

What Is the Sin Unto Death?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 June 2010

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] I'll take your Bibles tonight and open them first of all to the text that we're going to be looking at tonight.

1 John 5.16. Now you already, hopefully, got one of the little sheets over there, little study guides. And so you already know what we're going to be dealing with tonight.

Again, I keep thinking that I should have put on my little sheet a place for you to put your name down because I don't know who asked this question. But the question pertains to something that is found in this particular verse.

And the King James rendering of it is the sin unto death. The sin unto death. Let's go ahead and read the text. 1 John 5.16.

Now it's an interesting passage, isn't it?

[1 : 34] In fact, let me go ahead and read verse 17 because we'll also include that a little bit later. All unrighteousness is sin. And boy, howdy, it is, isn't it?

All unrighteousness is sin. And there is a sin not leading to death. Now what in the world is that about? So the question is, what is this sin leading to death?

Or the sin unto death, according to King James. Well, as I put for you on your study guide there, there are some assumptions that we can make right off the bat that I think will help us and guide us to making a conclusion about the meaning of this phrase in the text.

That first assumption, I think, is pretty clear. And that is that in the larger text, in this chapter in 1 John, the theme is prayer.

All right? So we're talking about, he's talking about prayer here. Or more specifically, intercessory prayer. And the need and importance of intercessory prayer.

[2 : 47] All right? That is the larger context. And, you know, we need to pray for one another. Need to intercede. And not just for, you know, Aunt Susie's sore toe.

But we need to pray when someone is struggling with sin. Need to pray for repentance. That kind of praying needs to take place within the body of Christ.

All right? So that's the context. It's intercessory prayer. And there's very little debate. I don't think there could be any plausible debate about the context.

It's prayer. The second thing might be debated by some, but I think it's pretty clear, at least just on the surface, on the face of it. But the person being prayed for here, or persons being prayed for here, or specifically the one who is committing a sin, whether it's a sin not leading to death or a sin that's leading to death, that person is a believer.

I think it's just clear from the text. I'm talking about a born-again child of God. John said there in the opening phrase of the verse, if anyone sees his brother, his brother's sin.

[4 : 14] Now, someone might say, well, brother applies to the one who's sinning the sin not unto death, and it's an unbeliever sinning the sin that is unto death. But I don't think there's any reason to try to twist that out of the grammar.

It just seems clear that we're talking about a brother here. And, by the way, I would say that that particular assumption, I think it's more than assumption.

Maybe assumption is not the right word, because that kind of conveys the idea of maybe we're right or maybe we're not, or we're just assuming something. When I say assumption from the text, I mean just from the text it seems clear.

That fact, the fact that the prayer is for a brother, and the one who is, quote, sinning, committing a sin unto death, the fact that that person is a brother is important in our understanding of the passage.

All right? Third, the third assumption that we just draw from the text, in this case draw from Scripture as a whole, is based upon the fact that we are praying, since we are praying for believers here, then the word death in the passage, how are we to understand that death?

[5 : 29] What kind of death is it? It's a physical death, not a spiritual death. All right? If we're talking about praying for a brother, then we know that the death cannot be a spiritual death, because that's not possible for a born-again believer.

We know, then, the assumption I think we can draw from this, and not all do this, but I think we can clearly draw from it, is that this is physical death.

It would be a violation of the whole of Scripture, really, to say that John is talking about some sin that leads to spiritual death. That is for a believer.

All right? All sin leads to spiritual death, and, you know, death is the result of sin. Spiritual death, certainly. Ask Adam and Eve.

They died in the Garden of Eden when they sinned. They didn't die physically then. The death came later. So physical death, in one sense, is a result of sin, but we're talking about a specific sin that leads to a death, and it's not a spiritual death.

[6 : 43] It is a physical death. For example, and I gave you several verses of Scripture there, John 11, 26, you know, that particular passage with the context there, as Jesus is speaking to Martha, and he says, He that believeth and liveth in me shall never die.

Never die. Did he mean physical death there? He's talking about spiritual death there. All right. Shall never die.

And so he's clearly talking about spiritual death there. It's in John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have, what?

Everlasting life. That's not a physical everlasting life. It's spiritual life. And Romans 6, 23, the gift of God is eternal life.

It's everlasting life. And so Jesus, you know, in two of those passages, and Paul certainly together, they're talking about spiritual life.

