On 1 John 1:7 (Forgiveness)

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs
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There is considerable misunderstanding about automatic forgiveness of sin. Some seem to have the mistaken idea that Jehovah God, by the sheer exercise of his unqualified grace, will wipe out "secret sins."

The notion that the Creator ignores innocent-looking wickedness by the operation of his unlimited mercy takes various twists. A few say that all men walk under the protection of boundless grace and therefore no one will be lost—not even Adolph Hitler and Charles Manson.

Others claim that it is impossible for any man to know and do all that God requires of him. Hairsplitting arguments attempt to show that if a person does not fully understand niceties of divine injunctions, his ignorance or transgression or omission will be spontaneously dismissed.

Advocates of the idea of grace dispensing with some law are unwilling or unable to name specific sins that God "winks at" in our age. Still, they cannot bring themselves to believe that God will enforce his laws absolutely. They fear lest some tender soul might be tortured with nameless guilt and beset with nightmares and look for some basis to say to the transgressor that God will impulsively forgive, and grant the sinner peace and rest.

The one verse to which all advocates of automatic forgiveness appeal is this:

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Though we had a lengthy discussion on this around the first of this year, I will again consider the question because a few dear brothers are still having trouble grasping John's teaching—they don't seem to catch his drift, as the dudes say. Certain nervous-nelly types wring their hands and clutch their chests and bemoan the poor soul that violates some obscure and petty rule in the divine lawbook.

Shall such a one go down to eternal perdition simply because he/she was caught on some technicality? Thinking about someone floundering forever in flames of fire because of being entrapped on the hook of some minor point of doctrine is more than they can bear. Surely, they think, we can stretch the strait gate just a little—just enough to take care of insignificant violations.

There are several things amiss in this wrong-headed thinking. In the first place, it casts doubt on God's love and goodness and suggests that the Lord makes loopholes in his law and plays games with us (it does seem God is wise enough to speak to us in our language so we can understand him). The laws of God are not all that complicated. Any person who wants to do the will of God can understand his will (John 7:17).

In the second place, it denies God's holiness and purity and suggests that, after all, God ought to tolerate some sins —*teeny-weeny ones* —(mortal sins deserve hell, but venial sins should be purged in some temporary confinement, or entirely overlooked, according to this view).

In the third place, it does not take into account the justice of God. God is love, but he is also just. His mercy tempers judgment, but according to rule and not by whim. "Behold then the goodness and severity of God: toward them that fell, severity; but toward thee, God's goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off' (Rom. 11:22).

In the fourth place, it assumes superior knowledge about what is minor and unimportant and about what is major and necessary. If you keep the whole law but offend in one point—even if you think it is a tacky point—you have violated the whole law (James 2:10). The essence of sin—even so-called small sins—is rebellion. If we rebel in one point, we will rebel in another because we have an indisposition to respect the law. There may be large and small consequences of law-breaking, but all infractions are equally serious. Otherwise God is a respecter of persons. We must understand what it means to walk in the light. The condition upon which the blood of the lamb is cleansing us from all sin is walking in the light, according to 1 John 1:7. Please don't forget the condition—the passage begins with an "if'—"if' we walk in the light, then—and only then—does the blood of Jesus keep us clean from all sin. If we do not walk in the light, then the cleansing does not follow.

Walking in darkness is the opposite of walking in light. Either we walk in darkness or we walk in light, and we cannot do both simultaneously.

Note: "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1:6).

Note: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3).

He who walks in darkness and says he knows God lies (1 John 1:6).

He who keeps not God's commandments and says he knows God lies (1 John 2:4).

Therefore walking in darkness is the same as not keeping God's commandments.

If the negative is true, the positive is also true. Walking in

darkness is not to keep his commandments. Walking in light is keeping his commandments. Therefore, John is saying if we keep the commandments of God the blood of Jesus keeps us clean from all sin.

Question: How can a person sin who is walking in the light—keeping God's commandments? *Answer:* One who attempts to hear and do the words of Jesus can fail—he may omit to do something the Lord requires of him or do something the Lord forbids. If he should sin, he repents and confesses; that constitutes walking in the light—keeping God's commands—and the blood of the lamb is cleansing him from all sin. If a blood-bought child of God sins but excuses his wrong and will not confess and repent, he is not walking in the light and the blood will not cleanse his transgressions. The key is walking in the light. Walking in the light is a continuous action. Cleansing therefore is a continuous action because walking in the light involves keeping the commands of God, which involves confessing sin and repenting of sin. All of this—walking in the light, confessing, repenting, and cleansing—is continuous action.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This passage, by the way, is in the immediate context of 1 John 1:7.

