

Reason For Writing

5:13 These things [this letter] I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know [be sure, confident] that you have eternal life.

1. John makes it crystal clear why he is writing this first letter.
2. The Christian can “know” he is saved.
 - a. This is not a mere subjective feeling or the opinion of men.
 - b. This is based on God’s promise to those “who walk in the light” (keep the commandments) and confess their sins. (1 Jn. 1:8, 10; 2:3-5).
3. This knowledge pertains to those “who believe in the name of the Son of God.”
4. To believe “in the name of the Son of God” is to believe all that Jesus taught about Himself and believe all that He taught.
5. One cannot claim to accept Christ and then reject His commandments. (Jn. 14:15; 15:14; Lk. 6:46).

“Confidence Which We Have Before Him”

5:14 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

- “Confidence” is from “parresia” [pahr ray see ah] denoting “assurance.”
 - John affirms the child of God can approach God in prayer with “confidence.”
 - God is a loving God and He wants the best for us.
1. The Christian is urged to pray. (Matt. 7:7-11).
 2. God answers prayers “according to His will.”
 3. God’s will is not always done in the world.
 - a. It is not the will of God that men sin and do what pleases them.
 - b. Jesus taught us to pray that God’s will be done indicating that all that happens in the world is not the will of God.
 4. We should pray that God’s will be done. (Matt. 6:9-13).

5:15 And if we know [are absolutely sure] that He hears us {in} whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

- “aitema” [i tay mah] means “what we have asked, requests.”
1. Jesus assured us that God answers our prayers. (Matt. 7:7-11).
 2. James and Peter stressed that God answers prayers. (Jas. 5:16; 1 Pet. 3:12).
 3. God is able to do more than we ask or think. (Eph. 3:20).

EPH 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do **exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think**, according to the power that works within us,

“Sin Unto Death”

5:16 If anyone sees his [Christian] brother committing a sin not {leading} to death, he shall ask and {God} will for him give life to those who commit sin not {leading} to death. There is a sin {leading} to death; I do not say [command] that he should make request for this.

- See Notes on 1 Jn. 5:14-17 located at end of this lesson.
- A separate lesson will be devoted to the “Sin Unto Death.”

5:17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not {leading} to death.

- “adikia” [ah dee kee ah] - “wrongdoing, unrighteousness, wickedness.”
 - Lit “sin unto death”
1. God’s commandments are “righteousness.” (Psa. 119:172).
 2. The “sin unto death” is a sin that a Christian will not confess. (1 Jn. 1:9).
 3. God forgives those who repent.

Concluding Assurances And Warning

5:18 We know [absolutely sure] that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him [himself] and the evil one does not touch [defeat, conquer, overcome] him. See 1 John 3:6, 9

- “auton” - KJV, ASV, McCord have “himself.” This seems to be the idea.
 - “haptomai” [**hap** tah mi] - “touch.”
1. See 1 Jn. 1:8, 10 to show that Christians sin.
 2. The idea is that the Christian is not a habitual sinner who does not care about God and Christ and their laws. (1 Jn. 3:6, 9).

5:19 We know [are absolutely sure] that we are of God, and the whole [unconverted] world lies in {the power of} the evil one [Satan]. Lit. “the whole world lies in the evil (one)”.

1. We can be confident we are God’s children. (1 Jn. 5:4, 13).

2. The words “lies in” mean the unconverted world is controlled by the devil and stands condemned.

3. The world, in this condemned state, has “no hope. (Eph. 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:13).

5:20 **And we know** [are absolutely sure] **that the Son of God has come** [in the flesh], **and has given us understanding** [of God and His will], **in order that we might know Him who is true** [real, genuine], **and we are in Him who is true** [real, genuine], **in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.**

- This is the final use of the words “we know” in John.

1JO 2:3 And by this **we know** that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

1JO 2:5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this **we know** that we are in Him:

1JO 2:18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this **we know** that it is the last hour.

1JO 3:2 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.

1JO 3:14 **We know** that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

1JO 3:16 **We know** love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

1JO 3:19 **We shall know** by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him,

1JO 3:24 And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And **we know** by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

1JO 4:6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this **we know** the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1JO 4:13 By this **we know** that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

1JO 4:16 And **we have come to know** and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

1JO 5:2 By this **we know** that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.

1JO 5:15 And if **we know** that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

1JO 5:18 **We know** that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him.

1JO 5:19 **We know** that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

1JO 5:20 And **we know** that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

- Lit. “we might know the true [one].
- Lit. “we are in the true [one].
- Greek has “heko” [hay koh] meaning “has come.”
- “This is the true God and life eternal.” Greek literally has “this is.”
- RSV has “He” instead of “This.” The idea may be “This [Son] is the true God and eternal life.”

Do the words “true God” in this context refer to the Father or the Son?