[7 : 59] And so the believer will never die spiritually. Right? So then if we're talking about a believer here in 1 John, or if John's talking about a believer here in 1 John 5, 16, then he could not be referring to a spiritual death there, because the believer will never die spiritually.

He's talking about a physical death. All right? Those are three assumptions I think we can make from the text. Now, before we really, I guess, in a sense, based on those assumptions, have come to some kind of conclusion.

At least I have. It's apparent. And we'll get back to that. But really, we ought to talk about some of the views about this particular text. And consider whether they are plausible.

The first view that I've listed there for you is, and this is offered by some scholars, this was an old one, this is really the Catholic view, and we're talking about mortal sins.

That is, here is a believer. They would agree that this is a believer in the text, in 1 John 5, 16. It's a believer, but this believer commits a mortal sin as opposed to a venial sin.

[9 : 25] In this view, the mortal sins are a category of sins for which there is no forgiveness.

Alright? And this view really comes from a certain translation of the Bible, the RSV.

If you had an RSV, I doubt very seriously anybody here has an RSV. Here, do you have an RSV? Oh, okay. Yeah, I've got one in my library.

But where the text says a man commits a sin or sins a sin, the RSV translated mortal sin to make a distinction between another category of sins that are forgivable but mortal sins are not forgivable. Like murder would be one. Suicide would be one. And some others. Alright? So there's one view of the kind of sin we're talking about and so there's no need to pray for that one because there's no forgiveness available.

It's a mortal sin. The second one is, I don't know who might fall under this category or this one might fall under a certain category of doctrinal belief, but it's called a post-baptismal sin.

[10 : 48] So the sin that is committed here is a sin or a pattern of sin, they might say, that is occurring after salvation, after baptism.

And they usually turn to or would get this from Hebrews 6.4. And it is a troublesome passage, but I think it's easily explained.

But in Hebrews 6.4, it says, For in the case of those who have once been enlightened, those who hold the view of post-baptismal sins equate enlightenment with the salvation experience, including baptism.

I think probably our Church of Christ, some of our Church of Christ friends would hold this view. But they would equate enlightenment with the baptismal, being baptized into Christ.

And so the text says, For those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucified to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame, and so forth.

[12:17] That's a troubling text. And maybe that's a question we could deal with at some other time. But the short answer is, nowhere in the text is the writer of Hebrews mentioning salvation.

This is not about salvation. This is just the short answer is those who have come real close. They have enjoyed, embraced even some of God's Word.

They have been enlightened mentally. The word enlightened is really a mental thing, an intellectual thing. They're mentally aware of the truth of the Gospel, and they have tasted.

See, these are very pointed words. Enlightened. Tasted. They have tasted of the heavenly gift, that heavenly gift being salvation.

They've tasted of it. They have been partakers. And that word really points more toward an association with the work of the Holy Spirit. But they've never been saved.

[13:23] And so they've come close, and God has led them to a point where they're close, and they have every reason to believe, and they have absolutely, not only rejected, but turned away, totally away.

And the judgment is that they can never be renewed to repentance. So there are other questions that would come from that text that we're not going to answer tonight.

But the short answer is it's not about salvation. And so we're not talking here, the sin unto death is not talking about post-baptismal sins. If so, you and I are sunk, every one of us.

Alright? Now, I can say that about you. Alright? I'm not trying to be offensive. But since you were baptized, you've sinned. Every day you have.

And so have I. Alright? So, twice is that? Well, at least you... You really... Major confession here.

[14:25] Third is the idea of apostasy. That what John is referring to, or who John is referring to here, is the apostate.

Dying, or denying rather, the faith. Denying the faith. Matthew 10.33 But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven.

And there are other texts that we could go through. But it is the out and out. Here's the idea of being saved. You're saved. Born again.

You're a child of God now. And you're rocking along for several years as a Christian. And then you... You deny Christ.

Come to a place where you deny Him. Deny the Gospel. Deny the truth of God's Word. And so you become an apostate. And my question is, what about Peter?

[15:30] I guess then Peter lost his salvation. That day when he denied Jesus three times. And no need to pray for Peter. He's lost. It's just too bad for him.

And so, you know. Well, number four. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit would be another view. Out of Luke chapter 12.

Let's see if I marked that one here. I did not. Look at Luke chapter 12.

Verse 10. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him. But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.