Yet some would have us believe in spite of this that somehow, someway, sometime, God will forgive his child of a slight infraction of sacred precepts, that walking in the light magically forgives casual sins—whatever that is!

That won't wash! The verse under study says, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." We are continuously cleansed not from some sin, nor from haphazard sin, nor from unknown sin, but from all sin—all sin!

If walking in the light is something other than keeping all the commands of God, if it is approximate obedience and just getting close, then all sin—all sin!—adultery, murder, stealing, lying, idolatry—all sin—is automatically forgiven. The verse says "all sin," just as verse 9 says "all unrighteousness."

If the liberalizing view that grace dispenses with complete obedience to every requirement of heaven is true, then "all sin" is washed away in the blood of the cross unconditionally and all will be saved—Adolph Hitler and Charles Manson included. Simply put— Calvary was a mistake.

Some say "the light" is God, because verse *5* says, "God is light." So, the passage would read, under this understanding, "if we walk in God, as Jesus walked in God. . .." The question comes: How did Jesus walk in God—in the light?

Question: Did Jesus obey his heavenly Father incompletely and only when it was handy, or did he obey Jehovah always and in all things? The passage requires us to walk in the light as Jesus is in the light, if his blood is to keep on cleansing us from all sin. Jesus claimed sinless perfection and challenged his contemporaries to convict him of wrong (John 8:46-47). None did! He always pleased Jehovah (John 8:29). Keeping divine law gladdens the heart of God (1 John 3:22). Therefore Jesus always kept the commands of Jehovah, and that pleased his holy, heavenly Father. "Then said I, Lo, I am come (In the roll of the book it is written of me) To do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). The unbending rule of the life of Jesus is "not my will, but thine be done."

Jesus walked in the light, and so must we if his precious blood is to keep us clean from all sin. He never failed. We may fail, but provision is made for forgiveness, if we walk in the light as he is in the light.

It is tragic for a professing teacher of righteousness to

encourage people to think that any rule of God can be disregarded with impunity. Instead of trying to comfort the guilty by offering false hope, let us console them by rebuking sin and calling for repentance. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16).

Now, that gives some real help and lasting relief! “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Come to Dinner

by George W. DeHoff
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Matthew 22:2-14, Luke 14:16-24

This parable could be called “The Parable of the Great Invitation” or “The parable of Frivolous Excuses.” It is a call to dinner. “All things are ready, come.”

“The kingdom of Heaven is like unto” (Matt. 22:2). Then He

describes certain things about the kingdom of God. This is a judgment parable and contains these central thoughts: (1) The guilt of the Jewish nation for rejecting God's word; (2) God will have a people nevertheless; (3) Since the Jews rejected the gospel message, his servants invited others.

Standing out clearly in the scripture is the importance of the call. In both the Old and the New Testaments, feasts denote spiritual blessings. The feast in this parable is the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. Since this is a call of God to accept the gospel message, it is all important. The certain king of the parable points to the great God of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Since it is the King's dinner, the invitation is tremendously important.

In the second place, this call is important because the feast honors the King's son. Christ refers to Himself. He is the son of God. If the king was giving a dinner in honor of a servant perhaps the call to attend would not be so important, but he is honoring his son. This makes the invitation all important. To refuse the invitation dishonors the son.

The Bible teaches every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God, the Father (Phil. 2:10-11). Since this confession and homage is inevitable, we must either make the confession here or hereafter. We should gladly accept this great invitation.

Third, this call to dinner is important because of the immense preparation, "all things are ready" (Luke 14:17). Nothing is undone. Can we not see the great banquet table groaning under the load of luxurious delicacies? Nothing is omitted. No expense is spared. Calvary is an accomplished fact. The blood of the Lamb of God soaked into the wood of the cross, and dripped to the ground beneath the accursed tree.

"All things are ready." Think of what the great spiritual feast cost the Father. It cost His only begotten son. The

preparation was most elaborate but very necessary. There was no other way for man to come to God to be forgiven. It took the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the very son of God. What an important call and how tragic it is to reject it.

