

HOW GOD KEEPS THE CHRISTIAN SAVED

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(from a sermon delivered orally in 1986)

...it is set out plainly and clearly what those conditions are. But I'm equally sure, very, very sure that we do not preach nearly enough—not nearly enough—on how God keeps the Christian saved. For it is just as important for those of us who are his children to comply with the conditions that are applicable to us as it is for the alien sinner to obey the gospel. By which I mean this: those duties that are ours as Christians stand between us and heaven just as much so as do faith, repentance, confession and baptism in water, between the alien sinner and the forgiveness of his sins.

That all of us, even the very best of us, need such forgiveness, we're surely well aware. We have the painful consciousness of it in our own hearts. We're mindful of the fact that we fall short of our duty; do not measure up to the standard that our Lord has erected, and the Bible so teaches. We read for example in 1 John 1:8, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves"* and in the same context if we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar. Those passages teach that one adds sin to sin in denying sin in life. That is, it's a sin for you to claim that you don't sin. You sin in the very denial of saying it. The further fact that the Lord has made provision for us when we do sin shows our great need for it. We read for example in 1 John 2:1, *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not."* That's an admonition against sinning. That's instruction to us to avoid it to the extent of our ability. But then the verse continues, *"if any man sin, he has an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."* And the second time that that verb "sin" appears in that passage it is in a construction that means a sinful life. What that passage says is, in fact, "I want to encourage you against a sinful life, but in the event that you are guilty of an isolated act (and I would insert parenthetically there that that would not be by intent or premeditation but growing out of our ignorance and our weakness), He says we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. That sets out the fact that our Lord is our advocate. The word advocate there interestingly translates the Greek word that means about the same as we mean by the English words, "lawyer, attorney." It is, as you know, the function of a lawyer to plead your case, argue in your defense. This passage presents Christ as our heavenly lawyer there pleading our case, not on our merit, but on His. Now having seen friends that, number one, our need for such provision and God's recognition of that need and provision for it, let's take a look at what that system is. I must tell you, I don't think there are more wonderful matters taught. If I were asked to designate what gives me more comfort than any other one thing taught in the Bible, it would be this principle. I hope it will speak to your hearts

today as it does to mine. Listen very carefully.

In 1 John chapter 1, beginning with verse 7 we read, “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Now listen to it again, very, very carefully preliminary to its analysis. “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.” Now watch it carefully. “*If*”—there is the condition. “*We walk*”—there is the manner of conduct. “*In the light*”—there is the sphere of the conduct. “*As he is in the light*”—that is the standard of conduct. “*We have fellowship one with another*”—that is a result of the blessing. “*And the blood of Jesus Christ*”—that’s the agent. “*Cleanseth us*”—the action contemplated—“*from all sin*”—the subject under consideration.

Let’s look at it a little closer. “*If we walk...*” Walking in the Bible is a very common figure for Christianity, and it is a very fitting one because walking suggests an unwearied approach to a goal. That’s exactly what Christianity is—it’s a walk from earth to heaven. And the goal is eternal life. But that walk is circumscribed; it is not just anywhere, everywhere, it’s in the light. Light is a synonym for truth as its opposite, darkness, symbolizes error. To walk in the light is to live by the truth! What results for those who thus do? The blood cleanses. Here the cleansing power of water is metaphorically transferred to blood. Because our Lord died in our stead, because he accomplished an atonement on our behalf, His blood is said to wash our sins away. Now had John here intended to look at the atonement as an overall event with all of the blessings remote at Calvary, he would have put the verb in that passage in a construction in the Greek text known as the aorist tense—a single act. But it is not in that tense, it is in the present. The Greek present is linear or continuous action. As a matter of fact it has the same significance as the older English progressive present. The force of that statement is: **the blood keeps on cleansing**. That is, it’s an ever-present process. That if we walk in the light the blood cleanses. If we keep on walking in the light, the blood keeps on cleansing. Now having seen the principle involved, let us take a look at some of the wonderful propositions that rest on it. Number one, that teaches us that the faithful child of God is not condemned. Did you notice that I said “faithful child of God?” You do not understand these remarks to apply to apostate—they won’t. You will not understand me to be talking about people that deliberately pursue a course of sin—I am not! I’m talking about people just like us who want to go to heaven, who are trying to go to heaven, but who because of our weaknesses and frailties, imperfections and ignorance, and often times down right stupidity, make mistakes along the way. What is our first proposition? The faithful child of God is not condemned. Listen carefully now. Romans the eighth chapter, verse one, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not

after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” What? There is therefore now no condemnation—to everybody, everywhere? Oh no. Look at those limiting phrases. There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus. To everybody in Christ Jesus? Not necessarily, because sometimes people in the body of the Christ—the church—deliberately pursue a course of sin and fall. Well what then? “There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.” Look at the similarity in Paul’s condition and John’s. What was John’s condition? Who would walk in the light as Christ is in the light? What is Paul’s condition? Who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. What do those statements mean? Exactly the same. One is a comment on the other, and both of them mean to live as best you can by his word. So the faithful child of God is not condemned.

