

# CHAPTER 13

*Reigning Grace* AND  
1 JOHN 1:9



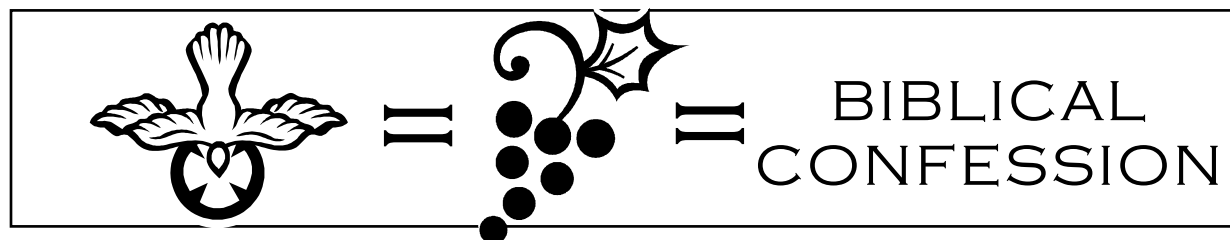
Patrick J. Griffiths @ 2009

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# CHAPTER 13

## REIGNING GRACE AND 1 JOHN 1:9

8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”  
(1 John 1:8, 9).



### AN INITIAL COMMENT

“Grace Living, 1 John 1:9, and Conditional Forgiveness,” is a work made up of three sections. Part one is in response to specific questions asked concerning the topic under consideration. Part two is a treatment of 1 John 1:9 in context. Part three is a plea for Christian love and biblical unity in light of a subject over which much diversity exists.

For whatever reason most Christians live in a state of perpetual bondage because of their inability to embrace a complete forgiveness from God and a full fellowship with God that is merited by grace alone and maintained by grace alone. Most have tragically drawn a sharp distinction between their positional justification in Christ and their progressive sanctification in the world.

It is my prayer that we would once more rest in a finished work that our greatest strength would be our weakness and our greatest boast His cross. May our offense be solely in His cross. May we delight in all that we are in Him and He is for us.



## PART ONE: QUESTIONS CONCERNING FORGIVENESS

1. "If I understood right, you said that we do not need to ask God for forgiveness when we sin, but rather confess and thank Him for the forgiveness given. What about the Lord's Prayer? Did not Jesus teach his disciples to ask for forgiveness?"
2. "Since we know that at the point of salvation we receive full forgiveness from past, present and *future* sin, how are we to understand Matthew 6:14, 15?"
3. "Do Christians have to confess and ask forgiveness for the sins that they commit after salvation?"
4. "Is the purpose of confession for our benefit to declare to God that we are going to turn from sin? If we are already forgiven then why does 1 John 1:9 say he will forgive our sins *if* we confess?"
5. "How does God's holiness fit in with the idea that our sin does not break fellowship with God? If He hates sin, how can we still have fellowship with Him if we are in sin?"
6. "In relation to how God sees me, which is through His Son's blood, can He see my sin? I know God is all-knowing and can see anything and everything, but in relation to how God sees me, this is my question."

"A word of encouragement for those who have slipped - and who has not? The only remedy is to confess your sins at once."<sup>1</sup>



## ANSWERS

The answer to these questions intersects several times with other doctrinal truths. I am grateful for the hard questions. It is essential we become *Bereans* (Acts 17:11). It is not enough for us to blindly accept all that we have been taught. Even if what we come to believe runs contrary to the tradition taught, we must have the fortitude to stand, even if alone. Our Bible is always the final court of appeal.

There are several issues involved in the answer.

- First, what is the idea of fellowship with God?
- Second, how full is the payment in the area of sins forgiven?
- Third, what is the true believer's present standing in Christ?
- Fourth, what is the larger context of Matthew 6:9-15 and how does it affect my application of this text?

- Finally, what is the larger context of 1 John 1:9 and how does it affect my application of this text?

I am convinced if we examine the above four thoughts, a biblical response can be found to the questions being addressed.

Closely tied to the idea of our forgiveness by God is our fellowship with God. Salvation establishes our fellowship with God. Some would suggest that our sin breaks this fellowship and can only be restored after our sin is confessed and hence forgiven. Some would equally suggest that our fellowship with God is also contingent on a walk of faith or obedience or by being led of the Spirit or walking in the Spirit. Because of the tie binding fellowship with forgiveness, it is impossible to separate the two ideas. I will begin this study by noting our fellowship with God.



## FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

As already noted, this area is problematic for most Christians. In a popular Counseling ministry, those who teach their material make the following statements:

Guilt through unconfessed sin interrupts our fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:1-10).

Guilt is removed through confession and repentance (1 Jn. 1:9; Ps. 32:5).<sup>2</sup>

On one hand the group notes how, “Guilt for believers was removed eternally at the cross (Col. 2:13-14; Heb. 10:1-18),”<sup>3</sup> yet on the other hand they make the previous two statements in the same listing on the same page.

