

WALKING IN THE LIGHT?

By Denver Cheddie

What happens to Christians who sin and die before they get a chance to confess their sin or repent? Do they go to heaven or hell? It really boils down to this. We all agree that God has forgiven us of our past sins. Has he also forgiven us of our future sins? Is it really absolutely necessary to confess acts of sin in order for them to be forgiven? Or would Jesus forgive them anyway if we continue to believe on him? We will attempt to answer these questions in this article.

1 John 1:7 says that if we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus (continually) cleanses us from all sin. It really comes down to what walking in the light means, because that is the necessary condition for our sins to be continually forgiven. Yes it says IF we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us, but it does not say IF AND ONLY IF. In other words this is not necessarily the only condition for our sins to be forgiven. Definitely if we confess our sins, God will forgive us. But just as definite is the fact that if we walk in the light, the blood continually cleanses us. It's like saying, "If you pray for rain it will rain." That doesn't mean if you don't pray for rain, it won't. Maybe if the clouds are saturated enough, it will rain regardless of your prayers.

Walking in the Light

The word "light" is used in various ways in scripture. In one sense Jesus is called the Light (John 1). In verse 4 it says the life was the light of men. Here it equates our light with eternal life. In John 3:19-21 light is portrayed as something that exposes evil deeds. Perhaps in this context it refers to the truth or illumination of the Gospel. In John 12:35 walking in the light is the same thing as believing the light. So walking in the light could mean the same thing as being saved. However, even though the 4th gospel was written by the same apostle, it is of utmost importance to determine what walking in the light means in the context of 1 John.

It is clear from a casual reading of the first chapter of 1 John that walking in the light is not the same thing as living holy, that is living without sin. In verses 8 and 10, it is clear that not only have we SINNED, but we have SIN. If we are walking in sinlessness, what sin is there to cleanse?

It is also obvious that walking in the light is not the same thing as walking in "openness" before God i.e. walking in the light is not the same as continually confessing our sins (as we commit them or as we are convicted of them). Why is that so obvious? Because in this context, God is also IN THE LIGHT. Whatever walking in the light means, it is something that God also does. I don't think God confesses his sins too regularly.

Actually it is very easy to see the meaning of walking in the light from 1 John. There are 2 sets of verses where John alludes to walking in the light. In 1:5-7 he states that if we walk in the light we have fellowship with one another, and also that walking in darkness means that we don't have fellowship^[1] with God and we do not practice the truth. 2:8-11 further declare that walking in the light means loving your brother and when we do so there is no occasion of stumbling. Hating your brother is tantamount to walking in darkness.^[2]

Fellowship with God --> walking in the light —> loving your brother

No fellowship with God --> walking in darkness --> hating your brother

It should be clear that walking in the light is the same thing as walking in love. Love is something that God has (or is) to a perfect degree, and this is something we are called to emulate. Throughout the book of 1 John the writer urges the believers to walk in love. He keeps on reminding them of the message they heard from the beginning. That message was that God is light (1:5) and that we should love one another (2:7-9; 3:11). These are all facets of the same message. The greatest commands that Jesus gave both involve love for God and love for the brethren (1 John 3:23).

Agape

Now the question is what exactly is this love that if we walk in it, we are guaranteed to have our sins continually cleansed, even before we confess them? Love is not the tickly feeling we get in our stomachs when we see a cute fluffy dog. That's more of a fondness. We also know that love is not necessarily "like". Like is based on the qualities a person possesses. Some people are easy to like, others are not as likable.

The agape love of God is driven by who God is. It has absolutely nothing to do with the object of that love. God loved us in spite of who we were and are. Jesus gave his life for all men, but I could hardly imagine that he particularly liked the Pharisees. True love is laying down one's life for others (1 John 3:16,17). Basically it is self-sacrifice for someone else's good. It is not always nice for many times it may involve forms of chastening. But it always seeks the good of others.

So you mean we have to do all of that to be saved? No. When we are saved the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5). This is automatic. It is not something we have to try to do. When we are saved, we are transformed from creatures of selfishness to creatures of love. In fact that transformation is how we know we are saved (read 1 John 3:14; 4:12,13; 5:2). Assurance is not based on the fact that we answered an altar call or repeated some prayer. Assurance is not a confident assumption. When we truly believe in Christ, there is a life transformation, which forms the basis of our assurance. Note that we are not made perfect right away,

but there definitely is supposed to be a difference. An absence of this love could only indicate an absence of salvation in the first place.

Once we have this love in us and we continue in it, this is the same thing as walking in the light. Once we remain in this love (and do not walk away from it) we are assured that Jesus' blood cleanses our sins, even if we don't confess them. Jesus' blood works for us even when we don't "plead" it. This is something that Jesus does for us who are in Him. Jesus is our high priest who ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). The implication is that as long as He lives, he will make intercession on our behalf. When Satan desired to sift Peter like wheat, Jesus prayed for him without Peter even knowing what was going on (Luke 22:31).

He Who Commits Sin

So what about those scriptures in 1 John that says true believers do not commit sin and those who do are of the devil (3:7-10; 5:16-21)? Don't they suggest that if we sin, we are not of God?

First of all we must look at the word "**commit**" in the King James Version. That word gives the impression that it is referring to any singular act of sin. But the more modern translations use the word **practice** instead of **commit**. That means it is referring to those who practice a sinful lifestyle in open rebellion to God, not those who occasionally sin. Furthermore in 2:1

John made it so clear that it is possible for Christians to commit acts of sin. He can't be later saying that they are incapable of sin. What he is saying is that although they may commit acts of sin, a true believer will not live in open rebellion to God practicing a sinful lifestyle.

My father has a very good knowledge of medicine. He has a cabinet with all sorts of medicines for various ailments. And he just knows by instinct which ones you'll need when certain symptoms appear. But he does not practice medicine because he is not a doctor. Occasionally dabbling in medicine is entirely different from practicing medicine. Another illustration. Almost everyone has an opinion on legal affairs. But not everyone practices law. Similarly occasionally committing sin is different from practicing sin.

Now in 3:8 it says the devil has been sinning since the beginning. It makes you wonder if it is referring to sin in general or a specific sin. What has the devil been doing since the beginning? He has been in open rebellion to God. Then in 5:16 John talks about a sin which is unto death. This strongly suggests that he is talking specifically about the sin of apostasy.

Conclusion

So what characterizes the children of the devil is that they live in open rebellion to God and they practice sin. Children of God may commit sin but that does not change the fact that they are children of God and once they

remain in Christ (and in his love), Jesus' blood continually cleanses them of all sin, even if they did not repent as yet.

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i^[1] Fellowship could mean union or communion. Fellowship with God could refer to a saving relationship with Him or an intimate relationship with Him (after salvation is already established). I believe it refers to a saving relationship because in 1:3 he writes that our fellowship is with the Father and the Son. This was in direct contradiction to false teachers who taught that Christ did not come in the flesh (4:2) and thus we could have a relationship with God the Father alone. John was refuting that heresy and insisting that salvation must come through Jesus the Son, and when it does we have a relationship with both the Father and the Son.

ii^[2] No serious Bible student would make a distinction between walking in the light and abiding in the light.