1. The language can refer to God. (Jn. 17:3). See Jn. 1:1; 10:30; 14:9; 20:28.

2. The language can refer to Christ.
 - a. Jesus is also referred to as “God” in the scriptures.
 - 1) Jn. 1:1; 10:30; Phil. 2:5-8
 - 2) Jn. 1:18; 20:28; Heb. 1:8; Tit. 2:13.
 - b. Jesus is eternal and He is the source of eternal life. (Isa. 9:6, 7; 1 Jn. 1:2; Jn. 14:6).
 - c. The words “in his Son Jesus Christ” is without a connective or conjunction and appears to be used as an appositive identifying Jesus as the “one who is true.”
 - d. God has revealed Himself in His Son. (Jn. 14:9; 10:30; Col. 1:15).
 - e. In this epistle John has been concerned about the identity of Jesus, and has defended the Deity and humanity of Christ.
 - f. This verse appears to be another affirmation of the identity of Jesus.
3. We may never know for sure if John meant God the Father or God the Son in this verse, but the Deity of the Father or the Son does not rest on this one verse.

“Guard Yourselves From Idols”

5:21 **Little children, guard yourselves from** [lit. the] **idols** [false gods, images].

- “eidolon” [ay doh lahn] - “image, idol”
 - “phulasso” [foo lahs soh] - “guard, protect”
1. “Little children” refers to all John’s readers. (1 Jn. 2:1, 12, 18).
 - a. “Little children” (1 Jn. 2:1) - “teknia” [tek nee ah]
 - b. “Little children” (1 Jn. 2:12) - “teknia” [tek nee ah]
 - c. “Little children” (1 Jn. 2:18) - “paidia” [pi dee ah]
 2. Idolatry is a great danger to Christians.
 - a. Most will not bow down to literal idols.
 - b. Some do worship men or angels. Some worship nature. Some worship fame, money, power, etc.
 - c. Idolatry is putting anything before God.
 - d. This is always a real danger to God’s children.
 - e. It is imperative that we worship only God and put Him first. (Matt. 4:10; 6:33).

f. There is only one real, genuine God. (1 Cor. 8:5; Eph. 4:4-6).

1) There is only one divine essence.

2) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each possess this divine essence.

3) All three are eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, holy, omnipresent, etc.

"Sin Unto Death"

1 John 5:14-17

1JO 5:14 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

1JO 5:15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

1JO 5:16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

1JO 5:17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

1. The passage is a very difficult Bible passage.
2. What is "*the* sin unto death?"
3. Why does John not require prayer for "*the* sin unto death?"

What The Sin Unto Death Is Not

1. The words "sin unto death" do not have an article in the Greek.
 - a. It is not "a" sin or "the" sin, but "sin unto death."
 - b. "Sin" is abstractly considered.
 - c. John does not seem to have exclusively one specific sin in mind.
 - d. It most likely refers to more than one specific sin.
2. The KJV, ASV, NASB all have the literal rendering of "sin to (unto) death."
3. The RSV has "fatal sin." This may be a correct interpretation, but it is an interpretation. The word "fatal" is not in the Greek text.
4. The words "sin unto death" likely refer to sin that is fatal. (Jn. 11:4).

JOH 11:4 But when Jesus heard it, He said, "**This sickness is not unto death**, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it." Lazarus did die, but was raised up by Jesus. (Jn. 11:43, 44). The meaning is that his death was not permanent.. He would be raised by Jesus, but would later die. We do not know when he died the second time. He was an exception to the death statement. (Heb. (9:27). Lazarus and the others raised from the dead died twice.

5. The word "death" in 1 John 5:16 is almost for certain spiritual death - separation from God. See Romans 6:23.

- a. "Death" here is not physical death.
- b. All must experience physical death even if there was no sin in their lives.

