

SIN UNTO DEATH

1 John 5:16-17

Intro: I have several sets of sermons by well-known pastors from many years ago, and they contain messages that I have profited from in my own walk with the Lord. But I could not find a single sermon on the text that I have for this morning. I am not saying that no one has ever spoken on these verses before because I am equally sure that these verses have been singled out for exposition hundreds of times. I just couldn't find any in my library.

When you first look at these two verses, it looks like the Apostle John was taking a big jump to a new subject when he moved from what is verse 15 to verse 16 in our English Bibles. But I would point out to you that we do not come to a different subject at all because verses 14 and 15 have to do with prayer, and verses 16 and 17 have to do with prayer also. But they are very different as well. Verses 14 and 15 have to do with the way we would pray for ourselves. Verses 16 and 17 have to do with prayer for a brother who has sinned.

Now this “brother” is not a brother like James and John were brothers (although it could be), but it has to do with a brother in Christ. And I believe that I am staying within the bounds of this verse when I say that it could apply to a sister in Christ. This is an epistle which is addressed to those of us who are members of God's family, people of both sexes and of all ages who have been “born of God.”

One of the major points of emphasis in this epistle is, as we have seen, that we who are in the family of God, are to love one another. And surely one of the greatest evidences of our love for each other, is that we pray for each other. Now we are not to be sticking our noses into each other's lives, so to speak, but in the normal course of life it is often apparent that things are not right in a brother or sister's life. And when we see that things are not right in some other believer's life, we are not to make sure that everyone else knows about it, but we are to pray for that brother or sister. We keep it to ourselves, but we go to the Lord about it. In this way we can help a brother or sister and not even tell them that we are praying for them. In this sense we are our brother's keeper. Sin is such a major problem for all of us because we live in a world of sin, and we are still capable of sinning even though we are saved. We pray that the Lord will keep our children from sinning. I am thankful if you ask the Lord to

keep me from sin. I need all of the help I can get, and you probably feel the same way about yourself if you know the Lord. Our Lord ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25), and we can be sure that He prays to the Father to keep us from sinning. In our NT reading for this week in the Gospel of Luke, we had these words found in Luke 22:31-32:

31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

But we all know that if we do sin, we do not lose our salvation. Sin affects our fellowship with the Lord, but once we are saved we are saved forever. We have the words of the Lord Jesus guaranteeing us that if we are saved, we are saved forever. We read in John 10:27-29 that the Lord spoke these words to a group of unbelieving Jews:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

I point this out not only because it is good for us to be assured of the eternal nature of our salvation, but to point out in our text in 1 John 5 that the death which the Apostle John was talking about, was not spiritual death, but *physical death*.

Neither is this the unpardonable sin. That is a sin which only people who are not saved, can commit.

When God created Adam and Eve, He warned them about the severe penalty for sin by warning them that the penalty of disobedience was that they “would surely die.” When they sinned, they did not immediately drop down dead, but they died spiritually and were alienated from God. Eventually died physically, and were subject to eternal death if God had not graciously intervened. Contrary to what some are saying in these days, there is a hell, a place of eternal punishment. But by the death of Christ on the Cross, those who believe in Christ are saved eternally from the possibility of going to hell. John 3:16 makes that clear. And so does John 5:24:

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and

believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Paul was speaking of the eternal nature of our salvation when he wrote to the Philippian believers in these words:

6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

Let me give you one other verse before I move on to speak of sin unto death. It is found in Jude 24-25:

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

We can never lose our salvation once we are really saved because we are not saved as a reward for anything that we have done, but we are saved by the death of Christ where He paid the penalty for our sins in full.

Having said that, it is possible for a believer to sin against the Lord to the point where the Lord takes his life, and he dies.

Let me give you some examples from Scripture.

I am sure that in reading the Bible you remember the times when the Lord told someone that He had healed, "Go, and sin no more." See John 5:14 and John 8:11. There definitely were times when people were in physical trouble because of sin. In the case mentioned in John 5, the Lord had healed a man who had had an infirmity for thirty-eight years. And he was not able to get down into the water before someone else had beat him. After the Lord healed him, He told the man, "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14).

