

Excerpts from *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, and a few other items

“Scripture Quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,
1975, 1977, by the Lockman Foundation
Used by permission.” (www.Lockman.org)

Some Key Verses that Deal with Holiness and Victory Over Sin

(The comments in brackets are mine.)

**“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?...
...knowing this that our old self [man] was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. ... Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ... For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace [the powerful saving grace of God in Christ]. ... But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart [which is what saving faith is all about] to that form of teaching [to the Gospel, with its strong emphasis on the enablement and requirement for Christians to live in the righteousness and holiness of God] to which you were committed [or “delivered over”; we were spiritually dead slaves of sin, but when we become Christians we are delivered over to become slaves of God and His righteousness, which is good, very good] and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. And He Himself bore our sins [with the guilt and the penalties, very much including the major penalties of spiritual death and bondage to sin, not to mention the penalty of hell] in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.... Rom. 6:1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 14, 17, 18; 1 Pet. 2:24 NASB**

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh [Man in the flesh, without the Holy Spirit, cannot keep God’s Law], God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ... and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. ... So then brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh [in sin], you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body [To put to death the deeds of the body means to stop doing the sinful works of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:19-21)], you will live. For all who

are being led by the Spirit of God [We are led (and enabled) by the Spirit of God to put to death the sinful deeds/works of the flesh and to live for God in His righteousness and holiness], ***these are the sons of God***. And **But I say, walk by** [or, “in” or “after”] **the Spirit, and you will not carry out the** [sinful] ***desire of the flesh*** [of the old man].” Rom. 8:2-4, 8, 9, 12-14; Gal. 5:16 NASB

A few Comments by Karl Kemp

I strongly believe in the relevance and accuracy of my books (and papers), but I realize that some Christians do not agree with the viewpoints I express, and I realize that my books are not as easy to read as some books, in that my books are written more like Bible commentaries, and are packed with detailed information. They are intended for serious students of the Scriptures. This website allows me to include enough excerpts so that a person can adequately evaluate my books before purchasing them. I dislike the idea of people buying books they will not appreciate. (I have done that many times.)

We desperately need to rightly divide God’s Word and then cling (in faith) to the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches. We need to believe the truth and live the truth (by God’s grace in Christ through faith). I have observed over the years that many Christians are not doing much seeking for the balanced truth because they assume that what they believe is the balanced truth already. But we can’t all be right when we differ with other Christians. We need to humble ourselves before God and seek Him for the balanced truth. My desire and prayer is that this teaching will prove to be a great blessing to many. May the name of God (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) be glorified and His will be done!

A listing of the excerpts from *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* that are included below:

Copyright page (this material is copyrighted), Contents, Preface, Introduction, and a lengthy section titled “A Discussion of the Three Most Important Passages Often Used to Try to Prove that Christians Cannot Walk in Victory Over Sin During this Present Age”(pages 194-213, 217, 218 in the book). Galatians 5:17 and 1 John 1:8 are discussed in context with Gal. 5:16-25 and 1 John 1:5-2:6 and 2:28-3:12.

The excerpts are in a different format here than in the book. For example, the fonts are different, and I was not able to include a line above the letters *e* and *o* to represent *eta* and *omega*, which are long Greek vowels. The notes are included at the end of the chapters in the book and in the excerpts included here.

Copyright Page

Copyright © 1992 by Karlton T. Kemp

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without written permission.

ISBN 0-87148-414-5

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the NASB. Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

LOGOS Teaching Ministries St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Pathway Press
Cleveland, Tennessee 37311

Contents

Abbreviations and Other Such Information

Preface

Acknowledgements

INTRODUCTION ... 1

Extended Notes

A. A STUDY ON THE MEANING OF THE HEBREW NOUN *PESHA* ... 5

B. A STUDY ON THE MEANING OF THE HEBREW NOUN *AWON*... 13

C. A STUDY ON THE MEANING OF THE HEBREW NOUN *CHET* ... 35

D. A STUDY TO SHOW THAT UNDER THE OLD COVENANT SICKNESS WAS TYPICALLY CONSIDERED TO BE PART OF THE PUNISHMENT/PENALTY/CHASTISEMENT FOR SIN ... 39

E. A STUDY TO SHOW THAT HEALING AND HEALTH ARE INCLUDED IN THE NEW COVENANT ATONEMENT ... 55

F. A STUDY ON THE MEANING OF JUSTIFY/JUSTIFICATION AS THESE WORDS ARE USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ... 69

G. A STUDY ON THE MEANING OF THE GREEK NOUN *APHESIS* ... 141

H. HOLINESS AND VICTORY OVER SIN THROUGH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND HIS ATONING DEATH ... 169

Preface

Relationship of this book to *The Mid-Week Rapture*. My original intention was to include the eight Extended Notes, which make up the major content of this book, as an appendix to *The Mid-Week Rapture*. However, because of the length of that book (378 pages) and the length of these Extended Notes (220 pages, including the Introduction), it seemed better to publish these studies as a second book. It was easy enough to separate these Extended Notes from *The Mid-Week Rapture* because that book and these Notes can both stand alone. There are references to Extended Notes A, B, and C in chapters 7 and 8 of *The Mid-Week Rapture*, but these Notes are not crucial to an understanding of those chapters. Extended Notes A, B, and C refer the reader to the appropriate discussions in *The Mid-Week Rapture*, but those studies (though relevant) are not crucial to an understanding of Notes A, B, and C.

Need for revival? More and more I hear Christians speak of the need for revival. There is a growing awareness that all is not well with the Christian church of our day. I certainly agree, but I'm interested in a revival that is solidly based on the Bible and puts the emphasis on such things as truth, grace, holiness, righteousness, humility, and true Christian love. The studies contained in this book show something of the foundation needed for a true, Bible-centered revival.

Whatever happened to the New Testament call for repentance? It seems that we hardly ever hear the word repentance in many Christian circles of our day. The New Testament makes repentance an important part of conversion (cf., e.g., Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14, 15; 6:12; Luke 13:1-5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 17:30, 31; 26:20). Equally important, the New Testament calls for Christians in sin to repent (cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 7:8-13; 12:19-21; Rev. 2:4, 5, 14-16, 20-24; 3:2-5, 15-20). The references just cited from the book of Revelation strike me as being especially relevant and awesome. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was speaking to seven literal churches that existed at that time (about A.D. 95), but it seems clear that what He said to those churches is directly applicable to any church (or any Christian) that is in the same situation.

One of the most startling things about the messages to the seven churches is the frequent and powerful call to repent—or else. He warns the Christians at Ephesus that if they don't repent, they will find themselves no longer belonging to His church (Rev. 2:4, 5). He warns some of the "Christians" at Pergamum that if they don't repent, He will come and make war against them with the sword of His mouth (Rev. 2:14-16). He calls for the church at Thyatira to stop tolerating "the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads [His] bond-servants astray" (Rev. 2:20). He warns that He "will cast her upon a bed (of sickness), and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds" (Rev. 2:22, 23). He warns the majority of the Christians at Sardis that if they don't repent, He will come upon them in judgment as a thief (Rev. 3:1-4), and He infers that He will erase their names from the book of life (Rev. 3:5). Lastly, He exhorts the self-satisfied Christians at Laodicea to repent before He spits them out of His mouth (Rev. 3:15-20). (Many have pointed out that there is all too much similarity between the church at Laodicea and much of the church of our day.)

Some suggest that God doesn't take the sins of Christians seriously. (I've even heard Christians say that God doesn't see our sins because He looks at us through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. I believe it's true that He doesn't see our past [forgiven] sins, but if we are living in sin, He sees it, and it's a serious matter that needs to be dealt with in a high priority manner.) The messages to the seven churches are sufficient to show that God does take our sins seriously. They also show that repentance is more than asking for forgiveness.

