

Thus, if sin-cleansing by the blood of Jesus is assumed to be only going on, it would falsify the same John's language in Rev. 1:5, where we are said to be already washed by His blood, and this comes out more strikingly in any exact rendering, like Dean Alford's version:

Unto him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in his blood.

His love is constant, but the washing, or loosing, us from our sins is set forth by a participle of that tense which expresses an action simply past, excluding duration. John could have used no such form, if we had to come before God for daily cleansing by the blood of Jesus; for in this case it would be correct to employ, not the aorist, but the imperfect tense, which precisely expresses a continued, or repeated, action.

How, then, did the apostle use the present? Was there laxity in his expression, when he said,

The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from every sin? {1 John 1:7}.

On the contrary, the tense is just as exact in 1 John 1:7, as his use of distinctive participles in Rev. 1:5. A little learning is proverbially dangerous; and in the exegesis of scripture voluminous commentators are apt to go astray, no less than their followers. But to give an opinion on such a question hardly becomes people ignorant of the fact, that the present in Greek, as in most languages, is in no way limited to an incomplete action yet in course of performance; for it no less correctly expresses an absolute present, as in general propositions, doctrinal statements, apothegms, and descriptions of manners, customs, or matters of frequent occurrence. Just so, in English, we say, "Food nourishes the human body; poison kills." The idea intended is not the continuance of the act, but the quality of each material, or their opposite effects on man. Almost every chapter in the epistles furnishes instances. Take a plain and kindred statement from 1 John 2:2:

He is the propitiation for our sins.

Does the present here mean that He is actually now atoning for our sins? Clearly not; such an interpretation

of the present would incontrovertibly overthrow the atonement. It is here evidently used in its absolute sense, without reference to any definite moment, for expressing the great and blessed truth of His propitiation. Just so in our text the notion of continuous cleansing would distinctly contradict the grand doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and of the gospel in general. It is therefore the gravest error.

Further, it is inexcusable ignorance to assume that the present tense must be so taken; for the present may convey an absolute or abstract statement, and not continuance only. Let the reader take the Epistle of James, or the Book of Proverbs, and observe how often the absolute present occurs in every chapter. The same thing will be found in Paul's epistles, and especially in John. The sense and the context must decide which is meant in each case; and the selfsame principle applies to every book which lays down general maxims as truly as to the Bible.

Let us, then, look yet more closely into the verse and its surroundings. The apostle treats (not, as in Hebrews, of our access to God as worshipers once purged, having no more conscience of sins {Heb. 10:2}, but) of fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ, in virtue of the eternal life fully manifested and reported. But there is a solemn message, as well as a joy-giving manifestation: not only is the Son seen and heard, and the revelation written for others, but God is made known as light, and in Him no darkness at all {1 John 1:5}; so that those who pretend to fellowship with Him, while walking in darkness {1 John 1:6}, lie, and do not practice the truth. Gnosticism was then at work, soon to advance to still deeper impiety. It is not a question of saints more or less consistent, of failing Christians exhorted or corrected, but of false men contrasted with true believers, for profit and warning. But if (and here he introduces the true) we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus cleanseth from every sin {1 John 1:9}. He is contrasting the believer, not only with Gentile or Jew, but with the spurious class of professors of Christ

then spreading. The Christian is not like the Gentiles, walking in the vanity of their mind, darkened in understanding, estranged from the life of God, on account of the ignorance which is in them {Eph. 4:18}; nor is he like the Jews, walking at best outside the sanctuary, where God hid Himself behind a veil. Jew or Gentile once, the Christian owns and follows Christ, the light of the world, and consequently walks not in darkness, but has the light of life {John 8:12}. There we walk, no longer in uncertainty, but in the true knowledge of God as He is revealed in Christ.

In Eph. 4 we are exhorted to walk *as* children of light (that is, according to it), being now no longer darkness, but light in the Lord. Here this is not yet the question, though it follows at great length in chs. 2 and 3. The apostle is distinguishing the true from the false, and lays down, that if we walk (not according to, but) in the light {1 John 1:7}, if we walk no longer as men in the dark but as Christians in the light of God fully revealed to our souls in Christ, we have fellowship one with another, we are brought into common thoughts and affections, joys and sorrows, as saints, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us completely. No otherwise could we stand in that light, or enjoy this fellowship. It is not a mere momentary emotion, but the standing of Christians contemplated in this threefold way: walking in the light, mutual fellowship, and cleansing by the blood of Jesus. These are blessed privileges, every one, yet do they involve the gravest responsibility. It is no question of practical measure; for how could such as we experimentally be said to walk there as God is in the light? But if grace has brought us into the light to walk there, as He is in the light, in no partial revelation but the fullest of God's nature, all is plain. Christ once suffered for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God; and now in Him we, who once were afar off, are made nigh by His blood {Eph. 2:13}. Peter and Paul perfectly harmonize with John.