My challenge is to face a misunderstanding of such ideas as fellowship and forgiveness. I will begin with some initial thoughts concerning our fellowship with God.

**First**, I believe our fellowship with God was lost when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. Prior to the fall Adam had unhindered fellowship with God. After the fall, his fellowship with God was broken. God restored fellowship by offering up a blood sacrifice. This animal blood sacrifice was a temporal type of a future permanent antitype found in Jesus Christ. We will note this idea in the next section.

In commenting on 1 John 1:3, Charles Spurgeon makes the following statement:

They who have by his grace believed, and have by the precious blood been washed, have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord, they are "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God," and they have access with boldness into this grace wherein we stand. **So they who are in the kingdom, and under the dispensation of the second Adam, have restored to them in all its fullness that fellowship which was lost to them by the sin and disobedience of their first federal head.**<sup>4</sup>

This is the essence of our justification before God by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our justification "involves the forgiveness of sins, and restoration to divine favor. The Bible clearly teaches that the fruit of justification is much more than pardon. They who are justified have 'peace with God,' . . ." <sup>5</sup>

God not only completely pardons but equally accepts. It is unlike King David inviting his son Absalom back into the kingdom, but refusing to meet with him (2 Sam. 13, 14). (Note 14:24, 28-33).

Second, I believe fellowship with God in the Old Testament was contingent (thus tentative) on the offering of blood, whereas in the New Testament (i.e., Covenant) fellowship is permanent because of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Third, because my fellowship with God is a consequence of His cross work, nothing I do can break this fellowship. I believe this is a point of Hebrews 4:14-16.

<sup>14</sup> "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Therefore **let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need**" (Heb. 4:14-16).

I come with confidence to the throne of grace. Neither my obedience nor rebellion bars me from this throne. If the throne was marked by justice, then none would come. But it is a throne characterized by grace.

Pastor John Piper of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis Minnesota makes a summary point from 1 John 1:1-4.

Through this incarnation we obtain fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>

Fourth, I believe I can fail to enjoy my fellowship with God by neglect or willful choice. This enjoyment, however, does not break fellowship; it is only a failure to enjoy what is true.

Finally, if my obedience maintains fellowship and my rebellion breaks fellowship, then I will never rest from my work, since I will never know if I have done enough obeying or too much rebelling.



## THE EXTENT OF OUR LORD'S DEATH

**Second**, *how full is the payment in the area of sins forgiven?* It is unfortunate that believers can sing a song such as *It Is Well with My Soul*, then turn right around and not understand the full extent of Christ's work on the cross in behalf of sin. Consider the third stanza:

*My sin - oh, the bliss of this glorious thought, My sin - not in part, but the whole, Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! It is well with my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul.*

Why do many believers still bear the burden of sin? It is not because they are sinners. That truth will not change until the loss of the old man. It is because they do not understand the full extent of Calvary's work on sin.

If you've been taught all of your life that the way to get forgiveness is by going to a confession booth or responding to an altar call, don't expect that habit to disappear overnight. 'Why am I walking down this church aisle to get my sins forgiven all over again?' 'Why am I constantly asking for what I already have? Could it be unbelief in what God said is finished?' <sup>7</sup>

Consider the following passages. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the intent is to show the superiority of Christ. One of those areas accented is that of His sacrificial work. Within the book there is constant reference being made to the *once and for all* nature of His sacrificial act (Hebrews 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10, 11, 12).

<sup>12</sup> "and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. . . <sup>26</sup> Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation

of the world; **but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.** . . . <sup>28</sup> So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him” (Heb. 9:12, 26, 28).

<sup>10</sup> “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all.** <sup>11</sup> Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; <sup>12</sup> **but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time,** sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:10-12).

Because this sacrifice paid for sin in full, the impact forgave *all* sin forever. This appears to be the clear teaching of Scripture. Consider the following passages as they relate to the impact of Christ's death on sin (Acts 13:38, 39; Col. 2:13; 1 John 1:7, 9; 2:12).

<sup>38</sup> “Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, <sup>39</sup> and **through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things,** from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses” (Acts 13:38, 39).

“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, **having forgiven us all our transgressions**” (Col. 2:13).

<sup>7</sup> “But if we walk in the Light, as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one with another, and the blood of Jesus **His Son cleanses us from all sin.** . . . <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and **to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** . . . <sup>12</sup> I am writing to you, little children, **because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake**” (1 John 1:7, 9; 2:12).

“The power of Christ's death *pays in full* God's outrage against it.”

Those who come by faith and appropriate the provision of Calvary for themselves have their sins forgiven: past, present and future.

In fact, in eternity past when such an act was considered and then manifested in time, all of your sin was still yet future. He died for your sin before it was ever committed. The only thing lacking was an expression of your faith that would take God at His Word. If *all* sin has been forgiven, then for what sins are

you asking to be forgiven?<sup>8</sup> Instead, we should be thanking God daily for the fullness of His forgiveness. This does not negate the necessity to be forgiven on a daily basis, but it does negate the idea that such forgiveness is conditional.