The major theme of these studies. The major theme that permeates these studies is the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has dethroned sin, Satan, and spiritual death through His atoning death, and it is mandatory, therefore, for Christians to make it a top priority item to walk in holiness and righteousness through faith. We don't want legalism and striving in the flesh, and we certainly don't need more condemnation. What we need is the transformation to holiness that only the Holy Spirit can produce and maintain. We need to humble ourselves before God and cry out to Him to forgive and sanctify His people.

I trust that most sincere Christians know that sin is our greatest enemy and want the victory over sin. (Admittedly, some Christians don't believe that victory over sin is possible during this present life, but they at least agree that we must wage warfare against sin with the highest priority. [Actually, that last sentence is far too generous.]) Holiness (which includes victory over sin), like forgiveness, must be received from God (by grace) through faith. But we cannot have a solid faith to receive and walk in holiness unless we are convinced that this is part of the gospel (according to the Bible). A primary goal for these studies is to show that the gospel does indeed call Christians to walk in holiness with the victory over sin.

There is very little said in this book about Christian growth. Clearly, Christian growth is necessary and important, but the emphasis of these studies is on the need to get rid of anything and everything that God considers sinful in the heart and life of each Christian *now*. Everything that is truly sinful should be dealt with

now. Christian growth will take place as it should if we take care of the basics. They include the following: laying a solid foundation of repentance and faith in God and in the truth of the gospel; establishing and maintaining a proper relationship with God (e.g., make Him and His will top priority, walk by the Spirit [not the flesh], and spend adequate time in worship, Bible study, and prayer); establishing and maintaining a proper relationship with the people of God (e.g., become part of a God-centered, Bible-centered church); and continuing to walk in the light that we now have, as we continue to learn more of God's Word and of His will for our lives.

Every Christian must make their contribution to the proper functioning of the Body of Christ. We, the Body of Christ, cannot be what we are supposed to be, or do what we are supposed to do, without appropriating all of the grace of God in every area. Each of us must fulfill our assignments (by grace); we must fulfill our measure. (Cf., e.g., Rom. 12:1-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; Eph. 4:7-16.) The contribution of each member of the Body of Christ is important, but especially important to the proper functioning of the Body are the ministries that God has set in the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-13). All of the ministries and all of the gifts of the Spirit must function as God intends in order for the Body to be fully sanctified and fruitful. For example, how can the church be adequately set apart for God and victorious over sin apart from the functioning of the gifts of the Spirit that enable the church to discern and cast out demon (unclean) spirits. To the extent that we don't cast out unclean spirits, how can the church be clean?

It is important for us to be in an environment where we love one another, pray for one another, support and encourage one another, etc. Surely the best way for Christians to become holy and fruitful is to be part of a church that is truly holy and fruitful.

Dealing with guilt feelings and bondages. I realize that many Christians are burdened with guilt feelings. We are not solving the problem by trying to get rid of the guilt feelings through minimizing God's call to holiness and righteousness. God's answer is to drive out the sin by the power of the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even if this is not always an easy path to follow, it is the only right path, and we must choose this narrow path (cf. Matt. 7:13-27). Where sin is the problem, we must deal with the sin. Where condemnation and guilt feelings are caused by false accusations of the devil, we must resist the devil. We must believe that the sins we have confessed are forgiven through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., 1 John 2:1, 2).

I realize that many Christians have bondages in many areas. We are not solving the problem by accepting such bondages as just the way it is. Even if it's not always easy, we must press on to drive out all bondage by the Spirit of God through faith.

A few comments on the style of this book. This book cannot be considered light reading; it has been written for those dedicated to a serious study of the Scriptures. This book consists mostly of word studies and verse-by-verse

studies. It is packed with (very important) information, including a listing of many scriptural cross-references. I don't expect the reader to look up all of the cross-references when reading the book for the first time. (It depends on how much detail you want to get into at that time.) It is intended that this book be used as a reference book for continued study.

A request. I ask the reader to keep an open mind (as far as possible) to the viewpoints expressed in this book. Ask God to lead you (and all of us) into the balanced truth—most of us are not there yet. The more we have the balanced truth, the more we Christians can unite with one another. I assume that the reader truly wants to know (and walk in) the truth of God's Word.

A last word. May God's will be done and His name be glorified; and may this book prove to be a blessing to His people.

INTRODUCTION

The dominant theme of these studies is that holiness (which includes the victory over sin) has been provided through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ (the Lamb of God). All too often this very important aspect of our salvation has been minimized, or even denied, by many Christians (including many evangelical Christians), with the result that there is much sin in the church. (At the end of Extended Note H, there is a section titled "What Is Sin?") If we don't see that victory over sin has been provided for believers and make this a top priority item (in accordance with the Scriptures), we are certain to fall far short of what God intends for His people.

One reason it is so important for us to understand that victory over sin has been provided is that we receive and walk in victory over sin through faith. (We receive and walk in victory over sin through faith, even as we receive forgiveness through faith. Full salvation is by grace through faith.) Our faith cannot be solid in any area until we are sure that it is clearly taught in the Scriptures.

Extended Notes A, B, and C have much in common. Extended Note A is titled "A Study on the Meaning of the Hebrew Noun 'Pesha' "; Note B is titled "A Study on the Meaning of the Hebrew Noun 'Awon' "; and Note C is titled "A Study on the Meaning of the Hebrew Noun 'Chet.' " These three Hebrew nouns are similar in meaning. The NASB and KJV typically translate *pesha* as "transgression," *awon* as "iniquity," and *chet* as "sin." A prime goal for these three studies is to show that these Hebrew nouns include within their range of meaning the ideas of sin (transgression, iniquity), guilt of sin, and penalty for sin.

It is quite significant, but it is not widely known, that these Hebrew nouns (unlike the English nouns) include within their range of meaning the idea of penalty for sin. (Sin always has penalties/consequences.) An understanding of the fuller meaning of these Hebrew nouns will enable us to better translate and

understand many passages of Scripture. For one thing, this insight will enable us to better understand sacrificial offerings. Since our salvation is founded on the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is very important for us to understand these offerings.

In Extended Note B we will discuss Lev. 16:20-22. They are key verses in the chapter that deals with the very important sacrifices of the Day of Atonement. This was the one day of the year that the high priest entered the holy of holies with sacrificial blood. The verses we will discuss speak of the offering of the second goat of the sin offering (sometimes called the “scapegoat”). It is important to understand that when the high priest placed all the *awon* (plural) of the sons of Israel on the second goat, he was placing on it all their iniquities with the guilt and penalties. This sacrificial goat was then driven to a land cut off (a land cut off from the life and blessings of God). The goat took the place of, and bore the penalty for, those who had sinned. If the goat had not taken their place, those who had sinned would have been driven from the camp of God. The sacrificial offerings (speaking of the sacrificial offerings in general) bore the sins of the sons of Israel with the guilt and penalties (including the death penalty).

The passage that we will discuss the most extensively in Extended Notes A, B, and C is Isaiah chapter 53. This is probably the most important chapter in the Bible that deals with the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Well over half the combined content of Notes A, B, and C deal with verses from Isaiah chapter 53.) All three nouns (*pesha*, *awon*, and *chet*) are used in this chapter of Isaiah.

As we will discuss, there were very definite limits to what could be accomplished through the old covenant sacrifices. They did not have the power to dethrone sin, Satan, or spiritual death. The one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, however, had no such limitations. Isaiah chapter 53 shows that full salvation—including the new birth and the victory over sin—is provided through His atoning death. He bore our *pesha*, *awon*, and *chet* so that we could have full salvation.

