

FIRST JOHN 1:7 AND THE CONTINUOUS CLEANSING QUESTION

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Controversy has raged among brethren for several years over the matter of continuous cleansing.
2. 1Jno.1:7 has been a focal point in the controversy, with brethren sometimes sharply divided over the issue.
3. In my opinion 1Jno.1:7 has been grossly perverted, abused and mis-used in an effort to support some form of continuous cleansing for the generally faithful saint.
4. I have never believe in continuous cleansing for the generally faithful saint. I didn't believe it before it became a matter of controversy among brethren. I still don't believe it even after all the articles written about it, the private and public arguments made about it, and all the debates on it!
5. In this present effort we are going to study the following question raised and discussed in an article by bro. Hiram Hutto via Sentry Magazine, 6/30/89 (as reprinted in "The Instructor," Vol.30, No.6, June, 1993, Carrol R. Sutton, Editor), with which I am in total agreement. The question is this: "Is the faithful saint continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ?"
6. Bro. Hutto answers in the negative and argues as follows:

II. DISCUSSION

A. First of all, it should be pointed out that the question is self-contradictory.

1. How? It speaks about the blood continually **cleansing**.
2. 1Jno.1:7 tells us that he blood cleanseth us from **sin**. So, if the blood is continually cleansing, it is continually cleansing from sin, which means that there is sin present that needs cleansing.
3. That being true, the person (the saint) who is being continually cleansed must be continually sinning.
4. Now, how can a person be called a **faithful saint** (both terms) while at the same time he is continually sinning?
5. Clearly, the question contradicts itself!

B. Further, to imply that a Christian is one who continually sins is to contradict the Bible.

1. It says that a Christian does not practice sin, 1Jno.3:9, NASB.
 - a. The same tense and idea is in 1Jno.3:6 and 5:18.
 - b. Take note of 1Jno.3:6-10.
2. If a Christian who is continually sinning isn't practicing sin, what on earth would he have to do to practice it?
3. Again, when Paul in Rom.6:1, asks, "**Shall we continue in sin...?**", he answers, "**God forbid.**"
 - a. According to the position and the question we are examining, he should have said, "Not only may we continue in sin, but we will be faithful while doing so."
4. The fact is, these passages show that sin is not the norm for the Christian, as the continuous cleansing doctrine suggests; it is the exception!

C. The fact of the matter is that what is frequently meant by such questions as heads this article is this: Is the faithful saint automatically cleansed of sins of ignorance and/or weakness?

1. 1Jno.1:7 is cited to prove that he is.
2. Not only does 1Jno.1:7 not teach that doctrine, the passage says absolutely nothing **per se** about sins of weakness or ignorance.
3. It says the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us "**from all sin.**"
4. Whatever the passage says about sins of ignorance and weakness, it says the same thing about sins of rebellion and disobedience. It says "**all sin.**"
5. But someone might respond (and the idea is current), that person under consideration in 1Jno.1 is said to "walk in the light". And a person who is walking in the light will not be guilty of sins of rebellion and disobedience, only sins of weakness and/or ignorance.
 - a. Who said so? Did God? If so, where did He say it?
 - b. Obviously, a person who is guilty of rebellion and disobedience is not "in the light," at the point at which he is guilty of rebellion and disobedience.
 - c. But, **NO** sin is "in the light." If so, what sin is? Name one!
 - d. After all, "**God is light and in him is no darkness at all,**" 1Jno.1:5. And "he (God) is in the light," 1Jno.1:7. And if sin (any sin) is not darkness, what is it?

- e. There is no sin (rebellion, disobedience, or whatever) in the light where God is!

D. Consider another point. In Heb.3:2 God says that Moses was “faithful in all his house,” yet, at Meribah God said that Moses “did not believe in me**” (“believed me not,” KJV) , Num.20:12. And that he “**rebelled against my word,**” V.24.**

1. Although, in general, Moses was described as faithful, he certainly was not faithful there, neither did God approve nor automatically forgive him.
2. Instead, God was wroth with Moses (Num.20:12; Deut.3:26,27) and would not hear Moses, but rebuked him.
3. I cannot conceive of anyone’s thinking that he was faithful in the point where God said he did not believe, and that we was rebellious.
4. To say otherwise is to say that a person can be **full** of faith (faithful) in a point where he is **lacking** in faith.
5. A person might be faithful in a number of areas, and yet be unfaithful at some particular point, and as it was in Moses’ case, a very vital point.
6. Surely nobody would claim that Moses died still impenitent and rebellious about the matter but God forgave him anyway.
7. The idea that the only kinds of sins that a faithful Christian (one who walks in the light) commits are sins of ignorance and weakness is not taught in the Bible, nor does it teach that God automatically forgives those (or any other) sins.

E. To say that a Christian, one under the blood, is automatically cleansed, like the windshield wiper (or that he benefits; i.e., is forgiven, even as he sins), sounds too much like the Baptist preacher who said that he could seduce some woman but God would work it out for his good (benefit).

1. Hutto said: It reminds me of the Baptist who affirmed in a debate with me that a child of God could get drunk, that he could die drunk, and would go to heaven anyway; that a child of God could lie, that he could die with a lie on his tongue (as did Ananias and Sapphira) and he would go to heaven anyway; that a child of God could commit adultery, that he could get killed in the act, and that the child of God could of God could commit adultery with one who was not a child of God, that both of them could get killed in the act, and the child of God would go to heaven, but the one who was not a child of God would go to hell.