When a Christian asks God for forgiveness of his sins, he implies that Jesus' work on the cross isn't finished even though Jesus clearly said that "it is finished."<sup>9</sup>

The power of His forgiveness continues to this day. He is even now interceding in our behalf, providing a forgiveness that is unmerited and unconditional (1 John 2:1, 2; Rom. 8:34). Such a picture is beautifully acted out in John 13 when our Lord washed the feet of the disciples. Jesus told Peter that even with soiled feet he was *still* clean even though his feet were soiled (John 13:10). The stunning element in the story is how Jesus washed Peter's feet even though Peter *never asked!* Jesus washed his feet unconditionally, without being asked. If Jesus forgave us *only* when we asked, there would still be unforgiven sin in the life of the true believer. Such an individual, as identified by our Lord, "has no part with Him" (John 13:8). This person is not saved.

If Christ only acted as my advocate when I asked, then I would be of all men most miserable.

I can right now rejoice in a forgiveness that is full and sufficient. I can enjoy a forgiveness that is lacking in nothing. I can, as a believer, rejoice in the fact that I am forgiven.

To ask for forgiveness indicates that we don't really believe we are forgiven people. Friend, *there is nothing more that God is going to do about your sin.* [emphasis his] <sup>10</sup>



## THE BELIEVER'S IDENTITY IN CHRIST

**Third**, what is the true believer's present standing in Christ? According to Romans 6, I have been baptized into Christ (v. 3) and now I am walking in newness of life (v. 4). Because of this fact, I am now dead to sin (v. 2) and the body of sin is destroyed (v. 6). Thus, I no longer have to serve sin (v. 6). I am free from sin (v. 7) and no longer have to obey its dictates (v. 9). Colossians 3:1-4 speak of this same truth. I am dead (v. 3). The life I live in the flesh is according to Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3, 4). Jesus Christ is my life. I have no existence apart from Him. He has become my all and all. He is my sufficiency and satisfaction. The fact

"Sin has no inherent power to act on us. It has no authority over us. It cannot dictate or direct. Its reign over us has been broken."

of the matter is this: in my position my life has been swallowed up, by, and into the life of Christ. God the Father sees me in His beloved and blessed Son. In Him, I am as received, accepted, and satisfying to the Father as His only begotten Son.

We need to address two aspects of sin.

- First, sin's dominion
- Second, sin's demerit

As a believer, we are no longer under sin's dominion. Though we are no longer under the dominion of sin, we will still face the inherent demerit of sin. Thus, when we sin we are not under sin's dominion though facing its demerit.

Also coming into play is the whole area of two primary doctrines: justification and imputation. The doctrine of justification sees the sinner as being *declared* righteous. It is the canceling of sin's debt against him and then treating him as such. In the doctrine of imputation, the righteousness of Christ is placed into the sinner's account so that God now sees him as having the righteousness of Christ. Both doctrines have tremendous import on this area.

Unfortunately, we fail to practice positional truth. Though we have been declared righteous, given the righteousness of Christ and are positionally in Christ, we continue to live as if it all depended on us. The act of making the truth experiential is mapped out for us in Romans 6:6-13 and 12:1. Do you know the truth of your position? Are you considering it true? Yet is it something that is merely theoretical, or can it actually become experiential?

There is always a need to clarify what it means to "experience the victorious life." One's experience might never change. Circumstances, events, and experiences do not determine whether someone is having victory. Victory is in one's position, not in one's performance. Victory is seeing His victory as being our victory. Victory is when we rest knowing He is victorious, despite our debilitating circumstances. Victory is seeing past the moment, and finding rest knowing He is performing His perfect will. Experiencing the victorious Christian life is in mind renewal, not behavioral modification or circumstantial amendment.

It is only as you follow the pattern of victory that implements positional truth that you can experience your position in Christ *in* and *through* your earthen vessel. Yet, let us not fall into the trap of thinking this is in any way dependent on us. Philippians 2:12 and 13 assures us of God's providential working in and through us.

<sup>12</sup> “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> **for it is God who is at work in you**, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12, 13).

The outworking of positional truth is also seen in the area of personal sanctification. I understand sanctification, like my salvation, to be a monergistic work. In other words, it is the work of one. God is working in me and through me according to His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12, 13; Heb. 13:21).

<sup>20</sup> “Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, <sup>21</sup> equip you in every good thing to do His will, **working in us that which is pleasing in His sight**, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20, 21).

Faithful is He who called me who will also do it (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

<sup>23</sup> “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> **Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass**” (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

God will glorify that which He predetermines (Rom. 8:30).

<sup>29</sup> **“For those whom He foreknew,** He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, **He also glorified**” (Rom. 8:29, 30).