Fourth, the punishment of those who refused the call shows the importance of the call to dinner. If it seems drastic for the disappointed king to send his armies to destroy those who rejected his invitation, and killed his servants, consider the importance of the invitation. If you think the man found at the supper table without a wedding garment was too severely punished for his neglect, weigh the significance of this invitation he had slighted.

Those who heard the call and rejected the invitation suffered severe punishment. Christ's prophecy, for the Jewish nation, came to pass in the year A.D. 70, when the Roman armies, under Titus, laid siege to the city of Jerusalem and razed it to the ground. The terrible destruction of Jerusalem in the first century of this age is a kind of prophecy of the utter destruction that awaits the impenitent at the close of this age. Modern day people should take note, and shudder.

This call is universal—to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16). In the parable under discussion the elite received the invitation. They turned it down with scorn and frivolous excuses. The King's servants then went out into the highways and hedges looking for guests. The Jews rejected Christ and cried, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27:25). At first, the offer of salvation was to the Jews. When they rejected it, the teachers turned to the Gentiles.

The call was to dine at the great banquet table of the Lord. It is universal, God is not a respecter of persons. "Whosoever will" is the language of the scriptures. His loyal servants are still delivering the message all over the world that whosoever will may come to Christ and obey His gospel. It is a

message of love, and freedom. Thank God, everyone has an invitation to attend this great wedding feast.

This call is for preparation. Orientals wore long white robes at public festivals. Those who appeared with any other garments were culpable, and punished. The wedding garment is the righteous deeds of the saints. If we obey the commands of Jesus to believe and be baptized the promise of salvation from past sin is ours (Mark 16:16). If we are faithful at all costs, we will receive a crown of life (Rev. 2: 10). Obedience to the plan of salvation, and clean living, and faithful service are the right clothes for this feast. N& one attended this banquet with improper robes. Common clothes would insult the king, and dishonor his son. If we are to enjoy the great blessings of God we must make preparation. Why should anyone appear in filthy rags when clean garments are available? “He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still” (Rev. 22:11).

This call also contains a warning. Much of our Lord’s teaching is interspersed with warnings. Those first bidden began to make excuses—feeble, flimsy, foolish, frivolous excuses. Verse 7 tells the consequences of the refusal of the call to dinner: “But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murders, and burned up their city.” Verse 13 tells what happened to the poor fellow who tried to get by with unfit garb: “Bind him hand and foot, and take him. away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

These things are for our admonition. Transgression deserves severe punishment. Notice that these people “made light of it and went their ways.” Some took his servants and treated them shamefully, slaying them. One man came, “not having on a wedding garment.” These words speak disaster. The call of God contains a warning. It is tragical to go about your business

as if nothing happened. You can enjoy a feast of good things at the Father's table. It's up to you!

Inexcusable Excuses

By Terry R. Townsend
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Have you ever thought about what folks might say to God at judgment for their failure to obey him? It's sobering, isn't it, to know there's a coming judgment – a day in which all men will give account of themselves to the Lord! Paul writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Let's consider a few inexcusable excuses.

Without question, millions of people will blame their lack of obedience on preachers. Unfortunately, millions today put more faith in mortal man than they do God. Yet, the Bible is abundantly clear that one must be a doer of the word and not a hearer only (James 1:21-25). False teachers are deceiving millions into thinking they have "peace and safety," when in reality they're on a collision course with destruction (1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Pet. 2:1-3). Thus, it behooves us to test the spirits (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11). Blaming false teachers at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

There will be many on the Day of Judgment blaming the weather for their lack of involvement in the Lord's work. When asked why they fail to participate in spiritual activities, many blame mother nature – too hot in summer, too cold in winter, too wet in spring, too windy in fall, etc. If truth be told, people will do whatever their hearts so desire! Inclement

weather does not negate one's responsibility to serve God (1 Cor. 15:58). Blaming the weather at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

Undoubtedly, millions will blame their parents at Judgment for their failure to do God's will. How often have I heard non-members say the following in a Bible study, "I see what you're saying, but if what I believe was good enough for dad and mom, it's good enough for me!" But what if dad and mom were wrong? Will God still grant you entrance into Heaven despite your failure to obey that which you knew to be true? The Bible says that one must obey Christ above all else, including family (cf. Luke 9:57-62; 14:26-35). In matters of faith, who should we ultimately listen to? Parents or Christ? Obviously, the answer is Jesus (Matt. 17:5; Heb. 1:1-3). Putting the blame on parents for your lack of obedience will be an inexcusable excuse.