Now that text itself also raises some questions. And we don't have time tonight to deal with that question. Deal with that later. But that is blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

[16:30] It being the unpardonable sin. Alright? And we'll deal with that some other time. But again, I have to bring you back to one of the assumptions that I think is very valid from the text.

We're not talking about losing your salvation. It's not possible for a believer to ever die spiritually again once being saved.

And that, I think, we can rest upon that in light of Scripture as a whole. Number five would be denying that Jesus came in the flesh is another view from 1 John 4.3.

It's the... Let's see here. In every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. Or does not confess Jesus is not from God.

This is the spirit of the Antichrist of which you have heard that it is coming and now it is already in the world. And so here's, you know, the person who just comes to the place, a believer, can be a believer, according to this view, who just comes to the place intellectually or in their heart and they say, well, you know, Jesus was just a man and He was not God, did not come from God, and so forth.

[17:52] And it's the mark of the Antichrist. Number six would be the common view. Really, it is kind of somewhat in all of these various views, but it is just simply the view that a believer can lose his or her salvation.

It's a loss of salvation. They would translate this sin unto death or New American Standard comes closer to how they might translate it, the sin leading to death.

They would take that preposition, pros, it's just a preposition, and expand and say that it's a sin which is going towards death, spiritual death, a pattern of sin, moving into sin.

I mean, this is a man or a woman who sins and maybe initially feels conviction. It's just kind of the classic view of the losing of salvation view.

You know, you begin by feeling a little conviction, but then, you know, you sin that sin again, continue to sin, and you've torn up about it, but you keep on, and then, you know, reach a place eventually where you no longer feel any conviction, any effect at all.

[19:14] In fact, you know, this person would no longer see it as sin, come to a point where, well, maybe this is not sin, kind of justify it, kind of rationalize it. So you're moving from sin to more sin to more sin, and maybe repent at first, but then no more repentance, and then finally come to the conclusion this is not sin, and so, you know, the idea of repentance will not ever enter into the mind again, and the result is spiritual death.

Okay? So it's just simply the view that, you know, yeah, God will forgive your sin, and none of us can be perfect, but if you continue in a direction of sin, and do not repent, then you will lose your salvation.

And those who would take the extreme view that, from this text, that you can never be forgiven.

That you have trampled underfoot the blood of Jesus, and you've lost your salvation, and it's all gone for you, no possible.

And that's a very common view from this text. Now, none of those possibilities work for me, and I hope they don't for you, because, well, let's just read that text again.

1 John 5, 16. If anyone sees his brother, we're talking about a believer, committing a sin, or sinning a sin, not leading to death, we take that as spiritual death, or physical death, rather, he shall ask, and God will for him give life to those who commit sin, not leading to death.

[20:57] There is a sin leading to death. I do not say that he should make requests for this. By the way, when he says, I shall not say that he should make requests for this, it's not a commandment not to pray for them.

See, we kind of draw a quick conclusion here that God is saying, or in this case, John, but he's inspired by the Holy Spirit, that there's no need to pray for them.

In fact, don't pray for them. They've committed a sin and a death. Now, my question is, how do you know? How do you know? How do you know?

The idea here, and it's difficult from the, I guess, from the language, no matter how it might be translated, and it's just quirky grammar. I mean, it's quirky in the New American Standard, as wooden as that translation is sometimes, and it's even quirky in the King James and some of the more contemporary translations.

It's just kind of, I say not that you should, you know, it's just weird, isn't it? The idea is, really, if you pray for them, you may not get the results you're hoping.

[22:18] Don't count on getting the results that you're hoping when you pray. For those who have sinned the sin unto death. All right, let me go on, and then we'll talk a little bit about this.

All unrighteousness sin. And there is a sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death.

All right, now what is it? Well, apparently, there is a sin, or we might even say, could conclude that it's a series of sins, a pattern of sinfulness, that a believer can choose to follow, choose to participate in, a series of sin, a habit of sin, for which God will, or sometimes will, He doesn't always, will take that believer out of this world through death.

It's a sin that leads to death. God will just take them home. And I do not think that it's any one sin, one category sin, one type of sin.

The Bible doesn't tell us that there's one particular kind of sin. I believe it is a sin, though, that disgraces God so profoundly that God just will not allow that to go on.

[23 : 58] A sin that disgraces God or dishonors His grace, dishonors the gospel, disgraces the church. And I do believe that we're talking about, most likely, a believer who is a leader, a teacher, someone who is higher profile, that could sin in such a way as to bring disgrace upon God's church, bring disgrace upon the gospel.