This does not negate my responsibility but it does help me to put a proper slant on the whole issue. It lifts the burden of looking at my Christian walk from a man-centered perspective to that of a God-centered perspective. God, not man, will maintain his walk with Him, and the basis for fellowship is not found in man but in Christ alone. I am “responsible” to believe all that God has said is true. I am to yield myself up to His truth.



## THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Fourth**, what is the larger context of Matthew 6:9-15, and how does it affect my application of this text?<sup>11</sup> As most acknowledge, Matthew 6 is part of the larger context of Matthew 5-7 which forms what is commonly called our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. Here are some initial observations.

- (1) I am *not* convinced the Sermon on the Mount is directly applicable to me as a Church-age saint. I see it as having more direct application to those who will inherit the earthly millennial kingdom of God. This does not mean there is no application, but it does mean I am obligated to understand the idea inside of the immediate and direct audience.

It's important to remember that when Jesus was talking about this prayer to His disciples, they were still living under the old covenant - under the law.<sup>12</sup>

- (2) The descriptions found throughout Matthew 5-7 are the characteristics of those who will be present in a more immediate phase of the kingdom of God. I see the prayer of Matthew reflective of those who will be present within the Millennial kingdom but still in a natural state. I know this opens up another area of study that I do not wish to look at right now. I do *not* see it as a pattern for prayer today. Based on verse 12, I am not sure what debt I have that God has not cancelled in full at Calvary (Col. 2:13). Interestingly enough, verses 14 and 15 use a first class condition construction. Such a construction assumes the truth of the statement. It might not be true, but it will be assumed true for the sake of the argument. The "if" could be understood as "since" in a first class condition. Hence, verses 14 and 15 are simply saying "since you forgive, God forgives." Such a statement is true of all believers.

- (3) Luke's passage brings this out even better when it says, "And forgive us our sins; *for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us*" (Luke 11:4). All true believers forgive, because they have been forgiven. The principle illustrated in Matthew 6:14, 15 is that those who have experienced God's forgiveness forgive (Eph. 4:32). Thus, I forgive the same way God forgives: unconditionally and without merit. I have a hard time isolating the disciple's prayer from its larger context.

(4)The same is true with reference to Mark 11:24-26. Colossians 3:13 gives us the “grace” twist to such a principle as found in Mark 11:24-26. Mark 11 makes it conditional, whereas Colossians exhorts us to forgive even as we have been forgiven. Again, I go back to the idea that just as God forgives, so also we forgive. The principle of forgiving without limit or condition is clearly stated by our Lord when discussing the issue with Peter in Matthew 18:21 and 22. How often do you forgive another individual? Only as often as he asks or is truly repentant and sorrowful? NO, you forgive without limit.

(5)I find it interesting that this conditional forgiveness is only in the gospels and not in either the Paul’s writings or the non-Pauline writings. Could the cross have changed this idea?

Nowhere in the New Testament, after the crucifixion, is the concept of asking God’s forgiveness even mentioned. The apostle Paul never broached the subject - he didn’t have to. He stood firm in the fact that he was a forgiven person and that those to whom he wrote were forgiven people.<sup>13</sup>



FIRST JOHN 1:9<sup>14</sup>

The message of our complete forgiveness in Christ is so clear. Yet invariably, after all those hours of teaching, someone raises his hand to ask, “What about 1 John 1:9?” For many believers this is the only verse they have memorized that deals with forgiveness.<sup>15</sup>

I believe that through an improper understanding of what this verse really means [1 John 1:9], we have negated the power of the cross of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup>

**Finally**, what is the larger context of 1 John 1:9 and how does it affect my application of this text? The book of 1 John provides contrasts throughout between two groups of people. Consider the contrasts listed below:



## The Unbeliever

## The Believer

People who are liars (1:6, 2:4)	People who walk in the light (1:7, 2:6, 10)
People who do not the truth (1:6)	People who are cleansed from all sin (1:7)
People who do not have the truth (1:8, 2:4)	People who confess sin as sin (1:9)
People who do not keep His commandments (2:4)	People who are forgiven (1:9, 2:12)
People who hate their brothers (2:9, 4:8ff)	People who are cleansed (1:9)
People who are in darkness (2:9)	People who know Him (2:3)
People who love the world (2:15, 4:5)	People who keep His commandments (2:3)
People who do not have the love of the Father (2:15)	People who have the love of God (2:5)
People who deny the incarnation (2:22)	People who abide in Him (2:6)
People who practice sin (3:4ff)	People who love their brothers (2:10, 3:11)
People who are of the devil (3:8)	People who are the Sons of God (3:2)
People who have fear (4:18)	People who are purified (3:3)
People who call God a liar (5:10)	People who do not practice sin (3:4ff)
	People who are born of God (3:9, 5:4)
	People who are hated by the world (3:13)
	People who have answered prayer (3:22)
	People who have the Spirit's assurance (3:24)
	People who believe in the incarnation (4:2)
	People who have no fear of future judgment (4:18)
	People who have overcome the world (5:4, 5)

The question we have to ask ourselves is, “Who are these people?” The contrast is between those who are unsaved and those who are saved. It does not refer to three groups of people – those who are saved and right with God, saved and out of fellowship with God, and the lost. Believers are never described by such language as that found in the left column.