Others at Judgment will use the excuse of profession for their failing to do the Father's Will. I'm sure some will say, "I would have obeyed and served you Lord, but my job wouldn't allow it." Truth be told, millions are more interested in money than they are in God. Paul had it right when he penned, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim. 6:9-10 ESV). Jesus said that we're to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). To blame one's profession at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

I'm sure that on Judgment Day some will use their lack of earthly substance (poverty) as an excuse for their failing to do the will of God. Some will probably say, "Lord, I wasn't as blessed as others; thus, I didn't do all I could." I wonder if God will have standing beside Him the widow who gave two mites

as an example to those making such excuses (cf. Mark 12:41-44)? The Lord expects us to do what we can with what we have (Matt. 25:14 ff). Blaming our lack of service on poverty will be an inexcusable excuse.

Another excuse many will make at Judgment will be that of persecution. I can hear some now, “Lord, I would’ve served You, but I didn’t because I feared persecution.” But didn’t he tell us in his word that Christians would be mistreated on occasion (cf John 15:20; 2 Tim. 3:12). Didn’t he assure us his presence, protection, and panoply to help us overcome (cf. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6; Eph. 6:10 ff)? Jesus said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Thus, fear of persecution as a defense for failing to obey God will be an inexcusable excuse on Judgment Day.

Finally, millions will offer unto God the excuse of procrastination; that is, many will say, “I wanted to obey You Lord, but I simply ran out of time!” I wonder if Felix will be among the masses who will make such an excuse (Acts 24:25)? The Lord is patient, and he gives men ample time to obey (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9-14); thus, to use procrastination as a reason for failing to obey will be an inexcusable excuse on Judgment Day.

Simply put, we can make all the excuses we want to as to why we fail to do God’s Will; however, on the Day of Judgment, God’s answer to such excuses will be this:

“Depart from me, ye that work iniquity!”

The Marks of Jesus

By Owen Cosgrove
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Early Christians in the area of Galatia caused some consternation to the apostle Paul as they drifted away from the purity of the gospel that he had preached to them. He wrote to them and told them that he was amazed that they were so quickly departing from the truth that they had received.

The apostle warned them that if anyone, even an angel from heaven, taught them any other gospel than the one he had taught and that they had received, that the false teacher would be accursed. He wrote of his concern that he may have bestowed labor on them in vain and told them that those who sought justification except through the gospel of Christ would fall from grace. With all of his rebuking these wayward disciples he then asks, “Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”

Paul closes the epistle to the Galatians rather abruptly telling them, “From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”

Some have preached lessons on “The Marks of Jesus” using such topics as the mark of love, the mark of sincerity, the mark of honesty, etc. This may be an interesting way to develop a topical sermon, but it stretches the meaning of the original text.

Here the Greek word for marks is “stigma,” referring to marks or brands put on slaves and sometimes on criminals in order to identify them in some special way. It is very unlikely that Paul put any tattoos or other body markings upon himself, since such were strictly forbidden by the Mosaic law under which he had grown up (Lev. 19:28).

Some commentators think that Paul is here referring to scars left by the severe persecutions that he had undergone as a preacher of the gospel of Christ. He had been scourged and abused at various places. In 2 Corinthians 11, he speaks of being imprisoned often. Five times he had been beaten with 39 stripes, and these were not mere spankings. Three times he was punished with “rods,” a device used by the Romans to inflict severe punishment. Once he was stoned and left for dead. All of these things were written about in about A.D. 58 ten years before his death in Rome in A.D. 68, and so it is reasonable to believe that he could add many other sufferings to this list before his martyrdom.

Probably Paul had scars all over his body to remind him of places like Philippi and Lystra and Jerusalem where he had been physically assaulted for his faith.

Someone has said that Christianity has come to us on rivers of blood and sweat and tears. How could those early disciples bear the crosses of persecution put upon them? What made them endure when it would have been so easy to give up?

There were two great incentives and ideals that drove people like Paul and other early Christians. One was the persistent remembering of Jesus and his magnificent sacrifice at Calvary. The other was the hope of going to haven and being with God forever. Paul wrote at about the same time he wrote Galatians, on his third missionary journey, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:11).

Some day, the faithful Christian will be privileged to trade his cross of suffering for the crown of life. “Oh, for such a faith as this, and then whate’er may come, we’ll taste e’en here the hallowed bliss of