Every aspect of our salvation comes to us through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Mankind was under spiritual death, which came as a penalty for sin; but now we (all true Christians) have been born again and are indwelt by the Spirit of life. Closely connected with spiritual death, mankind was (to some extent, at least) under the authority of sin and the god of this world; but now we have been set free and are enslaved to God and righteousness. Many key aspects of our salvation are reserved for the future (like resurrection/transformation and glorification); these things will also come to us through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In **Extended Note E**, which builds on Isaiah chapter 53, we will discuss the fact that healing (including physical, mental, and emotional healing) has been provided through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. **Extended Note D** shows that even under the old covenant, healing was provided for the faithful in Israel. It also shows that sickness was considered a penalty (curse) for sin under the old covenant.

Extended Note F is titled “A Study on the Meaning of Justify/Justification As These Words Are Used in the New Testament.” I’ll just comment on the verb

“justify” here since the Greek noun that is normally translated “justification” is only used twice in the New Testament. A primary goal for this study is to show that “justify” (if we are going to translate the Greek verb *dikaioo* this way) frequently means much more than “declare righteous” (when “declare righteous” is limited to the ideas of forgiveness and right standing with God). The New Testament frequently uses *dikaioo* in a much fuller sense that includes all the following ideas: forgiveness and right standing with God; freedom from sin, Satan, and spiritual death; and the new birth and the transformation to righteousness (sanctification).

Much of Romans chapters 1-8 (which is one of the most important sections of the New Testament) is discussed in a verse-by-verse manner in Extended Note F. (Some four-fifths of the pages of this Note are devoted to these chapters in Romans.) These verse-by-verse studies are not strictly limited to that which pertains to the meaning of “justify.”

Extended Note G is titled “A Study on the Meaning of the Greek Noun *Aphesis*.” This study serves as an important complement to the theme of this book. The Greek noun *aphesis* is typically translated “forgiveness,” or the equivalent, in the New Testament. A primary goal for this study is to show that *aphesis* frequently means much more than forgiveness in the New Testament. It is often used in a much fuller sense that includes the idea of being released from our sins with the guilt and the penalties. We are released from spiritual death, bondage to sin, etc.

Extended Note H is titled “Holiness and Victory Over Sin Through the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atoning Death.” A primary goal for this study is to show that the Greek nouns translated “holiness” (*hagiasmos and hagiosune*), the Greek adjective translated “holy/saint” (*hagios*), and the Greek verb translated “sanctify” (*hagiazō*) are frequently used in the New Testament in a very important ideal sense. That is, Christians are actually to be set apart from sin for God and righteousness (basically) from the time of conversion. (The New Testament does not present this as an unrealistic or unattainable ideal.) I am not speaking of a ceremonial, positional holiness, nor am I speaking of a lifelong process throughout which Christians sin less and less. (It is true, however, that Christians must continue to grow in Christ.)

If we do not understand this very important New Testament use of the word “holiness” (and the closely related words), we will not be able to appropriate the fullness of God’s sanctifying grace through faith. To the extent that we believe that we must continue in sin, we will continue to sin. The world, the flesh, and the devil are very real and very powerful enemies. They are, however, no match for the powerful grace of God provided through the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning death. Extended Note H contains a section titled “A Discussion of the Three Most Important Passages Often Used To Try To Prove That Christians Cannot Walk in Victory Over Sin During This Present Age.”

The reader need not necessarily read these Extended Notes in order. These studies are interrelated and complement one another, but most of these studies can stand alone.

The excerpts that follow are from pages 194-213 and 218, 219 of Extended Note G, which is titled, "Holiness and Victory Over Sin Through the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atoning Death."

A DISCUSSION OF THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT PASSAGES OFTEN USED TO TRY TO PROVE THAT CHRISTIANS CANNOT WALK IN VICTORY OVER SIN DURING THIS PRESENT AGE

My studies indicate that the three most important such passages are Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17; and 1 John 1:8. Of these three, the first and third are the most often used. From my point of view, much damage has been done to the Body of Christ through a serious misunderstanding of these passages. I don't believe any of them suggests that Christians cannot walk in total victory over sin. In fact, each of these passages is set in a context that clearly teaches victory over sin. In my opinion, the New Testament consistently teaches that Christians can and should live above (without) sin. The call (and enablement) to walk in victory over sin is a big part of what salvation in Christ is all about.

Salvation, including salvation from the authority and power of sin, comes by grace through faith. We cannot walk in victory over sin apart from faith for that victory, and since our faith is based on the Word of God, we cannot have faith for victory over sin if we believe that some passages teach that such a victory is unattainable. All the many passages that clearly teach victory over sin (e.g., Romans chapter 6) cannot be taken at face value (they must be substantially qualified) by those who don't believe such a victory is possible. Victory over sin is often put off until after the resurrection.

It is very important for us to rightly divide the Word of God on this topic (and on every topic). There are powerful enemies arrayed against us that want to keep us in sin: the world, the flesh, and the devil. We will never defeat the enemy on a consistent basis apart from the grace of God appropriated by faith.

I will not comment on Rom. 7:14-25 here since these verses are discussed in Extended Note F. We will look at Gal. 5:17 as part of a study of Gal. 5:16-25. Then we will look at 1 John 1:8 as part of a study of John 1:5-2:6 and 2:28-3:12. (It would be impossible to understand 1 John 1:8 apart from its context.) I consider Gal. 5:16-25 and 1 John 1:5-2:6 and 2:28-3:12 to be among the most important New Testament passages that teach victory over sin.

Galatians 5:16-25

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. (17) For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (19) Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, (21) envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I

forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (25) If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Gal. 5:16. This verse (in its setting with Gal. 5:13-25) is one of the most important verses in the New Testament which shows that Christians can (and should) always walk in holiness with the victory over sin.

walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire [epithumia] of the flesh. In the Greek the negation is emphatic.⁶ We could translate “walk by the Spirit, and you most certainly will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” (Note the translation of the *Amplified Bible*, which is quoted below.)

The apostle Paul exhorts the Christians of Galatia (and all Christians) to **walk by the Spirit** on a continuous basis. (The Greek present tense imperative helps communicate this continuous idea.) We could also translate “walk after the Spirit” or “walk in the Spirit” (with the KJV). The translation “walk after the Spirit” would fit very well with the words “if you are led by the Spirit” of Gal. 5:18. Also, as we will discuss under Gal. 5:25, a very reasonable translation for the second half of Gal. 5:25 is “let us also follow after the Spirit.” Romans 8:14, which is an important cross-reference, speaks of “being led by the Spirit of God.”

In context with Rom. 8:1-13 (especially verses 12 and 13), the words “led by the Spirit of God” of Rom. 8:14 mean (at least in part) that Christians, by the enablement of the Holy Spirit, do not allow the flesh to manifest itself in sinful deeds/works. They allow the Spirit to lead them into (and to keep them in) an abiding state of holiness. (See the discussion of Rom. 8:1-14 in Extended Note F.) The teaching of Rom. 8:12-14 is the equivalent of the teaching of Gal. 5:16. In Rom. 8:4 the apostle speaks of the requirement of the Law being fulfilled by those who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

The desire of the flesh is to do the “deeds [works] of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19). A partial list of “the deeds of the flesh” is included in Gal. 5:19-21. “The deeds of the flesh,” as these words are used in Gal. 5:19-21, embrace all sin. (Such things as sinful attitudes and motives are included in what the apostle means by “the deeds of the flesh.” Note that he listed “jealousy,” “envying,” etc.) For Christians to **not carry out the desire of the flesh** (as they walk by the Spirit) is to live above sin.

In summary, the apostle Paul exhorts Christians to walk by [after] the Spirit on a continuous basis so that they will not carry out the desire of the flesh (so that the flesh will not be able to manifest itself in sinful deeds/works). Those who walk by [after] the Spirit on a continuous basis will walk above sin (by grace). If I understand the apostle Paul, he did not at all consider it an unattainable ideal for Christians to continuously walk by [after] the Spirit. However, as Gal. 5:17, for example, shows, the apostle did not teach that a continuous walk by [after] the Spirit is automatic, or that it would always be easy. There is warfare taking place.