The people in 1 John 1:9 are saved individuals. What are these saved people doing according to the first chapter? Well, for starters they are identified as those who walk in the light, are

cleansed from all sin, confess their manifestation of sin, and are forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness. How does this help us in understanding 1 John 1:9? First, all true believers are walking in the light and confessing their sin. Both walking and confessing are present active subjunctives.

The subjunctive mood is the mood of possibility and potentiality.<sup>17</sup> The action described may or may not occur, depending upon circumstances. Conditional sentences of the third class (“ean” + the subjunctive) are all of this type, as well as many commands following conditional purpose clauses, such as those beginning with “hina.” On what is the action of walking and confessing contingent? Why may these activities not happen? Why is it only a potential? Because whether or not an individual walks or confesses is completely dependent on whether or not they are saved or lost. We have created a third type of person in 1 John, that of a “lost-saved” person, one who is “dark-light” or a “hating-lover”. John says this is not the issue. You are either saved and walking in the light and confessing sin or lost and not walking nor confessing. Moreover, it is because we are walking and confessing that we are fellowshiping, cleansed and forgiven. The result of walking and confessing is entirely dependent on the cleansing and forgiveness. In addition, it is because I have been cleansed and forgiven that I can now walk in the light and confess my sin.

The “cleansing” of 1:7 is a present active indicative speaking of its continual action. The “forgive” and “cleansing” of 1:9 is an aorist active subjunctive speaking of an action that has potentially taken place in the past. The beauty of these two verses is evident. True believers have been forgiven in full judicially (1:9) and are being experientially forgiven (1:7) unconditionally. Evidence of such forgiveness and cleansing reveals itself by a walking and confessing that is supernatural in origin and completely contrary to that of the unsaved. The unsaved will never walk in the light. In fact, John tells us that they hate the light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19, 20).

The verb “cleanses” occurs only twice in 1 John (1:7, 9). In 1:7, it is a present active indicative and in 1:9 it is an aorist active subjunctive. Like the word “cleanse” the word “forgive” is found only twice in 1 John (1:9; 2:12). In 1:9 it is an aorist active subjunctive, and in 2:12 it is a perfect passive indicative. It is the faithfulness of God that produces the forgiveness and cleansing of 1:9. As His children (1:7), we enjoy the fellowship which produces the cleansing from all sin. The question is not *if* for the true

Lost people <i>are not</i> walking nor confessing. Saved people <i>are</i> doing both.
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believer, but only *when*. Thus the issue is not an un-confessing believer, for all true believers confess, but between true believers and those who are lost unbelievers. Saved people are confessing and are being cleansed because they have been forgiven and cleansed.

We often look at 1 John 1:9 as *the* verse for maintaining one's relationship with God, and that to consider an alternative look is difficult. The desire is not to stir up controversy but to know truth. To see the magnitude of God's forgiveness and love and to understand His Word more intimately so that we might know Him more personally is the end of all Bible study. God has provided for us a salvation that is fathomless in scope. I wish to live in light of this "so great salvation."

I also find our current view of sin and 1 John 1:9 unfortunate. If we constantly have to monitor our sin, we have unknowingly shifted our focus away from Him to our sin. Moreover, such a focus is wrong. We are to be looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, not making checklists of sins committed.



## PART TWO: "THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE AND 1 JOHN 1:9"

Many have a knowledge of grace that is often disjointed from other pockets of truth. As such, there is little understanding of what it means to "live under grace." It is my desire to consider the doctrine of grace as it relates to 1 John 1:9.

Most would state that they have a position on grace, but few have yet to develop a practice of grace.

I have often wondered if our understanding of 1 John 1:9 is an area that had failed to be touched by the Reformation begun by Martin Luther in 1517 or at least we have failed to understand the Reformers position concerning 1 John 1:9.

In this section I would like us to carefully walk through John's presentation of material as it is laid out for us in 1 John.

After John introduces his subject matter (i.e., Christ) in verses 1 through 4 his following paragraph highlights, "The Basis for Enjoying Fellowship with the Light" (1 John 1:5-10). John's theme is clear: God is light and in Him, there is no darkness. In addition, if we are to enjoy that light, we must become light, as He is light.

From the reality of the living Christ (1:1-4), we now begin by asking a simple question, “how does darkness enter into a relationship with the living Christ?”

This is John’s thesis statement. This is the fundamental principle, the statement of truth. John will not waver from this non-negotiable fact: God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (v.5).

There is in God no darkness at all. There is neither the slightest blemish nor stain.

