remains a semblance of assurance that one continues to be in the light despite the sin they have committed. Some may go as far to say that, because of one’s general walk in the light, God’s grace will cover that isolated sin if their life ended before they could repent. This tends to undermine the Bible view of the severity of sin, and the design of the gospel to impress those who have committed such with their pitiful state, and dire need of forgiveness.

Vine defines the Greek word, *peripateo*, translated “walk” – “figuratively, ‘signifying the whole round of the activities of the individual.’” John uses the word in this way to signify that a person whose life is characterized by darkness does not have God, and a person whose life is characterized by light does. However, like “cleanses” of verse 7, the word can only indicate what its natural and contextual limits allow. In other words, “walk” as used to signify the whole round of the activities of the individual cannot indicate that one who has committed an isolated sin, though their life is generally characterized by light, is still walking in the light despite that sin. Verse 5 acts as a Divine commentary on verse 7 when the negative description of God is added to the positive description of God in verse 7 – “*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light [‘and in Him is no darkness at all’], we have fellowship with one another.*” The purest, and most complete description of darkness is the absence of light. The same can be said for light – it is the absence of darkness. Ergo, an isolated sin is a walk in the darkness, places one in darkness, and severs fellowship with God, for an iso-

lowship with the Father and the Son, and all who shared in that relationship (v. 3). Such leads to joy inexpressible in the hope of salvation one in fellowship with God enjoys (cf. 1 Peter 1:8-9).

2) The message John heard.

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” (v. 5)

What is it about God that the Word of life disclosed? Verse 5 is John’s explanation in simple, yet powerful imagery. This message, heard and proclaimed by John, is essential to understanding this first chapter, and the rest of the epistle. From the positive, John disclosed that “*God is light.*” From the negative, John disclosed that “*in Him is no darkness at all.*” Several implications spring from this truth which would stand to decimate the deceivers’ doctrines among John’s audience.

In none of the four gospels is the exact phrase, “*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all,*” uttered by Jesus. Yet, one cannot read the gospel accounts, witness the Son of God, and come away without the truth expressed in such language. The scripture is clear concerning the nature of God.

It was God in the beginning Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6). This introduced a vivid image which reflected the holy character of God. He would always be associated with light henceforth. “*Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty, Who cover Yourself with light*

as with a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain” (Psalm 104:1-2). God’s relationship with light is to such a degree that He is described as one clothed, and enveloped with light. In fact, John wrote, “*God IS light.*” When Moses descended the mount of God after receiving the law, “*the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance*” (2 Corinthians 3:7). The presence of God was so vibrant and scintillating that Moses’ face radiated His glory. In contrast to the apostolic ministry which Paul defended, he noted, “*which glory was passing away.*” A greater glory would shine forth from the face of One greater than that of Moses, and it was the apostles who were commissioned to reveal it – “*[God] has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Corinthians 4:6). That knowledge of God was what John revealed, “*that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*”

Perhaps the first thing one might notice with the description of God as light is the totality of separation inhering in the term. Darkness is the absence of light. God is light, therefore there is no darkness within Him. He is separate from all darkness, and darkness is separate from Him. Where God is, there is no darkness. Where darkness is, God is not. A word commonly used in scripture to emphasize the Lord’s separation is “*holy.*” “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory*” (Isaiah 6:3)! The triune use of the word – as we sometimes sing – emphasizes the totality of His holiness, or separation. In this context, His separation from darkness.

ceiving cleansing in verse 7 is equal to that of verse 9. The walking in the light as He is in the light, and confessing our sins are the same in 1 John 1.

Lastly, it is important to note that repentance is implied in 1 John 1:9. John does not write, “If we confess we *have* sinned,” rather, “*If we confess our sins.*” It is necessary for one to know what one did to commit sin. That specific sin must be repented of to be forgiven. This must be acknowledged in prayer to God. Otherwise, that sin leads to death, and God will not forgive such a sin (cf. 1 John 5:14-17).

The doctrine of continuous cleansing comes from Satan, not God. It must be refused and refuted, and God’s word must be followed.