Secondly, the reason the faithful child of God is not condemned, God does not impute to him sin. The word impute often appears in the New Testament and Old. It means to “charge to account, to put to one’s credit, to chalk up against.” Thus when we say that there is a person to whom the Lord does not impute sin, we are simply saying that it is possible to be in a relationship to God where he cancels sin out, keeping us justified. Here is a passage of scripture—if you haven’t already done so—please, before this day ends, make it a point to memorize it. It will immeasurably enrich your lives. It is found in Romans chapter 4 and verse 8, “*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord doth not impute sin.*” Isn’t that a magnificent utterance? Under consideration here is a person said to be in a happy, fortunate state. Why is it that he is so greatly blessed? God does not impute sin to him. Why does the Lord impute men to charge to account? Here it is a person to whose account God doesn’t place it. Why? Because he is in a relationship to God—because He cancels it out. What is that relationship? We see as he walks in the light the blood cleanses. If we keep on walking in the light the blood keeps on cleansing. This illustration, crude though it is, I sometimes use to indicate that principle. You start out in your automobile on a rainy day, and it is necessary to turn your windshield wipers on. You don’t sit there and operate them manually—at least you don’t anymore. Perhaps there are a few in this audience today who can remember that the windshield wiper was a manually operated thing. Go down the road driving your car working your windshield wiper by hand. We don’t do that anymore. We set in operation a process that keeps them going. These passages teach us that the Lord for his faithful people sets in operation a process by which he keeps them continually cleansed. What is that process? As we walk in the light—by which it is meant as we live by his word to the extent of our ability—the blood cleanses. If we walk in the light, it cleanses; if we keep on walking, it keeps on cleansing.

Now let’s take a look at some of the wonderful implications that flow out of the blessed promise. Number one. That teaches us that there isn’t any proper place for a sense of guilt or a consciousness of remorse

on the part of the faithful Christian. I know that we all need that lesson. My observation is the harder you try to live right the more aware of your failure to do so. The best people are always the most sensitive people, and the reason is there is always such a great difference between the perfect standard and our own feeble and inadequate efforts that the contemplation of that difference tends to set up a sense of guilt. We must not let that happen. That is where the cleansing power of the blood takes over and thus enable us to meet his standard in a way we couldn't otherwise. The failure to recognize that principle leads people into confusion regarding their own status before God. Now you surely are aware, at least you ought to be, you could be dead in about the next five or six seconds. There will be a time when but five or six seconds remain. What will be your relationship to God at that moment, and on what basis? It is very unlikely—very unlikely, that when that moment comes you will be engaged in religious activity. Have you ever thought about how few people die at church? That has on rare occasions happened, not very often. I never saw it happen. I have preached more I think it's safe to say than any man living in the churches of Christ today. For thirty years I held meetings continuously January through December, and I have continued to preach all over the United States on weekend meetings. I never saw a person die in a religious service. I take that to be a rather strong argument why you ought to be back here tonight. I can't promise you that you won't die in a hospital, or home, or in an automobile. Likely, you will die in one of those three places. In a hospital, a home, or an automobile. Not likely—not likely that you will die in church, but die you will. When that moment comes, what will be your claim upon the Lord's mercy, and on what basis? The answer is in the principle that we are discussing today, if you walk in the light, the blood cleanses. If you keep on walking in the light, the blood keeps on cleansing. The failure to recognize that principle leads people into error regarding the relationship of confession and prayer to forgiveness. I haven't heard it in these parts, but I sometimes hear it indicated over the line that one must specifically catalog every sin of which he is guilty and make specific mention thereof to God in order to be forgiven. Why I am certain that is not so. I am sure that if that were so, none of us would ever get to heaven. For granting that we can and must (and you watch this distinction—it is a vital one) catalog those sins of which we are guilty and of which we are aware, and confess them. A sin known only to God should be confessed only to God and nobody else. Certainly not to a so-called prayer partner. A sin known only to one or few should be confessed to the one or the few as the case may be. A public sin, confess before the church, of course the book so teaches. What about that vast area sin, that vast area sin of which we are all guilty and we don't even know we did? How can you confess a sin that you don't know you committed? For us to be able to confess every sin of which we are guilty we would have to know the Bible perfectly. We would have to know as

much as God knows on that hypothesis, because if there are any error of information that we didn't know it might be duties and responsibilities in that area that we are violating. It is that area specially the marvelous truth of this lesson applies.

