

GOD IS MY FATHER

I John 1:3 - 2:2

vs. 7 If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus Christ is steadily cleansing us from all sin.

Michael Faraday, the distinguished scientist, was asked by some of his students as he neared death, "What are your speculations now?" "Speculations," he replied, "I have none. I am resting on certainties!" Then he continued, "For I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day!"

I remember one Sunday many years ago, when the worship hour was over on Sunday morning and I was greeting people at the door. As this one person shook my hand he said, "Preacher, I have a question for you. I've enjoyed the worship and the fellowship, and I've heard a good sermon and been around the Lord's table. Now suppose tomorrow during the day I commit some sin. And suppose on the way home from work I am in a wreck and I'm killed - before I've prayed and asked forgiveness. Am I saved or am I lost?" I wanted to give him an answer on the spot - but quickly realized I could not do that. So I asked him to give me some time and promised that I would get back to him with an answer. It took me about a year. Because as I began to ponder his question, I realized that I had never answered it for myself. And I have discovered since that there are lots of Christians who have not found the right answer to that question.

I ultimately found my answer one morning during my devotions as I was reading I John. Suddenly it was like the window blind flew up and the light shone in and I saw something I think I had never seen before! I'll get back to that in a little while,

I think, for the most part, that from our pulpits we have not preached the **Grace of God** nearly as much as we should have.

I. Misconception of sin and pardon

In the process of trying to answer this man's question, I went back and re-examined my own faith. I'm very thankful for a Christian Mom and Dad - and Christian grandparents. I'm thankful for the little country church where I grew up - and my Sunday School teachers - and the preachers who came - usually student preachers from Kentucky Christian College. And I am thankful for the day that I accepted Christ and was baptized.

As I retraced my steps as best I could, I remembered that as a child I had pictured in my mind an imaginary chalkboard. I tried to keep score with God. When I would do something wrong, commit a sin, I would put up a mark on the left side. And when I would do something that was good, that I thought pleased God, I would put up a mark on the right side. My goal was to try to keep more marks on the right side than on the left.

Then came the day that I became a Christian. That was a very happy day! I believed then, as I do now, that when I was baptized, Jesus washed my sins away! It was like He took the eraser - and wiped the chalkboard completely clean!

As an adult, looking back on my experience, I realized that while I understood that Jesus had taken care of my previous sins, I kept on keeping score - except I changed my method of keeping the books. After I was baptized, I still used that imaginary chalkboard. I still put up a mark for each sin on the left side. And then I would cross them off one by one as I repented and confessed them and asked for forgiveness. Now, at first glance you may say, "Preacher, that sounds like a pretty good method!" But let me hasten to tell you - the sheer record keeping would be an impossibility! You say, "Preacher, do you think I sin a lot?" I want you to just get the picture here, if you will. All of us probably understand that sin is disobedience toward God. We know there are some things that are absolutely wrong - and when we do those things we sin. For instance, lust is sin. When you catch yourself taking the second look - or the third - you know you have sinned. Swearing is forbidden - 'out of the same mouth should not come bitter water and sweet' - so when your language is ugly - you know you have sinned. Falsehood is wrong - so when you tell a lie - you sin. I would suggest that in the best of us that there are numerous occasions of sin - and the record keeping would be almost impossible. Now add to that the understanding of the Greek word *hamartia* - it means 'missing the mark'. God created you for good! He aimed you for the 'bulls eye' of the target of perfection. Anytime you veer off that path you are missing the mark - it is *hamartia* - sin. James writes "If you know to do good - and do it not - it is sin!" Try to keep track of that! If you try to keep track of all the things you should NOT DO that you DO - and all of the things that you should DO that you DO NOT DO - all you will have time for is sinning and keeping track of it!