The Misapplication of “Walk”

In an effort to find assurance, some brethren have placed emphasis on the word “walk” in 1 John 1:6-7. “Walk,” they say, is a word denoting a continual action. Therefore, an isolated act of sin does not mean one “walks in darkness.” The phrase, “a step is not a walk,” has been coined to illustrate the principle. This approach to the text is taken by some who do not advocate continual cleansing. It is still understood that, to be right with God, one who has sinned must repent, confess, and ask forgiveness. However, this approach to the text is both illogical, and inconsistent with the context. It is also an unnecessary attempt to find assurance when assurance is already offered. The result of this approach is more harmful than good. If an isolated sin does not mean one “walks in darkness,” there is only one alternative: despite an isolated sin, one is still

bellion. Nor was it ignorance. He knew God was impartial (cf. Acts 10:34), yet showed partiality. It was under the pressure of his peers that Peter folded, and stood guilty of sin. His only way of recovery was repentance, and confession of his wrong doing.

The claim that the distinction between the sins of ignorance, sincerity, and weakness, and that of rebellion is a mitigating factor is illogical. Any limit offered as to what specific sins of ignorance, sincerity, and weakness are continuously cleansed is arbitrary. If followed logically, any sin can be continuously cleansed so long as it is done in ignorance, sincerity, and weakness. This ranges from ignorance in the worship and work of the church to ignorance in gross immoral conduct. One could even argue for sins of rebellion. Any time a sin is committed, weakness is involved. Are sins of rebellion continuously cleansed even as they are committed? Something which proves too much proves nothing at all.

Scripture is clear regarding the universal conditions of forgiveness. The text of 1 John 1 teaches the same. The condition of the cleansing of Christ's blood is *"walk[ing] in the light as He is in the light"* (v. 7). Therefore, the cleansing of sin cannot be instantaneous and continuous because sin is darkness. When one sins, he must do what God says to put him back into the light. By doing such he walks in the light. Verse 9 informs, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* A simple mathematical principle is helpful in this context – two things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. The condition for re-

As one investigates scripture, the use of this imagery blossoms in specific application. Light is not simply light, and darkness is not simply darkness. Light has an intimate relationship with truth in the scripture. Thus, darkness with error. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path...The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple"* (Psalm 119:105, 130). In fact, the focus of Jesus in John's gospel is heavier on the title of *"Light"* than it is on *"the Word."* *"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men"* (v. 4). *"That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world"* (v. 9). *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him"* (vv. 17-18). The *"Light"* was Jesus come into the world. He enlightened men with the truth of God. But most *"minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them"* (2 Corinthians 4:4). If such is rejected, then fellowship with God is impossible, for He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

In addition to the doctrinal connotation, *"light"* has significance in morality. Those who are born of God are *"children of light"* (Ephesians 5:8). For this reason, they are not to walk in darkness, i.e. *"have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness"* (v. 11). One in fellowship with God cannot be associated with immoral practices, for God is light. *"Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light'"* (v. 14). Christ gave light in the doctrinal sense as He disclosed the truths of God, and similarly gave light

in the moral sense, not only as He taught truth, but as He led a pure life – *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15).

This truth of God – that He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all – is key to understanding the argument of John along the lines of the specific battle with the Gnostics. Such is also key for our proper understanding, thus application of the following implications in this passage.

3) The logical spiritual implications from the message John heard regarding man and his relationship with God.

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” (vv. 6-10)

If *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”* there are certain implications which come with the claims the Gnostic heretics were making, or would make concerning their professed relationship with God. This foundational truth regarding God’s nature is followed by several hypothetical *“if”* statements given by John from verse 6 through chapter 2 verse 1. These state-

norance does not exempt one from the consequences of sin, or the conditions of forgiveness – *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent”* (Acts 17:30). A pattern is given in this account. The Athenians were ignorant, yet lost in sin. To receive salvation, it was necessary for their ignorance to be exposed, and for them to obey the gospel (cf. Romans 1:16). Paul was the preacher sent to proclaim the message they needed to hear (cf. Romans 10:14-17). The honest heart, hearing the message of the gospel, would repent and obey. Nothing less would save the souls on Mars’ Hill. For those lost in unauthorized practices of the worship, work, and organization of the church, their only hope is the truth. Nothing is gained by fastening blinders to our eyes, and extending our right hand to them. The darkness must be exposed that they might escape it.

