

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part twenty-five

Sunday, July 11th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2117

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THE LIFE OF PRAYER AND THE SIN THAT LEADS TO DEATH - continued

1 John 5:13-17 - "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. [14] And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. [15] And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. [16] If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. [17] All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death."

There are four truths I want to study from this great text. We considered two of them last week. ***First, true spiritual life longs to draw near to God - 1 John 5:14 - "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us." - IPAD TEXT*** - Note that little word "***toward.***" This is the direction of a spiritual heart. It is ***aimed*** in God's direction.

Second, God responds to those drawing near to Him - 1 John 5:14-15 - "[14] And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. [15] And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." - IPAD TEXT:

Today we'll consider two more points from this text

3) **I MUST PRAY FOR MY BROTHER'S SINS WITH THE SAME PASSION THAT I PRAY FOR MY OWN**

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:16-17 - "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. [17] All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death."

It doesn't usually enter my mind that my prayers for *my* needs can go unanswered because I don't pray with the same passion for my *brother's* needs. That's why John inserts this strong caution.

These are difficult words. If we weren't teaching through the whole letter they'd never be touched. Hence the value of allowing the text to select the subject.

John has already taught that the whole world in which we live is "***under the control of the evil one***"(5:19). We are all journeying in hostile territory. We naturally feel the need to keep ourselves close to God in prayer. ***But do I feel the need to keep my brother close to God with my prayer?*** That's John's point.

In my prayer time I must remember I'm not the only one with struggles and problems and issues and a fallen heart. I'm not the **only** one who blows it. I'm not the only one needing divine help. People are dropping like flies. Do I care? Does it show in my prayer life?

Question: How often do I stop and think my prayer can help give my brother or sister spiritual life? Isn't that what the middle part of **verse 16** says? **"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life...."**

This is not just a **person** who sins. It's my **"brother"** (or **sister**). If a church comes to view itself merely as a **collection of individuals** there will be **gossip, hatred, division**, and all kinds of petty sin. But we aren't just **individuals** who **sit together**. **We're brothers and sisters - spiritual flesh and blood.**

And John says you can tell when a church really knows this truth from the **inside**. If a church sees everyone in it as a **brother** or a **sister** the people will **pray** for each other.

John wants me to get this. He's very **in-my-face** with this truth. Listen, my brother will sin if I don't pray for him. Either that registers or it doesn't. My prayer is one of God's ordained means for bringing grace and power into my brother's life.

4) THERE IS A SIN THAT LEADS TO DEATH AND JOHN SAYS WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT IT

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:16-17 - "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. *There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.* [17] All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death."

These are verses that have been debated by Bible scholars for centuries. Let me offer my own thoughts and you can judge their worth.

- a) I don't think the "*sin that leads to death*" refers to a sin punished by physical death. I don't think this is the same idea as is contained in the warnings of the *communion passage* - **1 Corinthians 11:29-31 - "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. [31] But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged."** - IPAD TEXT

Obviously, there **are** sins that lead to physical death. We may not be **comfortable** with this idea, but our comfort isn't the issue. Being true to the Word is the issue. And you can see there **are** sins leading to physical death. Look again at the story of **Ananias and Sapphira** in **Acts 5:1-11** for another example.

- b) Without being too dogmatic, I think the way you interpret "**death**" in **verse 16** has to be consistent with the way you interpret the word "**life**" in the very same verse. When John says I should pray for my sinning brother and **God will give him life**, he doesn't mean my brother was physically dead and will be resurrected at the moment I pray. The life referred to is **spiritual** life.

To my mind that, at the very least, opens the door to the possibility that the "**death**" John describes in the very same context could well be a **spiritual** death - some lethal, final separation from God's loving reach and touch.

If that's the case, **what is this sin that leads to death?**

- c) **To my mind the sin unto death is a willful turning my back in hard and persistent rebellion to the Spirit of grace and salvation.**

I think this sin is described in different ways in different parts of the Bible, yet the result is always the same. John says "***all wrongdoing is sin***" (verse 17). But there comes a time when ***sin becomes fatal***.

We all sin in different ways. But there's a kind of sinning heart that ***never comes home***. There is a certain ***solidified sinful disposition*** that becomes the end of the road.

This has always been a concern for those with a heart for God. They check for the ***first inclinations*** of it the way a healthy person checks for the early stages of cancer:

IPAD TEXT - Psalm 19:13 - "Keep back your servant also from *presumptuous* sins; let them not have *dominion* over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of *great transgression*."

There's ***sin*** and there's ***presumptuous sin***. Check the Old Testament for yourself. There was no provision in the law of sacrifices for ***high-handed*** sin. ***Presumptuous*** sins are sins committed with ***persistent, unrepentant stubbornness***.

Even Jesus, with all the love of His perfect heart, was still honest enough to caution on this subject:

IPAD TEXT - Mark 3:28-30 - "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, [29] but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but *is guilty of an eternal sin*"— [30] for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'"

The ***background*** to these words from Jesus is where the ***meaning*** of His words lies. It's really quite simple. He is addressing religious people who had seen ***ample evidence to know they were wrong and Jesus was right***. Yet they ***would not change their minds***.

God's power, love, and presence was manifested to them repeatedly. It wasn't easy to deny all the evidence. But they did - over and over. They would rather say Jesus did His works by ***demons*** than the power of the ***Spirit***. Anything was a good enough excuse as long as they didn't have to ***bow their knees to Christ as Lord***.

Jesus said there was no hope for that kind of stubbornness. Finally, reluctantly, their wish would be granted. The same idea is restated passionately in the letter to the Hebrews:

IPAD TEXT - Hebrews 6:4-6 - "For it is impossible to *restore again to repentance* those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, [5] and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, [6] if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt."

These were people who had so many good things going for them. Look at how well they started. But the final principle is a very direct one. ***Either people make room for Jesus or they crucify Him all over again.***

So John, a ninety year-old apostle who's seen a lot of life role by, says there comes a time when the heart passes its own death sentence. It become set - fixed.

Just as a side, it is interesting to notice the way John refers to the one who commits that sin leading to death. John doesn't call him a brother. The brother is the one who commits the sin that is ***not*** unto death. The other sinner is never addressed or identified.

"Boy, pastor Don, what kind of a way is that to end a Sunday morning service?"

Ask John. What kind of way is it to end an epistle? The real question now is ***why does John link these two subjects - prayer and the sin unto death - together?*** This is the question I raised at the beginning of this teaching. Why talk about prayer as a lead-in to this horrible subject of sin that leads to death?

To catch this is to catch the heart of John's call. ***Nothing prevents hardness of heart like prayer.*** The sin that leads unto death doesn't happen in an instant. It creeps up on the soul like mold in a damp basement. ***Carelessness*** turns to ***casualness***, turns to ***indifference***, turns to ***death***. Don't trust ***yourself*** with your own heart. Bring it regularly and honestly and brokenly to Jesus.

You and I don't always know what's going on in our own skin. Adulterous and murderous David learned well how far we can fall from our best intentions. For the rest of his life he would wisely pray ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!"*** (Psalm 139:23).

More goes on at prayer meetings than meets the eye. Much can be changed and much can be salvaged in **my** heart and, by my prayers, in my **brother's** heart. Much sin can be prevented. Much precious time can be kept from waste. That's why waiting on the Lord is always a good investment. Help keep your **own** soul **and** the souls of others to boot.