I have been impressed in recent years of the inability of people to make confession before death. As I indicated I preached a great deal. It has not in the past been unheard of thing for me to meet a brother or sister, the outset of a meeting, shake hands with them regularly around the building a day or two, observe about them no hint of any indication of the likelihood of sudden demise. And yet, before the meeting is over I either preach or attend their funeral. Death to some people comes slowly; they will linger for days, weeks in full realization that they will never be well again. Others are alive and well today and dead tomorrow. Not even a warning, without even an opportunity to breathe a prayer for forgiveness, and to commit one's soul into the hands of the Lord. You get it friends. For the faithful Christian, it doesn't make one particle of difference which way the going is. The reason being, that the blood keeps on cleansing—cleanses those who walk in the light, keeps on cleansing those who keep on walking in the light. Failure to recognize that principle leads people into a restricted concept of the extent of God's grace.

I sat in a Bible class one time in the state of Arkansas during a meeting that I was conducting there. The brother teaching the class was about middle age, class of middle aged people, was taking the position in spite of and despite the fact they did the best they could they still might not be able to make it to heaven. To my amazement, a number in that class agreed. Well, that is a reflection on the grace of God. That insinuates that He offers the salvation that puts it out there a little bit beyond our ability to reach. A fellow in a Louisiana town once said to me that he was convinced there would be fewer people saved next time than were saved from the flood in the ark. That about eliminates us all. Being on that occasion only eight souls saved in the ark and that good brother didn't tell me who he thought the other seven are. I am certain that he thought that he was in the crowd. Why I think that ridiculous. I like to ponder the picture that is so vividly drawn for us in the earlier chapters of Revelation 4, 5, 6 and 7. Of the ancient of days, the God of heaven, who sits in inexpressible splendor on the throne of His glory, at his feet are the four living creatures, beyond them the twenty and four elders, beyond them the hundred and forty and four thousand, and out beyond them in a vast mighty semi-circle, a multitude which no man can number. How many? A multitude which no man can number. Well, who are they? Are they people who have lived perfect lives? No, none of us can live perfect lives. Who are they then? Listen to what the text says: *"These are those who have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb."*

How we should rejoice friends that there is a fountain filled with

blood drawn from Immanuel's veins where sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains. That concept often expressed in sermon and song finds origin not only in this passage, but in a beautiful picture drawn for us by the prophet Zechariah chapters 12, 13, and 14 where he tells us about a fountain open in Jerusalem with a stream flowing to the former and the hinder sea. Now, Imagine a bubbling fountain—see a stream flowing from it in two directions. The fountain represents the pouring out of our Lord's blood at Calvary. The stream backward: the provision made for the saints who died in triumphs of faith under former dispensations. The stream forward: the provision made for us in this the Christian age.

Sometimes people postpone obedience of the gospel on the ground they are afraid that they can't live good enough. Why friends, if we could live good enough we wouldn't need any plan at all. It's because we can't live good enough that we have to have a plan. Because, if we were able to live good enough, we could stand in his presence and claim deliverance on the basis of our own worth and merit. It is because we can't live good enough that we have to have a plan. I tell you frankly, I am unable to fathom the thinking of a person of even ordinary intelligence who wouldn't want to embrace that plan immediately.

If I were able to come into your community as a salesman, and I had a product and you knew it was a reliable product, in which you wouldn't ever get any older and you wouldn't be sick again, you would never have any financial problems, but ever thereafter your life would be unattended by difficulty—a rosy and happy one—would you say to me today, “Oh it is a great plan, certainly, and down the line somewhere I intend to accept it, but I am not interested in it today”? Well every one of you would rush forward this morning and want to sign up right now. I can't offer you that kind of a plan materialistically speaking, but I am offering you one that is infinitely better. One that has to do, not with a few years of material happiness and well-being here, but one throughout eternity. And the fact that there will probably be those in this audience today who will leave here without it shows what a grip the devil has on some of us. Friends don't let him do that to you.

Act in your own interest and throw off that yoke and claim this marvelous blessing today. And you claim it only if you're obedient to the Lord's commandments. If you're not a Christian you don't have access to it. If you have obeyed the gospel, but are not living right, you still don't have access to it. We're talking about those who walk in the light. Who live as best as they can by His word and are then able to claim continuous cleansing power of the blood of His son. If you are here today and haven't obeyed the gospel? To be a Christian you must believe and repent of your sins, upon confession of faith be baptized into Christ. If you have done this but have wandered, won't you in penitence today return as together we stand and sing?