The flesh has not been annihilated yet, and Satan works in the realm of the flesh. It is all too obvious that Christians can sin. They will, in fact, sin to the extent that they do not walk by [after] the Spirit through faith. Christians cannot walk by [after] the Spirit apart from the knowledge of the Word of God (the gospel) because the faith of Christians must be based on the Word of God.

The Amplified Bible at Gal. 5:16 says: *But I say, walk (and) live habitually in the (Holy) Spirit—responsive to (and) controlled (and) guided by the Spirit; then you will certainly not gratify the cravings (and) desires of the flesh—of human nature without God.*

The Meaning of “The Flesh” As These Words Are Used in Galatians 5:13-25

It is common for the apostle Paul (and others) to use “the flesh” to speak of fallen man (man in spiritual death, man separated from the Spirit of life). “The flesh” is not at all limited to the physical body. (The NIV has “the sinful nature” instead of “the flesh” throughout Gal. 5:13-25. The *Amplified Bible* at Gal. 5:16 defines “the flesh” as “human nature without God.”) Often, as here, there is a contrast between “the Spirit” and “the flesh” (cf., e.g., John 3:3-8; 6:63; Rom. 7:5, 6; 8:1-14; Gal. 6:8; 1 Pet. 4:1-6).

For a Christian to walk according to the flesh is to walk according to the old man, but this ought not (need not) be (cf. Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 2:11-13; 3:5-9). The Christian is to be dead to the old man; he has crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24). (“The flesh” and “the old man” are very similar in meaning, if not identical. We can speak of the old man being crucified with Christ [Rom. 6:6, cf. Gal. 2:20], and we can speak of crucifying the flesh [Gal. 5:24].) The old man, however, will still live and express itself in sin to the extent that the Christian does not walk by [after] the Spirit (appropriating God's grace through faith). Only the Spirit has the power to keep the old man/the flesh from manifesting itself in sin.

A primary reason why the flesh is such a formidable opponent for the Christian is that Satan and his horde of demon spirits are very active in the realm of the flesh. Satan is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31; 16:11; Eph. 2:1). Fallen man could probably sin in all the ways listed in Gal. 5:19-21 without the involvement of demon spirits, but demon spirits work in each of these areas, greatly intensifying the problem. This reality makes it all the more necessary for the Christian to walk by [after] the Spirit and to not give the devil any place. Ephesians 4:27 says: *and do not give the devil an opportunity*. As the margin of the NASB shows, a more literal translation would be “place” instead of *opportunity*. These words of Eph. 4:27 were written by the apostle Paul in a context of exhorting Christians to walk in righteousness and holiness, having laid aside all sin. Romans 13:14 says: *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to (its) lusts [plural of epithumia]*.

Gal. 5:17. For. This conjunction ties verse 17 to verse 16. In verse 17 the apostle expands on the absolute necessity for Christians to walk by [after] the

Spirit. To the extent that we do not walk by [after] the Spirit, sin (“the desire of the flesh” [Gal. 5:16]) will be the inevitable result.

the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit. The *Amplified Bible* has, “For the desires of the flesh are opposed to the (Holy) Spirit.” The NIV has, “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit.” The Greek noun *epithumia* (which is translated “desire” in Gal. 5:16) was derived from the verb *epithumeo*, which is translated ***sets its desire*** in Gal. 5:17. As I mentioned under Gal. 5:16, “the desire of the flesh” embraces all sin—all sin is ***against the Spirit***.

and the Spirit against the flesh. The [Holy] Spirit is, of course, ***against*** [all the sinful desires of] ***the flesh***. All those who walk by [after] the Spirit will walk in victory over sin.

for these are in opposition to one another. Like two armies, ***the Spirit*** and ***the flesh*** are arrayed against one another. However, ***the Spirit*** of God and ***the flesh*** [even when Satan and his evil angels and demons are included as part of ***the flesh***] are not equally powerful contestants. ***The Spirit*** of God is well able to overpower ***the flesh*** in every encounter; Christians will, therefore, always walk in victory over sin when they walk by [after] the Spirit.

so that you may not do the things that you please. I'm sorry to say that many Christians have understood these words to teach that Christians cannot have the victory over sin during this present life. They understand the apostle to say something like the following: “so that you may not [always] do the [righteous] things that you want to do.” (In other words, the flesh is certain to win some battles.) In the light of Gal. 5:16 (cf. Gal. 5:24), I'm surprised by this interpretation. In Gal. 5:16 the apostle has just exhorted his readers to always walk by [after] the Spirit so that they will not carry out the sinful desires of the flesh (so that they will not do the sinful deeds/works of flesh; so that they will not sin).

The apostle did not write Gal. 5:17 to deny that Christians can always walk in victory over sin. He wrote this verse to emphasize the need for Christians to always walk by [after] the Spirit since the flesh is an active and formidable opponent. I'm quite sure that the apostle's words mean something like the following: “Although you as a sincere Christian may, at times, have desires [even strong desires] to sin [because the flesh has not been annihilated], you may not [must not] do the [sinful] things that you [so far as the flesh is concerned] may want to do [namely, the sinful deeds/works of the flesh]—the Spirit will always enable you to have victory as you walk by [after] Him.” “The [sinful] desire of the flesh” of Gal. 5:16 is the equivalent of ***the things that you please*** [the sinful deeds/works that you may want to do] of Gal. 5:17. I should mention that sinful desires, though very undesirable, are not in themselves sin or defeat.

Gal. 5:18. ***if you are led by the Spirit.*** To be ***led by the Spirit*** is a big part of the new covenant salvation offered in the gospel; anything less is not acceptable (Biblical) Christianity. Romans 8:14 (with Rom. 8:1-13) strongly infers that it is only those “who are being led by the Spirit of God” that are really the “sons of God.”

you are not under the Law. With the background for the epistle to the

Galatians, these words are not surprising. Throughout this epistle the apostle refutes the “gospel” of the Judaizers. He repeatedly insists that their gospel is a false gospel and must be rejected by the Christians of Galatia. The Judaizers were telling the Gentile Christians that they must submit to the ceremonial works of **the** [Mosaic] **Law** and be circumcised (cf. Gal. 5:1-12).

Paul taught that Christians are not under the Mosaic Law (Gal. 5:18; Rom. 6:14; 7:4, 6); however, he also taught that Christians are the only ones who really keep the Law (excluding the ceremonial aspects), being enabled by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:4; 2:26, 27; cf. Gal. 5:14; Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 13:8-10).

Gal. 5:19-21. We discussed the meaning of **the deeds** [works] **of the flesh** under Gal. 5:16 and 17. With the words **I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God**, cf. Gal. 6:7-9; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Matt. 7:21-23; 13:40-43, 49, 50; Rom. 2:1-13; Eph. 5:3-7; and Rev. 21:8 and 22:11-15.

Gal. 5:22, 23. **The fruit of the Spirit** is to be contrasted with “the deeds [works] of the flesh” of Gal. 5:19-21.

Gal. 5:24. (Cf. Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; 6:14.) There is a sense in which Christians are supposed to crucify the flesh once for all at the beginning of the Christian life. This is accomplished through the Holy Spirit by faith. It is clear, however, that the flesh has not been annihilated and Christians must keep the flesh from manifesting itself in sinful deeds by continuing to walk by [after] the Spirit through faith. (Cf., e.g., Gal. 5:16; Rom. 6:11-13; 8:12-14; 13:14.)