This detail is stressed by the employment of a Greek double negative, which is always emphatic. Furthermore, the word translated “at all” is a compound word literally meaning “not one.” John, therefore, says, “in God there is no darkness, not even one bit.”<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting how John sets up his opening statement. God is alive and we are dead. God is light and we are darkness. If this is so, then how are we going to enjoy intimacy with untainted light?

According to vv.6-10, there is really only one condition that must be met if we are to enjoy fellowship with God: we must be born-again. We have softened John’s message, but it is clear. If we have not come to Him with the acknowledgement of our sin and thus receiving from His gracious hand a full and complete forgiveness, and as a result of His enabling ministry are now walking in truth, then we are self-deceiving liars and know not the truth. We are lost.

John gives for us five conditional statements (“if - then”). These five verses act as a portal through which all true believers must pass. He begins with a negative statement, followed by a positive and continues in this pattern with three negatives and three positives. The three negative statements reflect the unsaved and the three positives the saved.

For clarity, I have grouped the like verses together.

I. The unsaved are described in three ways (vv.6,8,10)

A. The unsaved are liars (v.6)

### The Grammatical Structure

(Negative - lost)

If we say (Aorist Active Subj.) that we have fellowship with Him yet walks (Pres. Act. Indic.) in darkness

We lie (Pres. Mid. Indic.) and do not practice (Pres. Act. Indic.) the truth (v.6).

This individual is a professing Christian, but a practicing pagan.

Plummer notes how “Profession without conduct is a lie.”<sup>19</sup>

The *fellowship* spoken of here is the common Greek word, “*koinonia*.” It speaks of having things in common. It has the idea of identification, of defending, of sharing one’s wealth with others, of joining in another’s joy and sorrow. That is New Testament fellowship. It is this kind of intimacy that is spoken of.

A lie is that which is contrasted with the truth. A lie is from the old man and we are told not to lie. He who walks in darkness does not have any fellowship with the Father. He who walks in darkness and claims to be a Christian is a liar.

B. The unsaved are deceived (v.8)

#### The Grammatical Structure

(Negative - lost)

If we say (Aorist Active Subj.) that we have (Pres. Act. Indic.) no sin

We are deceiving (Pres. Act. Indic.) ourselves and  
The truth is (Pres. Act. Indic.) not in us (v.8)

This individual will not admit that he is a sinner. He believes there is sin, but just not by him.

Verses six and eight are in parallel. If an individual does not acknowledge their sin condition, they will not be saved. Sin’s presence is salvation’s necessity. The individual who has not repented of their sin but rather continues to walk in darkness is self-deceived and has no grounds for claiming to know truth. This person is lost.

C. The unsaved are arrogant (v.10)

#### The Grammatical Structure

(Negative - lost)

If we say (Aorist Active Subj.) that we have not sinned (Perfect Act. Indic.)

We make (Pres. Act. Indic.) Him a liar and  
His word is (Pres. Act. Indic.) not in us (v.10)

This individual says he has in him no sin. He denies the existence of a sin nature. He denies the Scriptural record.

This individual accuses God of being the sinner. God is the one who lied, not man. Such arrogance is shameful. Without this acknowledgement of sin and its mastery over us, we can never be saved. Thus, verses six, eight and ten clearly identify those who are lost and verses seven, nine, and 2:1 those who are saved.

Salvation begins with an acknowledgement of sin. Without such a confession of sin, there can be no forgiveness from sin. Until the sinner is brought to a state of a complete and utter hatred for sin (John 16:7-11), he will never see the loveliness of our Lord's person and work.

II. The saved are described in three ways (vv.7, 9, 2:1)

A. The saved are cleansed (v.7)

### The Grammatical Structure

(Positive -saved)

If we walk (Pres. Act. Subj.) in the light as He Himself is in the light

We have (Pres. Act. Indic.) fellowship with one another and  
The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses (Pres. Act. Indic.) us  
from all sin (v.7)

Walking in the light with God makes possible fellowship with one another and is made possible also by the blood of Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

The subjunctive mood speaks of the possibility, not its reality. The indicative is a statement of fact. If the "walking" is in place, then the fellowship is true. The walk results in fellowship and is made possible by the cleansing. If we walk in light, then we can enjoy fellowship with other believers and it is a sign of our complete cleansing by the blood of the Son.

The speaker in the third class condition considers that the condition stated in the protasis has the possibility (or even probability) of becoming a reality. Therefore, he uses "ean" or "an" and the subjunctive mood in the protasis. The . . . indicatives are all used in the apodosis. The statement in the apodosis becomes a reality only when the conditions stated in the protasis are met.<sup>21</sup>

This is the exact grammatical formula that is being employed throughout verses 6-10.

If this is not true, then are we to assume that our cleansing from sin and fellowship with other believers is based on our habitual obedience to the light? Nay, may this never be! If this were so, then our salvation from sin is based on our own acts of obedience.