The same is no less true for one who sins in weakness. Christ’s blood does not continuously cleanse the impenitent whose sin is a product of weakness. Christ’s blood will only cleanse that sin if it is repented of, and forgiveness is sought. Paul commanded, *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness”* (Galatians 6:1). Restoration of such a one is unnecessary if their sin was cleansed as soon as it was committed. Yet, Paul said to restore him. There was an occasion where Paul had to do the same with a fellow apostle. Peter had played the hypocrite by withdrawing himself from the Gentile brethren when those of the circumcision were present (cf. Galatians 2:11-13). Paul wrote, *“I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed”* (v. 11). Peter’s sin was not high-handed re-

anything short of rebellion. These distinctions of sin are understood, but nowhere in Scripture is there a distinction made regarding the consequences of such sins, nor the conditions of forgiveness of such sins. John wrote that *“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from **all sin**.”* This would include all categories of sin – sincerity, ignorance, weakness, or rebellion. It can only be that Christ’s blood cleanses us from all sin, or no sin at all. John declared the former is true. And, because sin in general separates man from God (cf. Isaiah 59:2), all sin must be cleansed in the same manner.

When some told Jesus *“about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices,”* (Luke 13:1) Jesus indicated by His response that all sins, no matter what degree of severity they may seem to be, must be repented of – *“I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (v. 3). This was true for these men, and it remains true for all today. The eternal fires of Gehenna await those who do not break free from sin in mind and practice. It matters not about sincerity, ignorance, weakness, or rebellion. God cannot have fellowship with sin.

The proponent of continual cleansing would suggest there are those in liberal and institutional congregations who are sincere, and ignorant about the error of their teaching and practice. To justify fellowship with such individuals, the doctrine of continual cleansing has been espoused. So long as they are sinning in ignorance and sincerity, Christ’s blood continually cleanses them from their sin. Therefore, fellowship can be extended to them. Yet, Paul clearly taught the Athenians that ig-

ments stand both to refute fallacious doctrines and claims made by the Gnostics, and to emphasize the truth about having and maintaining fellowship with God. The result is an overwhelming comfort given to those who abide within the bounds of God’s fellowship, and an ominous warning to those who seek to stretch those bounds.

First, one who claims fellowship with God who walks in the darkness of sin and error is a liar who does not practice the truth. The truth which is not practiced is that which John disclosed in verse 5 about God. Fellowship is a sharing in character, or relationship with another. God is light, therefore, those who are in darkness cannot possibly be in fellowship with Him. Paul emphasized this simple truth to the Corinthian brethren in quoting from the Old Testament when he wrote, *“And what communion has light with darkness?...Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you’”* (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17). The condition placed by God upon fellowship with Him was a separation from *“them,”* i.e. those characterized by darkness. It is not possible to have a relationship with God while in darkness. Such is antithetical to His character. The Gnostics claimed fellowship with God while in the darkness of immorality and error. They taught that matter was inherently evil, thus inconsequential to their relationship with God. Through their spiritual enlightenment, i.e. the special anointing they claimed to have, they transcended the carnality of life even while they lived in it. Such is entirely separate from what the truth given by God teaches. Ergo, they lie and do not practice the truth.

Second, the opposite in action of the hypothetical claim made in verse 6 is stated by John. Logically, if one walks in the same realm in which God dwells he is in fellowship with those who do the same. The ultimate test of fellowship with those on the horizontal plane of mankind is the question of mutual fellowship with God. The first phrase of verse 7 – *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light”* – is simply a way of saying, “if we have fellowship with God.” This is because the condition of fellowship with God as stated before is separation from darkness and coming into the realm of light, for that is where God resides. This truth of *“fellowship with one another”* is opposed to the practice and doctrine of separation of the Gnostics – *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us”* (2:19).

Another blessing in addition to the fellowship with other believers that one has who walks in the light is the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. This is appropriated to the believer through faith, or walking in the light. Paul explained, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8:1-2). To walk according to the flesh is to walk in darkness. To walk according to the spirit is to mind spiritual things, i.e. things pertaining to the spirit disclosed by God, i.e. walking according to God’s commandments contained in *“the law of the Spirit of life.”* Such frees one from sin and death *“in Christ Jesus.”* In

“law of the Spirit of life” (Romans 8:2) is the word of God which directs us toward a life of righteousness. When one fails to keep that law through either commission or omission he has committed lawlessness. He has sinned. So, how can one keep from sinning? The Psalmist said it well: *“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You”* (Psalm 119:11).

While man always has a choice to submit to God’s will, and refrain from sinning, even John understands that sin can still occur. He wrote, *“And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 2:1-2). John is not in contradiction with himself. His understanding that sin may rear its ugly head does not nullify choice. When one has sinned, it is because one chose to do so. In this case, John offers assurance that all is not lost. Forgiveness is still offered. Jesus is a practitioner of His doctrine, and He taught His disciples, *“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him”* (Luke 17:3-4). As long as a penitent heart seeks forgiveness from the Lord, forgiveness will be granted.