Or take the example of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. This was a time of special need among the Lord's people, and so the people who had possessions sold all that they had, gave the funds to the Apostles to give to the people. Ananias and Sapphira did the same thing, but only brought part of what they had gotten, yet made the apostles think that they were giving all. For them, Ananias and Sapphira, that was sin unto death.

There are several illustrations in the OT. Moses sinned unto death in that

he was not allowed to go with the Israelites when they entered the promised land because in his anger with the children of Israel, he had struck the rock twice to give them water, when the Lord had told him just to speak to the rock. See the story in Numbers 20. And then read Deuteronomy 32:48-52.

The story of Achan in the battle over Jericho gives us another Biblical example of sin unto death. The nation was defeated at Ai because Achan had disobeyed the Lord in the battle over Jericho. He did a good job of concealing the fact that he had taken some things from Jericho when the Lord had told them not to take anything for themselves. Read the story in Joshua 6 and 7.

This morning we are going to observe the Lord's Supper. When we do, Pastor Will and I will read as we usually do, from the words given to us by the Apostle Paul about the observance of the Supper, remembering the Lord's death by eating the bread which symbolizes our Lord's body when He died, and drinking from the fruit of the vine which represents the shedding of His blood when He died for our sins. But those words are followed by these words:

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (1 Cor. 11:28-30).

Notice the last words of that passage: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

Now I don't have the wisdom to say that the Lord is working the same way today, but Paul obviously knew of "many" who were made physically weak, and some who were chronically ill, and many had died because they had not discerned the Lord's body. I looked up the word "discerning" and found that it indicates that many people in those days failed to understand how completely different this Supper is from any other Supper. They failed to discern the special meaning of this Supper. And their lack of understanding was apparent in the way they took observed the Supper.

It may not be that the Lord is still doing now what He did then, but who wants to say that He isn't. All of this surely should make us realize how

very careful we need to be about sin. What a solemn thing it is to take the Lord's Supper, and how careful we should be about how we observe it. Sin of all kinds has become so common, and people seem to be getting away with whatever they want to do. But is it possible that the Lord is speaking to us with all of the terrible hurricanes we are experiencing? Over three hundred people are dead today who were alive last Sunday. Does God have a hand in the difficult economic times we are having? And where are the leaders that are warning us about the wrath of God. The troubles in ancient Egypt got worse and worse until Pharaoh's servants realized that what was happening to them was not just to be expected, but it was "the finger of God." Pharaoh didn't get it until he stood by the dead body of his firstborn son. And then he regretted letting the children of Israel go, so he took his army and went after them thinking he could bring them back, and he and his whole army ended up in the bottom of the Red Sea – except for those whose bodies were washed up on the shore. In Bible times not all sickness was due to sin, *but probably much of it was.*

We all are going to die unless the Lord comes before we die, but do you think that it could be that in the Church today, and in the world, many are weak and sickly and some have died because of sin unconfessed sin?

What is it that we need to learn? Our text tells us: "All unrighteousness is sin." Sin is whatever is displeasing to God, and He has spelled out the meaning of sin in great detail in His Word. But He has also written it to a great degree in the heart of every living being. Whatever is contrary to the nature of God, and displeasing to Him, is sin. And sin is going to be punished if it is not forgiven. And it can only be forgiven by the blood of Christ.

We don't know when God is going to judge sin in the lives of people today, but we as Christians need to be praying for each other when we see a brother or sister in Christ growing careless about sin. And we need to be careful ourselves about ourselves. We can thank the Lord for those who pray for us that the Lord will keep us from sin, and that we by God's grace will devote our lives to being obedient to God. There was sin unto death when the Bible was written, and we had better believe that there is still sin unto death for those of us who know the Lord but who grow careless about sin in our lives. Are any of us excusing any sin in our lives today? Confess it before the Lord now, and tell the Lord that you want to give it up forever. Then eat the bread this morning, and drink from the

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cup, and get your eyes back on the Lord. Only with God's help can we forsake our sin, and live in the full enjoyment of our fellowship with God. What is the greatest need in the world today? It is the need that we as the people have to forsake our sin, and to live in the closest possible fellowship with God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This is why the Apostle John wrote this wonderful first epistle.