Gal. 5:25. **If we live by the Spirit.** I understand these words in this sense: If we have been born again by the Spirit of life. The Mosaic Law could not impart life (cf. Gal. 3:21), but all true Christians have life by the indwelling Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2, 9, 10).

let us also walk by the Spirit. The Greek verb translated **let us...walk** is *stoicheo* (a different verb than the one translated “walk” in Gal. 5:16). In the margin of Gal. 5:25, the NASB says: “or, follow the Spirit.” I believe “follow the Spirit” is the right idea.⁷ Christians must be led by the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16, 18; Rom. 8:14). If we have life by the Spirit, we must be consistent and follow after the Spirit.

1 JOHN 1:5-2:6 AND 2:28-3:12 WITH THE EMPHASIS ON THE MEANING OF 1 JOHN 1:8

In order to understand this important epistle of the apostle John, and 1 John 1:8, we must understand that it was written to refute a powerful heresy that had arisen in the Christian church.⁸ First John 2:18-26 help us understand this epistle. Let's look at 1 John 2:19 and 26; these verses are of key importance.

First John 2:19 says: *They went out from us, but they were not (really) of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but (they went out), in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.* Those involved in this heresy had gone out from the true Christian church. First John 2:26 says: *These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.* Those involved in this heresy were trying to persuade the others to follow them. The apostle John had to be concerned for the purity of the gospel and the welfare of the Christian church. He would also have desired to wake up, if possible, those who had already joined the heresy.

The following passages enable us to see something of the doctrinal deviations associated with this heresy:

1 John 2:22, 23. They denied that “Jesus is the Christ,” and they denied the Son of God.

1 John 4:1-6. They denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). First John 4:1 speaks of the need to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” They were to be tested (in part) by their doctrine (1 John 4:2, 3). Since these heretics denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, John mentioned this particular doctrine as one test for prophets. Why would the heretics deny that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh? For one thing, there was a widespread belief in the ancient world that physical matter is evil.

1 John 5:5, 6. First John 5:6 says: *This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood.* The heretics apparently accepted *the water*, that is, *the water* of baptism; but, significantly, they denied *the [atoning] blood* of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have already seen that the heretics denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, so it is not surprising that they denied His atoning death. These heretics denied that they were sinners, and they denied their need for (and the reality of) the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. (See below on 1 John 1:7-10.)

I have pointed out some of the doctrinal deviations associated with this heresy. Throughout this epistle John also frequently alludes to the sinful (and unloving) lifestyle of these heretics (cf., e.g., 1 John 2:3-11; 3:3-24; 4:7, 8, 20, 21). It is not surprising that those who denied that they were sinners would be living in sin.

It is widely agreed by the commentators that this heresy was an early form of Gnosticism. The Gnostics did not believe in salvation from sin through the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. They believed in salvation through their own secret knowledge. (The word “Gnosticism” was derived from the Greek noun *gnosis* which means “knowledge.”) The Gnostics believed that physical matter is evil, and many of them were noted for their sinful lifestyles. For more on Gnosticism see the commentaries, Bible encyclopedias, etc.

1 John 1:5-2:6

1 John 1:5-10. And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. (6) If we say that we have fellowship with Him and (yet) walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; (7) but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (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. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

1 John 1:5. The *light* of God includes His truth and holiness.

1 John 1:6. The heretics certainly claimed that they had fellowship with God. (They could not have claimed the right to “improve” the gospel that had been proclaimed by the apostles without claiming that they had received a more accurate version of the gospel through their intimate relationship with God.) However, the fact that they were walking in the darkness (separate from the truth and holiness of God) proved that they did not really have fellowship with Him in the light.

1 John 1:7. we have fellowship with one another. All those who have fellowship with God *in the light* have fellowship with one another *in the light*. The heretics were not included—they belonged to a different kingdom; they were walking in the darkness.

and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. The heretics denied that **Jesus** is the **Son** of God (cf. 1 John 2:22-24; 3:23; 4:14, 15; 5:5, 9-13), and they denied that they were sinners and their need for the atoning blood of the Lamb of God (cf., e.g., 1 John 1:7-10; 4:1, 2; 5:6). However, they did not keep the commandments of God (cf. 1 John 2:3-11; 3:3-24; 4:8, 20, 21; 5:1-4). The heretics denied that sin is the problem, and they denied that the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is the answer.

In sharp contrast with the heretics, all true Christians know that ***the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*** This precious blood [**cleansed**] **us from all sin** and enabled us to come into the light. This same blood continues to work in purifying power and keeps us cleansed from all sin—it enables us to stay in the light; it enables us to live in a state of holiness. And if a Christian should sin, restoration is provided through the same atoning blood (1 John 2:1, 2). The Greek verb translated **cleanses** is in the present tense, which probably

communicates the idea of continuous action.

Christians are cleansed from the guilt of sin, but in this epistle the major emphasis is placed on the fact that our hearts and lives are cleansed by the powerful cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ—we are cleansed in the sense of being transformed/sanctified. The Greek verb *katharizo*, which is translated **cleanses** here, is frequently used of a transforming, sanctifying cleansing (cf. Acts 15:9; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:26; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:14; James 4:8; 1 John 1:9). Throughout the studies contained in this book, I have been emphasizing that the blood of Jesus Christ (His atoning death) dethrones sin, Satan, and spiritual death—it gives Christians life and makes them holy. God gets all of the glory for the victory that Christians experience. The other side of the coin is that God is denied glory to the extent that Christians do not walk in victory.

1 John 1:8. if we say that we have no sin.⁹ The words **we have no sin** are exactly what we would expect the heretics to say in response to what John has just said at the end of verse 7. We know enough from this epistle (and it is confirmed by our knowledge of Gnosticism) to say that the heretics denied that they were sinners. (They also denied the reality of the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.) They denied that they had sinned (cf. 1 John 1:10), and they denied that they were living in sin even though they were not keeping the commandments of God (cf. 1 John 2:3-6).

Most believe that here in 1 John 1:8 the apostle is refuting the idea that Christians can walk in victory over sin. I'm quite sure, however, that this interpretation is wrong and that the apostle John would himself plead "guilty" to holding the viewpoint that Christians can and should walk in victory over sin through the powerful cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. (In addition to the verses that we are considering in this study [1 John 1:5-2:6 and 2:28-3:12], also see 1 John 2:9-17; 3:13-24; 4:7-21; 5:1-5, 16-21; John 4:23, 24; 5:14, 24; 7:37-39; 8:31-36; 14:15-24; 15:10-17; 17:6-26; Rev. 2:1-3:22; 7:14; 12:11, 17; 14:4, 5; 19:7, 8; 21:8, 22:11-15. Many of these verses could not state the victory over all sin in stronger or clearer terms.)

we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. These strong words were aimed at the heretics, not Christians who thought that they were living in victory over sin. These heretics were deceived and they were trying to deceive others (1 John 2:26; cf. 3:7). **The truth** was not in them; they were in the darkness, as the apostle says repeatedly throughout this epistle.

To me it seems obvious that the apostle John intended these words in 1 John 1:8 to apply to the heretics. This epistle was written to refute this particular heresy and every chapter deals (to a significant extent) with this heresy.

Commentators on 1 John 1:8. It is common for those who write from a holiness/victory-over-sin perspective to agree that 1 John 1:8 does not teach that Christians cannot have the victory over sin. In addition to John Wesley (see note 9) and the two commentators I'll quote below (after 1 John 1:10), see, e.g.,

Charles Finney (*Finney's Systematic Theology*, abridged; Minneapolis: Bethany, 1976; chapter 36, pp. 389-391).

1 John 1:9. if we confess our sins. I believe these words, which build on 1 John 1:5-8, were meant to apply to the heretics. They were not confessing their sins; they were denying that they needed to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 John 1:6-8, 10; 3:7; 5:6).

