

IS IT AUTOMATIC?

July 28, 2013

The apostle John said, “But 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” (1 Jn. 1:7). Once a person becomes a Christian, are they “automatically” cleansed of the sins they commit? Before this can be properly answered, we need to understand what the verse tells us. God is light and in Him is no darkness; if we desire to have fellowship with Him and His people, we, too, must be in the light. Once those parameters are met, then His blood will continually cleanse us from all sin.

However, the apostle didn’t stop there concerning how one is cleansed by the blood of Jesus. He also said, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:8-10). The Holy Spirit, through the pen of John, intended for the audience to understand that forgiveness of sins requires something on the part of the forgiven. Brother Guy N. Woods understood the words of John perfectly and commented, “The recognition and confession of sin is a prerequisite to our approval before God. To refuse such recognition and confession is simply to deceive ourselves and to demonstrate the fact that the truth is not in us,” and “Happily we have the assurance that the blood of Jesus his Son keeps on cleansing us from all sins’ (1 John 1:7) as we conform to the conditions on which such depends” (Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John and Jude* (Nashville, Tennessee: Gospel Advocate Co., 1957), p. 218, 220.).

There is no doubt that God will forgive any person of any sin and that there is no sin that God cannot forgive, as long as it is confessed. If one does not have to confess sin and ask God for forgiveness, then there is a contradiction, not only in the Bible, but within John’s letter. He also said, “If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death” (1 Jn. 5:16-17). If one is automatically forgiven of sin, then why would John tell us to pray for that sin? Also, James said, “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” (Js. 5:16). According to James’ statement, if forgiveness is automatic, then we would have to do something toward “one to another” that we would not have to do toward God in order to gain His forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not an automatic occurrence, but takes place when a person confesses his sin and asks God to forgive him. The only sin that God will not forgive is the sin that is not repented of and confessed; that is what John was referring to in 1 Jn. 5:16. It is of the utmost importance to remember that it is sin that separates one from God (Psa. 66:18; Isa. 59:1-2). However, it is not the sin that is repented of and confessed that keeps one away from God. If one chooses to walk in the light, he will immediately address the sin in his life and repent of it, and by doing that, the blood of Jesus continually cleanses that person of sin.