On 1 John 1:7 (Forgiveness)

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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.”