The present indicative speaks “of what goes on continually, that constant cleansing which even the holiest Christians need.”<sup>22</sup>

This cleansing is not conditional, but unconditionally given to all who are true believers and have Christ as their advocate (2:1).

“All” without the definite article means every single one of the whole of our sin. Christ’s blood both redeems us from the sin principle and from committed sins.<sup>23</sup>

B. The saved are forgiven (v.9)

### The Grammatical Structure

(Positive -saved)

If we confess (Pres. Act. Subj.) our sins

He is (Pres. Act. Indic.) faithful and just

(hina) To forgive (Aorist Active Subj.) us our sins and

To cleanse (Aorist Active Subj.) us from all unrighteousness (v.9)

Verses seven and nine are in parallel. True confession brings certain forgiveness and cleansing from Him whom alone is faithful and just. The forgiveness and cleansing are the result of Jesus Christ being faithful and just, not of the confession. The confession simply appropriates the provision. The “hina” creates a result clause and can be translated “so that”.<sup>24</sup> The confession is not the basis for our forgiveness. The confession simply moves God to apply a redemption that is already accomplished. We are not forgiven because we confess we are forgiven because He is faithful and just. Let us consider for just a moment the idea of in time forgiveness and the New Testament believer.

ETERNITY PAST - “Pre-Time”

“The Son of God was slain for the sins of His People before the Foundation of the World according to the Eternal Purpose of the Godhead”

(Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8; 17:8)

IMMEDIATE PRESENT - "In-Time"

"God the Father sent His Son "In-Time" to be revealed as the Savior of His People" (Matt. 1:21; Rom. 16:25; Gal. 4:4)

"Pre-Cross"	"Post-Cross"
'Pre-Cross' believers were saved base on a work that was future. Some refer to this as having been saved on credit (Acts 13:38, 39; 17:30; Rom. 3:25, 26; Heb. 9:15).	'Post-Cross' believers are saved based on a work that is past.

- The immediate present "in-time" event of Calvary is the inevitable expression of an eternity past "pre-time" decision of the Godhead. Even without the "in-time" event, the "pre-time" decision rendered the event just as real before the "in-time" expression as after.
- The forgiveness of the "pre-cross" believer is real because of the "pre-time" decision even though it precedes the "in-time" event. God is making application to the "pre-cross" believer based on what He had already decided and will render "in-time" at Calvary.
- The believer's complete forgiveness rests in an "in-time" event that is the outworking of an eternal decision made "before the foundation of the world."
- For the New Testament believer, "in-time" forgiveness is simply the outworking of a "pre-time" decision by God.
- God is forgiving me for "in-time" sin, though such a forgiveness on His part was as real in "pre-time" as the experience is "in-time." Thus, I have been forgiven (at Calvary) and am being forgiven ("in-time").

Let us now go back to 1 John 1. Both verses seven and nine have that trailing statement following the "if / then" clause. Moreover, both refer to the individual's cleansing.

The word *confess* is a salvation word. It is a compound word coming from "homou" "together" and "logos" "to speak" (homologeō). It carries the idea of "to say the same thing as another, to declare openly, speak out freely, to profess one's self the worshipper of one." What is to be our understanding of the word "confess?"

This is the only place in the New Testament where "homologeō" refers to the confession of sin. <sup>25</sup>

I have taken the time to trace the word "confession" through the New Testament. I then categorized the word according to usage.

Below are my findings (they are all from the King James Version of the Bible).



## CONFESSION USED FOR SALVATION

“And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matt. 3:6).

“And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mark 1:5).

“And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds” (Acts 19:18).

“These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22).

“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue” (John 12:42).

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10).

“They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:16).

“Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also” (1 John 2:23).

“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (1 John 4:2).

“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of

antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world” (1 John 4:3).

“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15).

“For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 1:7).

- TRANSLATED WITH THE WORD “THANK”

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25).

“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Luke 10:21).

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb. 13:15).

- TRANSLATED WITH THE WORD “PROMISE”

“And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude” (Luke 22:6).

“Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask” (Matt. 14:7).

- A CONFESSION OF UNIVERSAL PROPORTIONS

“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom. 14:11).

“And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).

- CONFESSION USED FOR PROCLAMATION OR TESTIFYING

“And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name” (Rom. 15:9).

“And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ” (John 1:20).

“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both” (Acts 23:8).

“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14).

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12).

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13).

- CONFESSON OF RELATIONAL SINS BETWEEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

- CHRIST IDENTIFYING US AS HIS PEOPLE OR LACK THEREIN

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5).

“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23).

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32).

“Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8).

I find its usage intriguing. You have to look at the references and then ask yourself the question, “How is John using this word in 1 John?”



#### WHAT TO DO WITH 1 JOHN 1:9?

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

In light of the evidence, instead of creating a new category for believers confessing their sin, why do we not simply make this a salvation verse? This would seem to make the most sense. Yet the immediate context as it stands in parallel to verse seven keeps me from seeing it as being salvific.