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **To cleanse** is a translation of *katharizo*, the verb used in 1 John 1:7. (See under 1 John 1:7 on the meaning of this verb.) **To cleanse...from all unrighteousness** is to transform/sanctify. This **cleansing** is beyond the forgiveness of sins mentioned earlier in 1 John 1:9. The Greek noun *adikia*, which is translated **unrighteousness**, could just as well be translated “wrongdoing” or “wickedness.” To **be cleansed from all *adikia*** is to be transformed/sanctified and made righteous. God, who is **righteous** [*dikaios*], removes the **unrighteousness** [*adikia*] from the hearts and lives of those who submit to Him through the gospel—He makes them **righteous** [*dikaios*]. (The use of *adikia* probably builds on the use of *dikaios* earlier in the verse. Both Greek words were derived from the same noun [*dike*].) On being **righteous** see, e.g., 1 John 2:29 and 3:7. There is a strong emphasis in this epistle on the fact that true Christians live in righteousness and holiness (cf. 1 John 1:6, 7; 2:1, 3-11, 15-17, 28, 29; 3:1-24; 4:7-21; 5:1-5, 16-21).

1 John 1:10. God is on record saying that all have sinned (cf., e.g., Acts 4:12; 17:30, 31; Rom. 3:9-20, 23; 11:32; Gal. 3:22). These heretics, however, denied that they had sinned. They clearly were not basing their opinion on the Scriptures. True Christians would not say **we have not sinned**. This verse helps demonstrate that 1 John 1:8 and 9 were also dealing with the heretics, not with true Christians. God is on record saying that all men are sinners and need to be saved from sin through the Lord Jesus Christ; but, as far as I know, He is not on record saying that Christians will necessarily continue to sin.

Several Quotations regarding 1 John 1:7-10

I'll quote part of what Adam Clarke said under 1 John 1:7, 8, and 9 (*Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, abridged by R. Earle; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967; p. 1317). Under 1 John 1:7 he says (in part): “*The blood of Jesus Christ.* The meritorious efficacy of His passion and death has purged our consciences from dead works, and *cleanseth us*, 'continues to cleanse us,' i.e., to keep clean what it has made clean. And being cleansed from all sin is what every believer should look for, what he has a right to expect, and what he must have in this life in order to be prepared to meet his God. Christ is not a partial Savior; He saves to the uttermost, and He cleanses from all sin.”

Under 1 John 1:8 he says (in part): “*If we say that we have no sin.* This is tantamount [equivalent] to v. 10: ‘If we say that we have not sinned.’ ‘All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God’; and therefore every man needs a

Saviour, such as Christ is. It is very likely that the heretics, against whose evil doctrines the apostle writes, denied that they had any sin or needed any Saviour. Indeed the Gnostics even denied that Christ suffered.... *We deceive ourselves.* By supposing that we have no guilt, no sinfulness, and consequently have no need of the blood of Christ as an atoning sacrifice.”

Under 1 John 1:9 he says (in part): “*And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Not only to forgive the sin, but to purify the heart. ... As all unrighteousness is sin, so he that is cleansed from all unrighteousness is cleansed from all sin. To attempt to evade this, and plead for the continuance of sin in the heart through life, is ungrateful, wicked, and even blasphemous; for as he who says he has not sinned, v. 10, makes God a liar, who has declared the contrary through every part of His revelation; so he that says the blood of Christ either cannot or will not cleanse us from all sin in this life gives also the lie to his Maker, who has declared the contrary, and thus shows that the word, the doctrine of God, is not in him. Reader, it is the birthright of every child of God to be cleansed from all sin, to keep himself unspotted from the world, and so to live as nevermore to offend his Maker. All things are possible to him that believes, because all things are possible to the infinitely meritorious blood and energetic Spirit of the Lord Jesus.” (I should mention that in the days of Adam Clarke, who died in 1832, the controversy regarding victory over sin was quite heated. He was an early Methodist, an associate of John Wesley, who died in 1791.)

I'll quote part of what Leo G. Cox said in a subsection titled “Failure to Be in the Light Brings Self-Deception (1:6, 8, 10)” (*Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986 reprint; p. 325):

“Though his words may be misinterpreted, the writer is not contradicting himself in verses 7 and 8. He has claimed the cleansing of the blood for all sin (v. 7). To state that claim is not the denial of sin; it is the acknowledgment of the sin, and of the full victory over it. Careful exegesis will avoid applying the condemnation of verse 8 to those who make humble claim of the promise in verse 7. When a Christian obtains the victory of full cleansing, and gives God the glory for this victory, he is not deceiving himself; he is honoring the blood of Christ that cleanseth from all sin.

While verse 8 speaks of sin as a principle, verse 10 refers to the acts of sin. Sin is always twofold—act and state, choice and condition, doing and being. The Gnostics denied both as being true of them. They claimed that they neither had sin nor committed sin.

Again, it is erroneous to apply this statement to those who claim God's victory over their sin by His grace. Christians do not deny the possibility of sinning, or the need for their 'Advocate with the Father' (2:1). Christians do not claim that they have not sinned; *they know that they have*. However, they rely upon the grace of God that now keeps them from sinning and will keep them from sinning. ... Of course, Christians do not boast of sinlessness; *they boast of Jesus Christ, and His victory for them and in them.*”

I'll also quote several sentences from what L. Cox said under the subheading "Confession Brings Forgiveness and Cleansing (1:9)" (p. 327): "One should never lay any limitation upon God's power to accomplish in His children the promise of full cleansing from sin through the blood of Christ. Any excuse for or allowance of the continuance of sin in the life of the believer is contrary to God's will for Christians and places a limitation upon the power of the cross of Jesus."

1 John 2:1, 2. *My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; (2) and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for (those of) the whole world.*

1 John 2:1. *I am writing these things to you that you may not sin.* As many have pointed out, the aorist tense of the Greek verb for *sin* here helps show that the apostle's meaning is, that you may not commit an act of sin.¹⁰ Verses like 1 John 2:3-6; 2:28-3:12; and 1:6, 7, and 9 help confirm this interpretation. These words in 1 John 2:1, by themselves, should probably suffice to show that the apostle was not denying the possibility of full victory over sin in 1 John 1:8.

And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (The NIV has "But" in place of **And**.) As in the first part of this verse, the verb for *sins* is in the aorist tense. Here the apostle deals with the possibility (certainly not the necessity) of a Christian committing occasional acts of sin. The full restoration after any such act of sin comes through our **Advocate**, the Lord Jesus Christ, on the basis of His atoning death.

1 John 2:2. The Lord Jesus Christ died for all men (cf. 1 Tim. 2:3-6), but each person must appropriate the benefits of His atoning death through faith.

1 John 2:3-6. *And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. (4) The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; (5) but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: (6) the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*

These verses strongly confirm that Christians are required to walk in righteousness and holiness. They also further demonstrated that the heretics really didn't know God, no matter what they claimed.

1 John 2:3, 4. The apostle John makes it clear in these verses that true Christians do keep God's commandments (cf., e.g., 1 John 2:5, 6, 29; 3:3-12, 22-24; 5:2-4, 18, 19; John 14:15, 21; 15:10; Rom. 8:4; 2:26, 27)—they walk in righteousness. Surely John had the heretics in mind in 1 John 2:4. They claimed to know God, but the fact that they didn't keep His commandments proved that they didn't really know Him.

1 John 2:5. whoever keeps His word. To keep God's word here in 1 John 2:5 is probably the equivalent of keeping His commandments in 1 John 2:3 and 4. (Compare the use of the words "word(s)" and "commandment(s)" in 1 John 2:7, 8 and John 14:15, 21, 23, 24.) The primary commandment is the commandment to walk in love (cf., e.g., 1 John 2:7-11; 3:10-12, 14-24; 4:7-21; 5:1-3; Matt. 22:34-40; John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-15; James 2:8). Christians must love God, but they must also love the children of God. This epistle of John emphasizes both of these aspects of love.

in Him the love of God has truly been perfected. I believe 1 John 4:12 helps us understand the meaning of these words. It says: "if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us." (Cf. 1 John 4:7.) God's love is in Christians by His indwelling Spirit. To the extent that they walk in love, His love is perfected in them. Christians walk in love by walking in the Spirit—the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:16, 22).