Some Improbable Interpretations Of This Difficult Bible Passage

1. It likely was not a sin the church might punish with death by asking God to visit the sinner as God did Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5:1-11).
 - a. The church did not pray for their deaths.
 - b. This was God's divine judgment on them for lying to the Holy Spirit. (Acts 5:3,4).
2. It does not mean one could be forgiven of sin while in actual commission if a brother prays for his forgiveness.
 - a. The words in ASV "sinning a sin" are present participle and denote a state of sin not some sin in actual commission or any other sin the brother has not confessed.
 - b. Such an interpretation is repugnant to reason and divine revelation. (Lk. 13:3,5; Acts 17:30).
3. The "sin unto death" is not some sin such as murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and idolatry.
 - a. These are serious sins. (Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8).
 - b. These sins are all forgivable. (1 Cor. 6:9-11). See 1 Jn. 5:9.
4. It is not likely a sin which caused the church to withdraw fellowship from the sinner. (1 Cor. 5:1-13).
 - a. One reason for withdrawal of fellowship was to save the soul of the sinner. (1 Cor. 5:5).
 - b. Surely the church would and should pray the lost brother would come back to the church.
5. It is not likely the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 12:14-24; Mk. 3:29,30).
 - a. There is no evidence those committing the "sin unto death" were attributing Christ's power to the devil. (Matt. 12:24; Mk. 3:29, 30).
 - b. John does not mention a specific sin.
 - c. The reference in the gospels is primarily to the wicked Pharisees who were calling "the Spirit" in Jesus Satan.
 - d. Jesus taught this was an unpardonable sin.
 - e. It was likely an unpardonable sin because those so harden as to attribute the miracles of Jesus to the devil were past redemption. They were too hardened to confess their sins. Some can reach the point of no return. (Heb. 6:4-6).
 - f. Furthermore, it was a sin that could not be tolerated. The miracles of Jesus proved His Sonship. (Jn. 20:30,31; Acts 2:22). If men accepted the view He did His miracles by the devil, Jesus could never prove His Sonship.

What Is The Sin Unto Death?

1. The text suggests it was a sin that one brother could see another "brother" committing.

"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not {leading} to death" NASB

2. The text suggests it was a sin that a brother could determine if it were a "sin unto death" or not.

"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not {leading} to death" NASB

3. On the basis of 1 John 1:7,9 we learn that a Christian can be forgiven of all sins he or she confesses.

4. This leads us to the conclusion that whatever the "sin unto death" is that it is a sin a brother will not confess.

Any sin a brother will not confess can become "a sin unto death."

Denial Of Deity And Humanity Of Christ

1. One of the sins John deals with in his letters is the denial of the Deity and humanity of Christ.

2. Let's take a look at what John wrote about this sin.

Humanity (1 Jn. 2:22,23; 4:1-3; 2 Jn. 7; 3 Jn. 8-11).

- Some brethren had already gone out from the church into apostasy. (1 Jn. 2:19).
- These brothers were denying Christ who shed His precious for them and they would be hard, if not impossible, to restore.

Deity (1 Jn. 2:22,23).

- Some brethren were denying the Master who bought them. (2 Pet. 2:1ff).
- These false teachers were so set against Jesus that His life, works, death, and resurrection had no affect on them.

3. The "sin unto death" may not be limited to the sin of denying the humanity and Deity of Christ, but it most certainly would have included it.

- a. This was an observable sin.
- b. It was sin a brother could absolutely detect and was not a mere judgment.
- c. John makes it clear that one could clearly detect this sin. It was not a matter of judgment.
- d. This was a sin which would damn a man's soul.
- e. It was a sin that would damn the souls of others.

Why Did John Not Encourage His Readers To Pray For The One Committing the "sin unto death"?

1. It is impossible to answer this question with absolute certainty.

2. It was likely because John did not feel it would help.

- a. These false teachers may have been so evil and so corrupt that they were beyond redemption. (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-29).
- b. God was willing to forgive them (1 Jn. 1:7,9), but they were unwilling to repent.

- c. All false teachers are not past redemption.
 - d. Some false teachers are sincere, and will embrace the truth once they learn it.
3. The Christian is very concerned for others.
- a. He is conscious of the physical needs of the brother. (1 Jn. 3:17,18).
 - b. He is very concerned about the soul of his brother and all men. (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19, 20). See Mk. 16:16; Matt. 28:19, 20).
 - c. The Christian would naturally pray for all even his enemies. (Matt. 5:43, 44).
4. John does not forbid praying for such as commit "sin unto death," but he does not command the Christian to pray for those brothers and sisters who were hopelessly lost because of their refusal to repent.

Conclusion

1. It is my personal belief that is very difficult for a Christian to apply this passage with absolute certainty today.
2. We do not know for sure what the "sin unto death" was.
3. It is interesting to suggest what might be the correct interpretation, but it is dangerous to be dogmatic about what the scripture has not defined.
4. It is extremely difficult to know for certain if sin is "sin unto death."
 - a. There are some Christians who have turned from Christ and deny His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His vicarious death, His resurrection, and His deity.
 - b. These people are without hope because nothing seems to persuade them to repent and come back to Christ.
 - c. They are like those Peter described. (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

2PE 2:20 For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

2PE 2:21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them.

2PE 2:22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

- d. We may not be commanded to pray for such as these, but I do because I can not be certain they will never repent and come back to Christ.
- e. I do not condemn those who do not pray for them.
- f. The scriptures teach prayer is optional where this sin is involved.

Note: Jesus gave a surprising statement in regard to those who refused to accept those sent by Him. (Mk. 6:11; Lk. 9:5). Paul also followed these instructions. (Acts 13:51).

"Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
© Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation

Used by permission." (www.Lockman.org)