And there's some examples. Moses is an example. I'm not sure that he fits perfectly, because I have the suspicion that we're talking about someone who gets very sick and then very quickly dies. Maybe even someone who drops dead. Just like that. Of course, you have no opportunity to pray for them. If they're dead, you're not going to pray for them. But Moses did die prematurely.

He was not allowed to see the promised land. Do you remember what happened? In Numbers chapter 20, we don't need to turn to it, but Moses got angry with God's people. Yeah, and the people kept begging him for water, and he just got so put out by God's people, and God had commanded Moses to speak to the rock.

This is in Numbers chapter 20. To speak to the rock, and it would provide the water, but Moses got mad, and he struck the rock three times.

[25 : 35] Now, if we understand 1 Corinthians 10.4, we're not going to look at that tonight, but in that passage, Paul identifies the rock.

The rock is Christ. It's symbolic of Christ, and it had already been struck once. In fact, God commanded Moses to strike the rock back in Exodus chapter 17, and Moses struck the rock, and it gave forth water, and he was doing exactly what God told him to do, and so there was no ramification for striking rock then, but now here again, he's being commanded to get water from the rock, but this time he says, speak to it, not strike it, and it is my view that since the rock is Jesus, Jesus died once.

He died once, and so for Moses to strike that rock a second time, Jesus is not going to die a second time. No crucifixion the second time.

This time he said speak to him, and so when Moses struck the rock that second time, he spoiled the type that God had provided for his people. And God said, you will not enter into the promised land, and Moses died before he was allowed to look in, but died before they went into the promised land, and God of course took care of his burial.

I think it's an example of that. Moses was allowed to lead, you see, great leader, and God, would not take away the punishment, physical death.

[27 : 18] As a matter of fact, you could look, we're not going to do that tonight, but in Deuteronomy 3, 25, and 26, we have Moses actually asking God to forgive him, to try to intercede there, to bring restoration, and even though he prayed that, God did not do it, and God did not allow Moses to go into the promised land.

In the New Testament, some New Testament examples will be to Ananias and Sapphira. I believe they were believers. When they lied to the Holy Spirit there in Acts 5, did God take their salvation away from them?

I don't think there's any indication that he did that. Did he kill them? Yeah, he did. I mean, graveyard dead, boom, just like that. Sapphira comes in, there's the feet, you know, the feet of the guys are carrying out his, you know, her dead husband.

And, they disgraced God at a crucial time in the birth and the growth of the church. And, God just would not allow it.

And, he struck them dead. There were some folks in the Corinthian church who were disgracing God through their observance of the Lord's Supper. They weren't taking, please hear me, and you can look at that text some other time, but 1 Corinthians 11 is where it's found.

[28 : 40] They were not taking the Lord's Supper with known sin in their life. I think every time we take the Lord's Supper, we ought to deal with unconfessed sin, certainly so, but they were not getting sick and dying because they weren't taking the Lord's Supper with pure hearts, as important that is.

What they were doing is taking it in an unworthily manner. I mean, the Bible tells us they were getting drunk, sick, and they were just missing out on the entire meaning of the whole supper, and

they were dishonoring it, and God made many of them sick and killed many of them. I think that's the sin, an example of the sin leading to death. And so, it's a sin that a Christian can commit, and it is one, I think, that disgraces God, disgraces the body of Christ, and hence I believe it's probably more indicative or more usual that it would happen to someone who's high profile, who would be in a position to bring great dishonor and disgrace to the cause of Christ and to the purpose of God.

And I close with one example that I think, and you can probably think of some in your life, but I grew up in Missouri, and Missouri Baptists, years ago, were led.

The executive director of Missouri Baptists was a tremendous leader and had served for, I don't know, umpteen years leading Missouri Baptists. And suddenly it came to light that he had embezzled just thousands and thousands of dollars from Baptists in Missouri.

[30 : 31] You know, within two weeks of that coming to light, the man dropped dead of a heart attack. Now, someone would say, you know, that's just coincidence, but I don't think so. I think God just took him out of here.

He had so disgraced God. And by the way, what happened to the church when Ananias and Sapphira were judged in that way, see, God's purpose, he didn't stop the disgrace, it happened, there was no reversing that, but it struck fear in the hearts of people, of God's people, that hey, this thing of sin is pretty serious with God, very serious, and there is a sin that leads to death. that