I discovered much to my dismay - that I was trying to manage my relationship with God in that fashion. I would mark down my sin - and then cross it off as I prayed about it. The result of that kind of spiritual record keeping can result only in frustration. You just bounce back and forth between being saved and being lost! I come to church - I pray - I meet around the Lord's table - I hear the Word - I feel saved! I go home - maybe even before Sunday is over - I have sinned - I'm lost! I pray - I'm saved! I sin again - I'm lost! I have said before - more seriously that facetiously - I hope Jesus comes back on Sunday! Suppose that when I become aware that I have sinned that I say, "Now when I get home tonight I must pray and ask God to forgive me." And suppose I get distracted and forget to pray? I hate to think that my eternal salvation is hanging on the thin thread of my forgetfulness! I do not believe that God is imposing on us some exacting accounting system whereby one sin I might forget to pray about - or pray about too late - is going to send me to hell.

I can imagine that a person living under such a concept of sin and forgiveness can know nothing but dread and fear interspersed with only brief moments of feeling O.K. with God! In contrast - Paul says that we are to enjoy "Peace with God!" (Romans 5:1)

II. What baptism does

As I pondered this question, "Am I saved or am I lost?" I went back to discover what happened in my life when I was baptized. Study this with me.

A. Baptism brings us into contact with the cleansing blood of Christ. Do you believe that the person who has come to Christ has received the remission of sins? Acts 2:38 says "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sin." Somewhere we have read the word 'past' into that passage - but it is not there.

I mentioned earlier about a wonderful discovery I made while reading I John 1. Let me share that with you. Verse 7 says, "If we walk in the light - as He is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin." The exciting insight came when the commentator pointed out that the word 'cleanses' here - in the Greek - is in the perfect tense - it is not a point action - a one time thing. The Greek tense properly translated means that the cleansing action began - and keeps on and on. So we ought to read it, "The blood of Christ is steadily, constantly cleansing me from all sin."

So I ask you "repent and be baptized for (WHAT) sins?" ALL of them! ...the sins of a lifetime! Past - present - (hold on now!) and future! When I came to Jesus, I came not so much bringing Him a list of sins - as I came bringing my sinful self, not only with its record of sin - but with my weaknesses and my tendency towards sin - and I ask Him to clean me up and keep me clean!

I found this so exciting! I pursued it a step further. Since God designed the blood atonement - and since God created this body of ours with its circulation system, I decided to study what the blood does in our bodies. I ask a Doctor friend of mine to describe it to me. He told me that the blood in our bodies basically does two things. First, it cleanses away the impurities. As our bodies function we use energy - which produces waste. And we wear out cells - which also produces waste. So inside our bodies there is this waste which must be carried away. Along comes the blood and picks up the waste and carries it away to the organs that process it so that our bodies are cleansed of the waste. The blood flowing thru our veins cleanses our bodies. That has to happen on a continual basis! We all know what happens when the blood is not allowed to properly function. The waste all 'piles up' and gangrene sets in! The blood cleanses us! When does this cleansing take place in our bodies? ...as soon as the impurity appears. When does the blood of Jesus cleanse away my sin? I think He does it as soon as the sin appears.

Secondly, my Doctor friend pointed out that the blood carries the life giving resources to the body - new energy to be used - and new building materials to build new cells. The blood brings new life!

Now catch this! In our spiritual life - the blood does the same things: It cleanses us - and it brings new life. When I was baptized, it was like I got a transfusion - the blood of Jesus started flowing in my spiritual self - and it began its cleansing process - and it keeps right on flowing - keeping me clean. And it brings new life!

B. Baptism ushers us into the Kingdom of light.

There are two ways we can easily grasp this.

First, light is symbolic of the holiness of God - and likewise of the holiness with which our lives are to be lived. When Moses was up on the mountain, he saw the 'shekinah' presence of God. So bright was it that when Moses came down he still glowed from being near God. "Light" is a description of the realm in which the Christian is to live when he rises from baptism to walk in newness of life. To walk in the light is to strive to copy the character of God in our daily lives.

Second, to 'walk in the light' is to be able to see where we are going. All of us have probably had the experience of trying to walk in the dark - and running into things we could not see - or missing our step - maybe even falling. Light enables us to see so we can walk with confidence.

But 'walking in the light' is not to say that I no longer sin. In fact, if you examine this text, you will clearly notice that it is those who are walking in the light who are promised the cleansing of Jesus' blood. The inference is unmistakable. It is those who are walking in the light - who are in need of the cleansing.