Without exception, the idea of confession is inseparably linked to that of salvation. This acknowledgement leads to salvation.

The Geneva Bible comments on this verse in this way:

Therefore the beginning of salvation is to acknowledge our wickedness and to require pardon from him, who freely forgives all sins, because he has promised to do so and he is faithful and just. So then our salvation depends on the free promise of God, who because he is faithful and just, will perform that which he hath promised.

What then is the idea behind 1 John 1:9? Listen carefully to John Gill, an old puritan.

Forgiveness of sin here intends not the act of forgiveness, as in God, proceeding upon the bloodshed and sacrifice of Christ, which is done at once, and includes all sin, past, present, and to come; but an application of pardoning grace to a poor sensible sinner, humbled under a sense of sin, and confessing it before the Lord; and confession of sin is not the cause or condition of pardon, nor of the manifestation of it, but is descriptive of the person, and points him out, to whom God will and does make known his forgiving love. <sup>26</sup>

It is only as we recognize the magnitude of our depravity that we see the abundance of God’s forgiveness.

The darkness of sin will not and cannot enter into the light of God's presence. For us to enjoy the light of God we must be purged of the darkness. This purging of darkness takes place at Calvary through the blood of His Son. We are now children of light (Eph. 5:7).

C. The saved have an unconditional advocate in Jesus Christ (2:1).



## CONCLUSION:

Like many other passages, we have tried to make 1 John 1:9 say more than is there. From 1 John 1:9 three thoughts are typically stated:

- First, we must ask for forgiveness.
- Second, we must get forgiveness in order to be right with God.
- Third, we must get forgiveness in order to restore broken fellowship.

However, from within the text itself, no such teaching is found.

The only way we can enjoy fellowship with the Father and His Son is if we are in the light. Calvary is the only way to become a child of the light.

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<sup>1</sup> L.E. Maxwell, *Born Crucified* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1945), 82

<sup>2</sup> *Foundations of Biblical Counseling*, Biblical Counseling Center, 3233 N. Arlington Heights Rd., Suite 302, Arlington Heights, IL 60004, 60.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Fellowship With God*, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, (Sermon No. 409 delivered on Sunday September 15, 1861); available from <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0409.htm>; Internet.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (new ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 513.

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *Eternal Life Has Appeared in Christ*, Desiring God Ministries, (Sermon No. 475 delivered on Sunday January 27, 1985); available from [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1985/475\\_Eternal\\_Life\\_Has\\_Appeared\\_in\\_Christ/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1985/475_Eternal_Life_Has_Appeared_in_Christ/); Internet.

<sup>7</sup> Bob George, *Faith that Pleases God*, (Eugene: Harvest Publishers, 2001), 87

<sup>8</sup> William Ames correctly notes how, "Not only are past sins of justified persons remitted but also those to come, Num. 23:25. God sees no iniquity in Jacob or perverseness in Israel. Justification has left no place for condemnation." However, he does, incorrectly, continue with, "Yet those who are justified need daily the forgiveness of sins." William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden ([Latin 1629] Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1968), 163, 164.

<sup>9</sup> Steve McVey, *Grace Rules*, (Eugene: Harvest House, 1998), 150.

<sup>10</sup> George, *Faith that Pleases God*, 126. In addressing 1 John 1:5-10, Pastor John Piper makes the following comment, "Some people say that a Christian should never pray for forgiveness because his sins are all forgiven in Christ. It is finished in the cross and no more forgiveness is possible. There is truth in this, but to me it smacks of artificiality. At least we should say, 'Father, I have sinned and am not worthy to be called your child. Please apply the blood of Christ to this my sin and count it among those which you forgave when he died for me

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on the cross.’ But if that is too complex, I am sure the Father would gladly receive the words, ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.’ From this author’s perspective, John has the right idea but fails to connect the theological dots.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:12 and the experiences of the Psalmists are consistently used to justify the action to pray daily for the forgiveness of sins (Cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 514). Such usage of the aforementioned passages is a misuse of the text against the larger context both biblically and systematically. His treatment of daily confession and forgiveness is a typical presentation of the material. It is scripturally unsubstantiated and theologically illogically. *Ibid.*, 514, 515.

<sup>12</sup> George, *Faith that Pleases God*, 112.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> “This text is a theological conundrum: It could be treated as purpose, result, or purpose-result.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 474.

<sup>15</sup> George, *Faith that Pleases*, 102

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>17</sup> For a thorough study of the subjunctive mood and its complexity in the Greek text see further, Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 461.

<sup>18</sup> Donald w. Burdick, *The Epistles of John*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), 23.

<sup>19</sup> Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1938), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Robertson’s Word Picture.

<sup>21</sup> Brooks and Winbery, 164.

<sup>22</sup> Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Epistles of John*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 34).

<sup>24</sup> Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar*, 248, 249

<sup>25</sup> Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 126.

<sup>26</sup> John Gill