2. Hutto continued: Frankly, it surprised me when he affirmed this publicly and openly, but it shocked me to learn that some brethren evidently believe it and teach that which logically leads to the same conclusion. I did not believe it then, and I do not believe it now.

F. The Bible clearly teaches that a child of God can sin, but does not HAVE to sin.

1. John says in 1Jno.1:8, **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”**
2. But it just as clearly teaches that a child of God does not **have** to sin. In fact, John wrote his first epistle so that he readers would **“not sin”**, 1Jno.2:1.
3. If a Christian cannot keep from sinning, he **has** to sin.
 - a. Therefore, John has wasted his letter; has voided his inspiration (e.j.d.).
 - b. Such an idea impugns the wisdom of God, and makes God responsible for creating man so that he has to sin and then condemns him because he sins.
 - c. Such an idea makes God a tyrant, an unjust God, a sinner!
4. And Peter says, “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall (stumble),” 2Pet.1:10 – that it is possible not to fall; he doesn’t have to fall.
5. If a Christian must sin (i.e., “man because he is man, sins” is as false when taught by “conservative” brethren, as it is when taught by Edward Fudge or John Calvin), why does God hold him responsible for doing something he could not keep from doing anyway?
 - a. Such does away with man being a creature of choice.
 - b. Man sins all right enough, not because he must sin, but because he chooses to sin, and therefore is guilty, and without excuse.
6. The idea that a faithful Christian saint is continually cleansed because he is continually sinning is not in the Bible.

G. Some have even claimed that when a person, one under the blood (e.j.d), unknowingly, ignorantly, violates God’s law, God automatically forgives him (like the windshield wiper), then when man learns that he has broken God’s law he must repent, etc.

1. They argue this way for the Christian, the one under the blood, but not for the alien, the one who has yet to obey the gospel (e.j.d).

- a. Why the difference? Where is the book, chapter and verse that teaches it? justifies it?
2. But why should one who is already forgiven by God repent? What does he have to repent of?
3. After all, if God automatically forgave him at the time he sinned, the sin isn't on his record; he doesn't have any guilt to repent of.
4. What he should do when he realizes this, if the argument is correct, is thank God for having already forgiven him without repentance and before he ever learned about his sin.
 - a. What I would like to know is what is there that is so mysterious about sin, and what are all these mysterious sins that are so hard to recognize that make us so vulnerable to be always committing sins in ignorance (ejd).
5. Still others claim that a person who unwittingly violates God's law is not **then** guilty, but when he later learns that he has violated god's law, if he does not then repent, he is guilty. (Wonders will never cease!)
 - a. Among the many problems with this argument is, it changes God's definition of sin.
 - b. God said, "**Sin is transgression of the law**," 1Jno.3:4. This doctrine says, "No, this is wrong. Sin is **awareness** of the transgression of the law."
 - c. Obviously, once again, man's ideas and doctrines are false. God is still true!

III. CONCLUSION

1. Yes, Christians can and do sin, and God has made provisions for them when they do sin, 1Jno.2:1,2.
2. But God has made no provision of any kind for them to live in sin or to automatically forgive them when they sin, or to forgive them as they sin, or while they are sinning.
3. When John in 1Jno.1:7 states that "**the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin**," he does what is frequently done in the Scriptures – he simply states a truth without giving all the details of the matter.
4. Jesus did this in Lk.23:34 when he said, "**Father, forgive them...**"
 - a. He did not give any conditions they must meet in order to be forgiven.
 - b. It was sometime later when Peter, on Pentecost branding them as sinners, told them what those conditions were, Ac.2:21-38.

- c. So his blood cleans “us” from “all sin”, but on conditions stated elsewhere; such as 1Jno.1:9; Ac.8:22; Jas.5:16.
5. Moreover, 1Jno.1:9 does not say we are to confess that we are sinners.
 - a. It says we are to “confess our sins.”
 - b. There is a vast difference between saying, “I am a sinner,” and specifying the sin or sins of which I am guilty and for which I am seeking forgiveness.
 - c. This is evident in the case of Simon the sorcerer in Ac.8:22. Peter said to him, “Repent therefore of **THIS THY WICKEDNESS**, and pray God, if perhaps the **thought** of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”
 - (1) Peter identified Simon’s sin and demanded that he repent of it.
 - (2) He didn’t teach Simon to simply say, “I have sinned” or “I am a sinner, forgive me.”
 - (3) See the difference?
 6. Instead of teaching one to be confident of his salvation and feel secure about it and about himself because the blood of Christ will automatically or continually cleanse our sins if we are Christians, if we are under the blood, we need to teach people:
 - a. As Peter did Simon.
 - b. As John did in 1Jno.1:9
 - c. As James did in Jas.5:16.
 7. No, no way, the faithful saint is not continually cleansed by the blood of Christ because the faithful saint is not continually sinning.
 8. But a saint may be often in need of and be cleansed by the blood of Christ, just as often as he sins and then meets the conditions given by God in his inspired word written so we can understand it and for our learning and our admonition.