God's love has always been perfect, but it is not perfected in the Christian until the Christian walks in love. The apostle John is not speaking of some unattainable level of love, but of a level that even a newly converted Christian can walk in, being enabled by the Holy Spirit. This walk in love is a major part of the ideal state of holiness that we are discussing in Extended Note H.

1 John 2:6. It would be difficult to imagine a higher call to holiness and righteous living than the call expressed in this verse. Every true Christian, by definition, abides in God and is called to walk in the same manner that Jesus Christ walked. (Cf., e.g., 1 John 3:3-7; 4:17.) All true Christians will agree that He walked above sin.

The apostle John undoubtedly wrote these words (at least in part) to help show that the heretics were not really abiding in God (cf., e.g., 1 John 1:6; 2:3-5; 3:6).

1 John 2:28-3:12

These verses constitute one of the most clear and powerful statements contained in the New Testament which show that Christians are enabled to (and expected to) walk in righteousness with the victory over all sin. This passage is very important in its own right, and it also helps demonstrate that the apostle did not teach that Christians cannot have the victory over all sin in 1 John 1:8.

1 John 2:28, 29. And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. (29) If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

1 John 2:28. abide in Him. Christians are exhorted to abide in God the Father and God the Son (cf. 1 John 1:3; 2:24). We abide in God by abiding in the truth, Spirit, life, light, righteousness, holiness, and love of God. (Cf., e.g., 1 John 1:6, 7; 2:6, 10, 24, 27; 3:6, 24; 4:12-19; 5:11-13.)

so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away

from Him in shame at His coming. The New Testament frequently speaks of the second **coming** [*parousia*] of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible that we should also think of the **coming** [or, **presence**] of God the Father. (As the margin of the NASB shows, **at His coming** could be translated **in His presence**.) God the Father is mentioned in 1 John 3:1 and apparently 2:29, and His presence is frequently mentioned in conjunction with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the day of judgment (cf., e.g., Col. 1:22, 28; 1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 24; Rev. 11:15-17).

Christians are frequently exhorted (in the New Testament) to make sure that they are always fully ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ—they must abide in God.

1 John 2:29. [God] is righteous and His children (those **born of Him**) are enabled to be (and required to be) **righteous**—they are those **who [practice] righteousness**. (On **[practice] righteousness** cf., e.g., 1 John 1:6, 7, 9; 2:1-17; 3:3-24 [especially 1 John 3:7-10: *Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; (8) the one who practices sin is of the devil.... (9) No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (10) By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother*]; 1 John 4:7-21; 5:1-4, 18, 19.) First John 2:29 strongly infers and 1 John 3:3-12 clearly state that those who do not **practice righteousness** (those who live in sin) are not the children of God. The apostle John, in a style typical of the Scriptures, presents the black and white with very little recognition of the in-between gray area.

This is good news—God has called us to be righteous, and He will enable us to be righteous.

1 John 3:1-3. See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and (such) we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope (fixed) on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

1 John 3:2. when He appears. (See under 1 John 2:28.) **When He appears**, all who have loved His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8) will be resurrected/transformed into the glory of God's eternal kingdom.

We know that...we shall be like Him, because [we know that] **we shall see Him just as He is.** To be able to see Him just as He is will necessitate that we be glorified first.

1 John 3:3. everyone who has this hope (fixed) on Him. The Christians' **hope** was just spoken of in 1 John 3:2. Our **hope** is to be like Him, etc.

purifies himself, just as He is pure. I believe the apostle John is speaking of an ideal once-for-all purification at the beginning of the Christian life. At conversion the Christian is born of God and begins to practice righteousness (cf., e.g., 1 John 2:29; 3:6-12). The heretics that John was refuting when he wrote this epistle did not purify themselves, walk in righteousness, etc. This proved that they were not children of God. Their “gospel” must be rejected.

Christians are required to purify themselves (by the grace of God in Christ Jesus) and to be pure ***just as He is pure.*** (Cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 John 1:5-7, 9; 2:3-6, 29; 3:6-12.) First John 3:3 (and all such verses) help demonstrate that 1 John 1:8 should not be understood to teach that Christians cannot walk in victory over sin in the present life.

1 John 3:4-12. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. (5) And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. (6) No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. (7) Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; (8) the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (9) No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (10) By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (11) For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; (12) not as Cain, (who) was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

1 John 3:4. Apparently John made this somewhat obvious point to underscore the fact that sin is a very serious matter—it is ***lawlessness***; it is rebellion against God and His laws. The sin/lawlessness of the heretics proved that they did not really know God or love God (cf., e.g., 1 John 1:5, 6; 2:3-6; 3:6-12). This verse further emphasizes the fact that Christians should not have any sin—they are not rebels against God.

1 John 3:5. He appeared in order to take away sins. The Lord Jesus Christ ***[takes] away [the] sins*** of those who submit to Him in faith. In this context the emphasis is on the fact that He ***[takes] away sins*** in the sense that He sanctifies His people and makes them righteous (cf., e.g., 1 John 2:29; 3:3, 4, 6-12; 1:5-7, 9; 2:1-6). ***He appeared in order to take away sins*** is probably parallel in meaning with “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil” of 1 John 3:8.¹¹ In one sense we can think of the sins of man as “the works of the devil.” This point of view makes it all the more obvious that Christians should not have any sins. Ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ will ***take away*** [all] ***sins*** from the earth so that God’s kingdom can be fully

established. For those who continue in rebellion, this will necessitate removal by judgment (cf., e.g., Matt. 13:41, 42).

in Him there is no sin. In Christ there never was any sin and never will be any sin, but it is also true that those who are ***in Him*** [who abide in Him] are to be fully separate from sin. (See 1 John 3:6.)

1 John 3:6. *No one who abides in Him sins.* These words build on 1 John 3:5. True Christians, by definition, abide in Christ. The heretics claimed to abide in God, but the apostle has informed us that they did not abide in Him. The ideal presented in this epistle (and throughout the New Testament) is that Christians are to walk in victory over all sin. I don't believe the apostle would have us dilute this ideal except to acknowledge the possibility (not the necessity) of an occasional act of sin (1 John 2:1; cf. 5:16, 17). The Greek verb (*hamartano*) that is translated ***sins*** here is in the present tense. This Greek tense fits the idea that ***no one who abides in [Christ]*** can live in sin or be characterized by sin. (In 1 John 2:1 a different Greek tense, the aorist tense, is used. See under 1 John 2:1.) The Greek verb could be translated several different ways, including the following: "lives in sin"; "practices sin"; "habitually sins"; "keeps on sinning" (with the NIV); "[deliberately and knowingly] habitually commits (practices) sin" (with the *Amplified Bible*); and "is a sinner" (with the *New English Bible*).

no one who sins. A Greek participle of *hamartano* in the present tense is used here. We could translate this participle several different ways, including the following: "no one who lives in sin"; "no one who practices sin"; "no one who continues to sin" (with the NIV); "no one who habitually sins" (with the *Amplified Bible*); and "the sinner" (with the *New English Bible*).

The present tense of *hamartano* is also used in 1 John 3:8 ("the devil has sinned from the beginning") and in 1 John 3:9 ("and he cannot sin"; see under 1 John 3:9).

In 1 John 3:4 the words "everyone who practices sin" are a translation of the present tense participle of the verb *poieo* (which means to do, make, practice, etc.) used with *hamartia* (a noun, which was derived from *hamartano*, that means sin). This same combination is used in 1 John 3:8 ("the one who practices sin"), and 1 John 3:9 also uses the present tense of *poieo* with *hamartia* ("practices sin").

