

THE CONTINUOUS CLEANSING CONTROVERSY

Text: 1 John 1:7-10

INTRO: One controversy that has troubled brethren over the past few years is, what does the Bible teach about continuous cleansing from sin? Much of the turmoil is based on semantics. Brethren do not always say clearly what they mean to communicate. But that is not the whole problem. Many of us have been unduly influenced by Calvinistic commentaries & philosophies. Let us take note of a few elementary facts that should help us understand what the Bible teaches about continuous cleansing.

I. WE DO NOT **HAVE** TO SIN.

A. Adam & Eve did not have to eat the fruit; Cain did not have to kill Abel.

B. God's word commands us not to sin.

My little children, these things I write to you that may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father... (1 John 2:1).

...Go & sin no more. (John 8:11).

NOTE Adam's excuse: The woman YOU gave me...

C. God promises to supply the strength to overcome temptation. 1 Cor. 10:13.

D. If I have to sin, what sin or sins do I have to commit?

II. THOUGH WE DO NOT HAVE TO SIN, WE DO SIN.

A. All have sinned, Rom. 3:10, 23.

B. All **do** sin, at least occasionally, 1 John 1:8-10.

C. All **do** fall short (present tense).

III. NO SIN IS FORGIVEN AUTOMATICALLY.

A. 1 John 1:7 **does** teach that Christ's blood **continues** to cleanse the Christian who **walks** in the light.

1. Walking in the light is a life style, chosen intentionally by the faithful Christian. It involves the

will to do what is right and holy.

2. As John shows in the context, even the child of God who walks in the light will fall short of complete obedience or sinless perfection.
3. How the erring child of God deals with his sins will determine whether he continues to walk in the light and be cleansed.

B. Though cleansing is **continually** available, it is never automatic or unconditional.

1. The alien cannot expect to have his sins overlooked because of ignorance or good intentions, Acts 17:30-31; 16:32; 2:36-38; Mark 16:15-16.
2. The erring child of God must also meet conditions before his cleansing can take place. Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9.
3. Modern illustrations re windshield wipers, water hoses, umbrellas, etc., do not accurately reflect what is taught in 1 John 1:7-9. These may be good illustrations of the theory, but they do not prove the theory to be true. Illustrations do not prove anything, they simply illustrate.
4. But--what about the sins of which I am not specifically aware?

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. (Psalm 19:21).

NOTE: Asking God's patience & mercy as we seek to know His will better & obey it better is in accordance with 1 John 1:7-9. The penitent truth-seeking attitude is what walking in the light is all about.

IV. DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS ARE AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY.

- A. Time. Hebrews 5:12.
- B. Ability to understand/initiate. Matt. 25:14-15.
- C. Opportunity.

For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; & to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48).

CONCLUSION: I am not the judge of any man, woman or child. I may not know to what extent they are accountable. God knows & will judge them fairly & equitably. I take comfort in the fact that Christ's blood remains ever available to cleanse me from sin, even from sins which I have not yet learned to avoid. But I shudder to realize that such cleansing is not automatic. I must penitently confess the sins of which I am aware, & continue, with God's help, to learn of & depart from the sins I have not yet learned to recognize. May God be merciful to us all. Without His mercy and grace, we have no hope whatsoever.

Exton, PA, February 1, 1987

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, April 4, 1993

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, December 4, 1994

Westview, Athens, AL, April 16, 1997 (meeting)