Sometimes we fall - right in the daylight. It may be a moment of inattention - or haste - or carelessness - and we're down. Not because we could not see. The same thing can happen spiritually. While we are striving to walk in the light - we can stumble. Some Christians have taken a worse stumble after their baptism than before! This verse promises that those who are striving to walk in the light are constantly cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

(Summary to here)

When I became a Christian, I came into contact with the cleansing blood of Jesus
I began walking in the light - and

C. When I became a Christian I became God's Child. Turn a page or two and read what John wrote in Chapter 3 verse 1 - "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God - and such indeed we are!"

In Galatians 4 verses 4-7 we read:

- 4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,
- 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.
- 6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."
- 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

When I accepted Christ, God became my Father - and I became His child! God is my Father! I think I understand something of this Father-child relationship.

III. God is my Father!

First of all, as a child, I know how important it is to know my father and mother love me. As a father, I know the joy of loving my children.

As a child, I remember how happy I was when my parents gave me gifts. As a parent - I experienced that it is more blessed to give than receive! I also learned on occasion what it was like to give - and not to hear a 'Thank You!'

As a parent, I found out that children do not always obey. And sometimes I had to exercise discipline. As a child, sometimes I disobeyed - and had to be punished!

I cannot conceive of one of my children doing something for which I would kick them out of my family!

My Bible tells me that God is able to be a better father than I can be.

I grew up on the farm. My Dad worked 5 days a week as a Soil Conservationist. At night - and on Saturdays we farmed. As a youngster, I knew that after I got home from school, I had chores to do. And I knew that about 5:30, Daddy would be home. I loved basketball - and had a hoop up at the barn. Sometimes I would get to playing basketball - and not stop to do my chores. I can still remember the feeling I had when I would see Daddy's car coming around the bend - and it suddenly dawned on me that I had not done my chores. I can still remember sitting down at the supper table and eating with my face in my plate. Now notice - I was still under Daddy's roof - still eating at his table - but I did not want to look up and let his eye catch mine - and hear him asked, "Son, have you done your chores?"

He was still my father - I was still his son - but our fellowship was interrupted - by my disobedience.

Here is what I want you to catch.. After I become a Christian, what happens when I sin?
MY SIN INTERRUPTS MY FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, BUT IT DOES NOT BREAK MY RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM!

Since my heart cannot bear to be out of fellowship with Him, I penitently pray that our fellowship will be restored. This lifts Christian living and the plea for pardon to a higher plane! My prayer might sound something like this:

"Dear God, I am so sorry for my sin. Thank you for holding on to me - even in my waywardness - and thank you for keeping me clean from every sin. I know that we have been out of fellowship - and that is my fault. Lord, I long for us to enjoy again the wonderful fellowship which you make possible. Please restore the joy of our kinship In Jesus name, Amen"

Because He regards me as a child - I respect Him as my father - and strive to be an obedient son. There is no relationship known to us that conveys that kind of security! I can indeed enjoy 'Peace with God!'

I have heard some people say, "Lucian, aren't you opening the door for people to just live like they want to and sin?" and my answer is "definitely not!"

When I know God as my father- I will be a lot more careful about breaking His heart than I would be about breaking his law!

One final note. You may be saying, "Preacher, that sounds very wonderful! But are you saying that once a person is saved, they can never be lost?"

Let me answer that this way. A child can decide to turn his back on his family - and reject them - and move out - and all the love in the world may not be able to keep them from going. The child can break the relationship!

And a person can 'move out' on God. He or she can choose to turn their back on God and renounce Christ - and break the relationship. And all of God's love cannot keep them from going - and they can be lost - eternally!

But I want you to see today that there is a vast difference between a deliberate decision to renounce Jesus Christ - and stumbling in sin while you are striving to walk in the light

vs. 7 If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus Christ is steadily cleansing us from all sin.

I preached this sermon several years ago in Center Christian Church, Mays, Indiana. After the service I stayed up at the front - and folks were coming to speak to me. A little lady in her 90's stepped up and took my hand. I can still remember how her small hand felt in mine. Her skin was soft like an elderly person's skin is. She looked up - and when her eyes met mine she said with a smile, "Thank you! I've been waiting on that sermon. Now I'm ready!" I knew what she meant!

Are you ready?