Yet, despite Scripture’s overwhelming emphasis on repentance as a condition of forgiveness, the proponents of continual cleansing submit that cleansing is offered without it. They do so by suggesting that Christ’s cleansing blood is continuously applied to those who sin in sincerity, ignorance, weakness, or

cleansing of sin is necessary for any man to be in fellowship with God. However, this view of man's nature and his relationship to sin is at variance with the apostle John's writing, and that of all Scripture. The whole concept of free-will negates the idea that man must sin. Such a gift from God to choose is at the foundation of His scheme of redemption. To have fellowship with God, man must not have sin, for *"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"* (1 John 1:5). This is the very reason John wrote his epistle – *"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin"* (1 John 2:1). Either the inspired apostle is mistaken, or not sinning is an option.

John further wrote, *"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God"* (3:9). The advocate of continual cleansing would suggest that one born of God cannot help but sin. The Holy Spirit said one born of God cannot sin – *"Let God be true but every man a liar"* (Romans 3:4). This is due to the nature of a child of God. When the Word of life brought light into the world, He gave the right to become children of God to those who were born of the will of God (John 1:10-13). Peter worded it this way, *"having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"* (1 Peter 1:23). When one obeys God's word he becomes a *"[partaker] of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"* (2 Peter 1:4). While this nature is something that God is within Himself, this is what we become and grow in as we submit to His ways. While God's seed – which is His word – dwells in an individual, sin is not present. For, John defined sin as lawlessness (1 John 3:4). The

other words, the blood of Christ cleanses one from sin, but the blood of Christ is appropriated in obedience of faith to the gospel. As will later be discussed in greater detail, this cleansing is not perpetual, but is given those who meet the conditions placed by God in the gospel. The Psalmist wrote of God's word being a lamp, and a light (cf. Psalm 119:105). Such remains true for the gospel (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6). Those who are faithful to the gospel will have the benefits offered therein, namely, the forgiveness and cleansing of sin. It is not Biblical to suggest one has the cleansing of Christ's blood if that one is not meeting the conditions God has set forth, namely, walking in the light, or living in faithful obedience.

A third hypothetical is offered in verse 8 of the text. A negative implication is followed by the claim. Those who suggest they *"have no sin"* are deceivers of themselves, and like those of verse 6, have no connection with truth. Verse 10 is not a repetition of the sentiment of verse 8. Here, the Gnostic doctrine of the relationship between sin, the body, and the spirit is alluded to. The Gnostic would say that his sin in the flesh had no effect on his spirit. Immorality to the Gnostic was not a matter with spiritual implications, but simply a fact of fleshly existence. If the body is a mere envelope of the spirit, the actions of the body do not affect the spirit. Therefore, the Gnostic claimed to have no sin even while participating in immorality. This view shows a misunderstanding of the nature of sin. John explained that sin is lawlessness (3:4). The law of Christ was given to be followed that one might have fellowship with God, being in the light. *"He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in*

him" (2:4). To break a commandment of God in any way – omission or commission – is to taint your spirit with sin, and sever yourself from God. To practice immorality in the flesh and claim that such does not affect your spirit is to deceive yourself.

Like verse 7, the fourth hypothetical is one which is not refuted as error, but encouraged as proper behavior in truth. Rather than suggest your sin did not have a deleterious effect on your spirit, one should confess that sin has occurred, and understand forgiveness is needed. This implies that the spirit is affected by sin, and for the spirit to once again be safe, and in fellowship with God, forgiveness must take place. The cleansing of this verse, and that of verse 7 are not different from each other. Both are dependent upon the *"blood of Jesus Christ His Son."* John explained, *"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"* (2:1-2). The whole purpose of this dissertation on light and darkness is that his readers would know to avoid darkness to maintain fellowship with God. However, John is not naive to think times of weakness will not come. *"And if anyone sins,"* shows that falling short is still possible. However, *"these things I write to you, so that you may not sin,"* shows that falling short is devastating to the soul. Therefore, forgiveness and cleansing of those sins is needed. John says it is only possible by walking in the light in verse 7. This can be paralleled with confessing our sins in verse 9. The cleansing is conditional upon confession and repentance (cf.

in explanation. While driving through a rain storm, the windshield wiper continually wipes away rain, granting vision to the driver. Christ's blood is the windshield wiper, and the rain is sin. As soon as we sin Christ's blood cleanses us from our sin. An implication of this is that nothing must be done on the part of the sinner to be forgiven. The cleansing is instantaneous. This naturally raises the question concerning the first part of verse 7. What about the obvious condition for the cleansing of Christ's blood given by the inspired apostle – *"if we walk in the light as He is in the light?"* If sin is darkness, and the condition for cleansing is walking in the light, how might one be cleansed *"even as he sins?"* The doctrine already begins to fall apart.