There *is* provision for failure, but this is in ch. 2:1, as in John 13. There is fresh application, not of blood which abides shed once for all in ever efficacious value,

but of water, figure of the word applied by the Spirit, in answer to Christ's advocacy with the Father.

He that is washed (λελουμένος) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit {John 13:10}.

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you {John 15:3}.

So more generally Christ gave Himself for the church, that He might sanctify, having cleansed it with the washing of water by the word {Eph. 5:26}. *No one* holds so mean and shallow a view as that this means, by reading of the scriptures, but by the Spirit's applying the word to the conscience, both at conversion and all through the Christian's course. It is not true, as Alford says, that the word translated "washing" means "laver" or "bath" (which would be λουτήρ), but "bathing," and hence the water used, *not* the vessel which contained it, ἐν ᾧ characterizing it as effected by the word, and not ritual or ceremonial as in Judaism. To read the scriptures is all well; but this goes far more deeply to the Lord's application of His word to convict, or otherwise deal with the soul, as we may see in Peter's case (Luke 22:61). But there is no such thought in 1 John 1:7, which ought in that case to read, "If we do *not* walk in the light . . . the blood cleanseth"; just the opposite of what the apostle says and means.

This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ {1 John 5:6}.

For repetition in washing with water the feet apt to be defiled here below, scripture leaves ample room; repeated application of Christ's blood is unknown to God's word, though common enough in Christendom -- another gospel, which is not another.

We have seen, then, that continuous cleansing by blood cannot be meant, not merely because it has no just sense in itself, but because it opposes other scriptures which treat the effect on the Christian as complete. Scripture cannot be broken. Repeated application of Christ's blood the word does not countenance anywhere else, even if the word here implied it, which it does not. It remains, therefore, that

we must fall back on the only possible sense of the present here open to us, namely, that the apostle states, in an absolute way, the cleansing of believers by the blood of Jesus, expressed (as it regularly is in such propositions) in the present, but abstractedly, without reference to time past, present, or future, as one of the main characteristics of their place or standing. Hence it is no question of this or that sin, when confessed: His blood cleanseth from every sin. Details are not before us, nor restoration after failure. It is the proper and full value of His blood. Consequently, if it were the design of the Holy Spirit to reveal this absolutely, the present tense was the one exactly suited to the apostle's hand, as we see it now before us. The effort to limit, or even apply, the expression "cleanseth," to the *continuous* force of the present, is therefore mere ignorance, or worse. The doctrine of the clause, the context, and scripture in general, declare unitedly and unequivocally for the absolute (or, as some less correctly term it, the emphatic) usage of the present in the closing verb of 1 John 1:7.

W. Kelly, *The Bible Treasury* 12:239, 240.

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## ***Query: Is There is a Present Process of Cleansing by Blood? (1 John 1:7)***

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Q. 1 John 1:7. Is it true that the last clause of this verse teaches us that the blood of Jesus *cleanseth* the sins of believers as a present process (that is, is actually cleansing)?

A. It is always a serious thing when an effort is made, on grammatical grounds, to overthrow a plainly revealed truth of the gospel. Now, there is not a single fact more certain than that in Christ we *have* redemption through Christ's blood, the forgiveness of sins or offences (Eph. 1; Col. 1). So, in the next chapter of our epistle, John writes to the entire family of God, "Because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." In Rom. 5 we are said to be justified in virtue of Christ's blood, and reconciled by His death; in Hebrews, sanctified by the offering of His body once for all; yea, more, perfected by it for ever (εις τὸ διηκεῖς), for unbroken continuance {Heb. 10:10-12}. But why heap together scriptures so familiar and precious to the youngest Christian? To represent the cleansing of the believer by the Savior's blood as a continuous act, and therefore incomplete, is to dishonor the efficacy of His work, and to weaken the ground of that peace which He is declared to have made by the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20). How manifest it is that a false interpretation not only introduces an error, but sets one scripture against another -- the surest way to discredit all.