The idea of practicing sin (e.g., 1 John 3:4, 8, 9) is contrasted with the idea of practicing righteousness. In 1 John 2:29 and 3:7 the present tense participle of *poieo* is used with the noun for righteousness (*dikaiosune*). In 1 John 3:10 the same combination is used, but with a "not" included. The ideal is for the Christian to always practice righteousness and never sin.

no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. These words were aimed (at least for the most part) at the heretics. (Cf., e.g., 1 John 3:7; 1:6; 2:3-6.)

1 John 3:7. *let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.* The heretics (who were not practicing righteousness) were trying to deceive John's readers (cf. 1 John 2:26; 2 John 1:7). First John 2:29 is an important cross-reference. On the meaning of

practices righteousness, see under 1 John 3:6.

For the Christian to be **righteous, just as [God] is righteous** doesn't leave room for sin (cf., e.g., 1 John 1:5-7, 9; 2:6; 3:3). This is the Christian ideal, and it is very important for us to understand this ideal. This verse makes it very clear that John is not speaking of a mere positional, legal righteousness—he is speaking of Christians actually living in righteousness through the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, he is not speaking of a gradual growth out of sin into righteousness. Again, this is good news!

1 John 3:8. the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The one who practices sin is following the devil in his rebellion against God, is part of the devil's kingdom, is motivated by the devil and demon spirits, and is a child of the devil. (Cf., e.g., 1 John 3:10, 12; Matt. 13:38; John 8:38, 41, 44; 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:26.) According to the Scriptures, a person cannot be neutral.

As God enables His people to be righteous (cf., e.g., 1 John 2:29; 3:7), so the devil (and his demon spirits) works in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:1-3). This is not to say that those who are not submitted to God are totally controlled by the devil (most have some freedom), but his influence is very extensive.

for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The devil has been sinning since the time of his fall, which took place before the fall of man (cf. Gen. 3:1-24). In the context of 1 John chapter 3, it is quite possible that the words **from the beginning** refer back to the time that mankind joined Satan in his rebellion against God. In one sense the sins of man are the sins (works) of the devil. (See under 1 John 3:5, and see on the second half of 1 John 3:8.) To say this is not to deny that man is responsible for his sins.

The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. As I mentioned under 1 John 3:5, it is quite possible that we should equate these words with "He appeared in order to take away sins" of 1 John 3:5. The Greek verb translated **destroy** is *luo*. The BAGD *Greek Lexicon* (under subheading 4 of *luo*) has, "destroy, bring to an end, abolish, do away with...." If we are to equate the "sins" of 1 John 3:5 with the **works of the devil** of 1 John 3:8, then a translation like "do away with" would be preferable for *luo* here in verse 8. If we do not equate the "sins" of 1 John 3:5 with the **works of the devil**, the sins are at least included as part of **the works of the devil**.

Ultimately (after His second coming), the Lord Jesus Christ will remove from God's kingdom the devil and all who continue to follow him, and all of the devil's works.

1 John 3:9. No one who is born of God practices sin. The fact that true Christians do not practice sin is becoming a familiar theme. Again, the ideal is victory over all sin. First John 2:29 shows that those who are born of God practice righteousness.

because His seed abides in him. God's seed abides in every born-again

Christian. We can speak of being born of the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23), but here **His seed** probably refers to the indwelling Spirit of life.

and he cannot sin. The Greek more literally reads, “and he is not able to live in sin,” or the equivalent. The Greek has the present tense infinitive of the verb *hamartano*, which I have translated “to live in sin.” (On the Greek present tense of *hamartano* see under 1 John 3:6.) This infinitive could be translated several other ways including the following: “to practice sin”; “to habitually sin”; “he cannot go on sinning” (with the NIV); “he cannot practice sinning” (with the *Amplified Bible*); and “he cannot be a sinner” (with the *New English Bible*).

1 John 3:10. In 1 John 3:8 the apostle says, “the one who practices sin is of the devil.” Here he says, **anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God** (and therefore is a child of the devil). First John 2:29-3:9, for example, show that the children of God do practice righteousness.

nor the one who does not love his brother. To love the brethren is a big part of walking in righteousness (cf., e.g., 1 John 1:7; 2:5-11; 3:14-24; 4:7-21; 5:1-3; John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17). In this matter also, the heretics proved that they were not the children of God—they did not love the brethren (cf., e.g., 1 John 1:5-7; 2:3-11, 19; 3:11, 12; 4:20).

1 John 3:11. from the beginning. These words are also used in 1 John 2:7. This message **that we should love one another** goes back to **the beginning** of Christianity. It was also included to some extent in the Old Testament.

1 John 3:12. not as Cain, (who) was of the evil one. See 1 John 3:8 and 10.

NOTES

5. We discussed 1 Thess. 3:13 under *hagiosune*. Jude 24 is an important cross-reference for Col. 1:22 and 23. Let’s look at Jude 24 and 25.

Jude 24, 25. *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, (25) to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, (be) glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

The Greek preposition *katenopion* is used in Jude 24 (*in the presence*) and in Col. 1:22 (“before”). The Greek adjective *amomos* is also used in Jude 24 (*blameless*) and in Col. 1:22 (“blameless”).

Jude 24 speaks of Christians standing in the presence of God the Father at the end of this age. He is able to keep these Christians (and all Christians) from stumbling and to make them stand blameless in His presence. (Cf. 1 Pet. 1:5.) The viewpoint of Jude 24 is that these Christians were (for the most part, at least) already in a blameless state before God and that He was well able to keep them in this state. In the worst case, *stumbling* would speak of falling away from God, but Jude 24 probably also includes the idea that God is able to keep Christians

from falling into any sin.

The epistle of Jude (along with the rest of the Bible) warns Christians that they must do their part to make sure that they stay faithful to God (cf., e.g., Jude 3, 4, 20-23; 1 Pet. 1:6-19; 2:1, 2, 11, 12; 3:8-17; 4:1-6; 5:6-10; 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

6. The Greek has a double negative in Gal. 5:16: *ou me*. See, e.g., H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957 reprint), pp. 266, 267.

7. The BAGD Greek Lexicon (under *stoicheo*) gives “follow the Spirit” as the meaning here. The NIV has, “let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

8. We need to go very slow and be very careful about calling any “Christian” a heretic—that is a serious charge. As we continue, it will be obvious that this particular movement involved a major deviation from the gospel—a true heresy.

9. John Wesley (*Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, p. 631) says on the meaning of these words: “*If we say*—Any child of man, before his blood has cleansed us; *we have no sin*—To be cleansed from, instead of confessing our sins, ver. 9.”

10. Donald W. Burdick (*Letters of John the Apostle*; Chicago: Moody, 1985; pp. 129, 130) says the following regarding the meaning of *that you may not sin*: “Rather than to permit or encourage sin, John’s purpose was to combat it. *Hamartete* (from *hamartano*, *I sin*) is an ingressive aorist indicating that the apostle does not want his readers ever to commit even one act of sin. It is significant that the present tense is not used here. John is not merely aiming at the cessation of the practice of sin (present tense), but at the eradication of every act of sin. His goal is nothing less than perfection.”

11. See, e.g., F. F. Bruce, *Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983 reprint), p. 91; Donald W. Burdick, *Letters of John the Apostle*, pp. 237, 238, 242-244; Benjamin C. Chapman, *Liberty Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Nelson, 1982), p. 769; Leo G. Cox, *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 342; George G. Findlay, *Studies in John’s Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989 reprint), p. 280; J. E. Huther, *Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol. 10 (Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, 1980 reprint), pp. 555, 556, 559, 560; Steven S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 51; Waco: Word Books, 1984), pp. 169-171; J. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, p. 635; B. F. Westcott, *Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966 edition), pp. 103, 106, 107.