Firstly, the term "cleanses" is not of necessity perpetual. *"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* can be observed as a simple statement of fact. What does the blood of Jesus Christ do? It cleanses us from all sin. It may be that the blood of Christ is continually available, but it cannot mean there is a continual cleansing of sin the instant sin is committed. It is dangerous to hang an entire doctrine on one word. The meaning of "cleanses" cannot reach beyond its contextual limits. The context of 1 John 1, as well as the remote context of Scripture does not allow the word "cleanses" to denote an uninterrupted, continual, and unconditional process.

In part, continual cleansing has been espoused by some because of a fallacious approach to the nature of man, and sin. The influence of Calvinism has infiltrated the church of our Lord. Some posit that sin is inherent within man's nature. That man, because he is man, will continually sin. Ergo, continual

Walking in the Light – 1 John 1

Abuse and Misapplication

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 1:5-7)

While approaching the text of 1 John 1:7, some have become too focused on individual words at the expense of the overall context of the passage, and scripture in general. Some do this to find a proof text that would justify them acting in ways contrary to scripture. Some approach this text seeking assurance of their fellowship with God, and venture beyond the context, resulting in potential for great harm. In approaching this text, one must do so with integrity, and no ulterior motives. There must be a desire for the message the Holy Spirit is seeking to convey in the context.

The Error of Continual Cleansing

The error of continual cleansing rests on the phrase, *“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”* *“Cleanses”* is emphasized by those who believe and teach this doctrine as a word with a perpetual nature. They assert that Christ’s blood continually cleanses one of sin even as he sins. An illustration of a windshield wiper on a car has been offered

Acts 8:22).

Lastly, the hypothetical *“if”* statement of verse 10 is given as another claim likely made by the Gnostic heretics. *“If we say that we have not sinned”* is distinct from *“if we say that we have no sin.”* This can be seen by the contrast of the implications that come with these claims. One who says he has *“no sin”* deceives himself. However, the subject of consequence in verse 10 is not the one making the claim, but Christ Himself. One who says he has *“not sinned”* makes Him a liar. Implied is a claim made by Christ that something is so, and the statement made in verse 10 – *“we have not sinned”* – suggests that it is not so. The topic is sin. Christ says the action which elicited the statement of verse 10 is sin. If one posits that such is not sin, he makes Christ a liar.

Further explanation is given by John’s inspired pen: *“and His word is not in us.”* It is the word of Christ which exposes sin. Therefore, many do not come to the light – *“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed”* (John 3:20). Paul explained what God’s word did for him in his life: *“I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet’”* (Romans 7:7). The one making the hypothetical claim in verse 10 would have responded to this verse by saying, *“but I did not sin when I coveted.”* He made God a liar, for God said covetousness was sin. Ergo, God’s word does not dwell in that man. If he responded by saying, *“I have sinned by coveting,”* he would have started down the path to forgiveness disclosed in verse 9. He

would have owned his sin and its consequences which God's word had exposed, and responded in the way God desires which He has revealed in His word. His word dwells in that man, and God remains true. However, some Gnostics claimed such elevation in their spiritual enlightenment that what action might be sin for the uninitiated was not sin for them. This, even though the word of Christ clearly labeled such as sin.

Conclusion

Essential to possessing and maintaining fellowship with God is knowledge of Him with the appropriate subsequent actions. This knowledge of God, and the eternal life offered therein, was manifested to the apostles, and subsequently proclaimed to the world (vv. 1-4). The revelation of God given from *"the Word of life"* boils down to one sentence: *"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"* (v. 5). To have fellowship with God one must be in the light, and separate from darkness (vv. 6-7). To maintain fellowship with God, when one falls short in sin they must not deny that it separates them from God, nor deny that such was sin at all. They must come to God through the Advocate Jesus Christ confessing sin, repenting of it, and asking for forgiveness (vv. 8-10). These truths in 1 John 1 expose the Gnostic doctrine and practice as error. For 21st century Christians to rightly apply these truths we must understand them in their context. This has been an expository effort toward that end.