

## "Sin Unto Death"

1 John 5:14-17

### Introduction

1. The text of this lesson is found in 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.

2. The passage we have just read is a very difficult Bible passage.

- a. What is "the sin unto death?"
- b. Why does John not require prayer for "the sin unto death?"
- c. This seems strange in view of the fact Christians are to pray even for those who persecute them. (Matt. 5:43, 44).

MAT 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.'

MAT 5:44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

- d. This seems strange in view of the fact Christians are to pray for authorities even if they are wicked and hostile to Christianity. (1 Tim. 2:1,2).

### 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. Lit. "There is sin to [or unto] death."

2. The KJV, ASV, NASB all have the literal rendering of "sin unto death."

3. The RSV has "fatal sin."

4. The words "sin unto death" likely refer to sin that is fatal. (Jn. 11:4).

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

ROM 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### **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. (Acts 5:5, 10).
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 8:22; 17:30).
3. The "sin unto death" is not some sin such as murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and idolatry.
  - a. These are serious sins.
  - b. These sins are all forgivable. (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

1CO 6:9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,  
1CO 6:10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.  
1CO 6:11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

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).

1CO 5:5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- b. Surely the church would 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. 3:28-30).
  - a. There is no evidence those committing the "sin unto death" were attributing Christ's power to the devil.
  - 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.
    - 1) Jesus taught He performed miracles by the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 12:28).
    - 2) They charged He performed miracles by the power of the devil. (Matt. 12:24).

## 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 if he or she walks in the light and confesses his sins.

1JO 1:7 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.

1JO 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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

5. 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.

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

1) Some brethren had already gone out from the church into apostasy. (1 Jn. 2:19).

2) These brothers were denying Christ who shed His precious for them and they would be hard, if not impossible, to restore.

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

1JO 2:22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

1JO 2:23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

1) Some brethren were denying the Master who bought them. (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

2PE 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

2PE 2:2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

2PE 2:3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2) 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. This was a sin which would damn a man's soul
  - d. It was a sin that would damn the souls of others.

**Why Did Not John 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).

HEB 6:4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

HEB 6:5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,

HEB 6:6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

HEB 10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

HEB 10:27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

HEB 10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

HEB 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

- b. God was willing to forgive them (1 Jn. 1:7,9), but they were unwilling to repent.
3. The Christian is very concerned for others.
  - a. He is conscious of the physical needs to the brother. (1 Jn. 3:17,18).
  - b. He is very concerned about the soul of his brother and all men.
  - 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. 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.
  - d. I do not condemn those who do not pray for them.

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