

1st John Lesson 20 – The Sin Unto Death

1 John 5:15-16 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (16) If any man see his brother sin a sin *which* is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

As a case in point, when John recommends a prayer for us to pray, notice how unselfish it is. John doesn't say ask for a new camel, or for a new robe, or anything along that line. Notice the heart of John is the same as the heart of Jesus. John is concerned about a sheep that is starting to stray. This is a prayer that the Good Shepherd would most certainly approve of. It is a prayer that can be prayed "in the name of Jesus" because it comes from the heart of the Savior.

The first point John is making is that the more we are conformed to the image of Christ in us, the more our petitions will be in line with the heart of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd, "Christ in us," loves the sheep and lays down His life for the sheep. What matters most to Him are His sheep and He does not want a single one of them being dragged off by the enemy into death.

Do you remember Satan came to sift Peter like wheat? Peter loved the Lord, but Jesus could see that Peter would temporarily yield to fear. Notice how Jesus prayed for Peter,

Luke 22:31-32 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.**

This wording so reminds me of how the apostle James instructed us to pray for a sheep that is losing its way,

James 5:19-20 Brethren, **if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;** (20) Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

Jesus prayed for Peter, and he eventually repented of his error, was converted and became one of the greatest apostles in history. James says we are to "convert" a brother who has erred. We normally think of converting them by counselling him ... and that is certainly one way to help. But if you leave what James said in the context of the verses just before it, **James is talking about the power resident in the prayers of a righteous man.**

James 5:17-20 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (19) Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; (20) Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

John is teaching the same thing in this epistle. When we pray for the brethren, especially for a brother who has erred from the path, we can have confidence that the power of heaven is being released to get him back onto the path of righteousness. Counselling the brother who is in error is good. Prayer is powerful and avails much. Let us do both!

Think about the shepherd boy David whom God made king of Israel because he was a man "after His own heart." David had lots of flaws, but David always had a heart for the sheep. He fought off the lion and he fought off the bear when they came to drag off one of his father Jesse's lambs. David put his own life on the line for the sheep. Let us pray with confidence that our Father will hear and answer our prayers for the brethren the same way Jesus prayed for Peter.

[CAUTION: We are about to discuss now what John calls the "sin unto death." I have not read every commentary that exists, but I have read many of them in my BD [Before Dave] days. Personally, I have never found one that does not say John is talking about blaspheming the Holy Spirit ... because of the phrase ... "there is a sin unto death." What you are about to hear is vastly different from that teaching. I am asking again, please don't reject this lesson without first hearing it all. Be like the noble men of Berea, who searched the scriptures to see whether these things are so.]

One thing I have learned about the apostle John through teaching this series; He is one of the best teachers I have ever studied. Every new thought is built on the foundation of truth He has already established earlier in the epistle. John does not ramble about one subject, and then switch over to another subject without purpose. Nowhere previously in this letter has John said anything about blaspheming the Holy Spirit or anything like that. No, he has been extremely methodical with one purpose in mind throughout this letter and he told us what that purpose was at the very beginning,

1 John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

His purpose is that every person who reads this letter will remain in fellowship with John and all true believers. His purpose is to keep others from making the same mistake as those who had "gone out from us" because they are "not of us." These were men who followed in fellowship with John and the disciples for a season, but in truth they were not really "of us," John says.

Jesus taught about four different types of people when He taught about the "sower sows the word. There was wayside ground; people who heard the Word and did not understand it at all. The seed produced no fruit at all in them. There was good ground; people who heard the Word, received the Word, nurtured the Word and the seed produced fruit in them, some thirty, some sixty, and some one hundred fold.

Let's talk about the two middle types of ground ... stony and thorny ground.

Matthew 13:20-22 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; (21) Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. (22) He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Regarding people who were stony ground, It is almost like these men were saying, *"Hmm, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. That sounds pretty good. Let's try this Christianity thing and check it out."* At first, they hear the Word of God and they receive it with joy. They endure for a while, **but they never really put down roots deep into the LIFE of Christ.** They are trying out Christianity like you might do a test drive in a car before deciding to buy it. They are not really Christians. At the first sign of trouble or persecution "because of the Word," they are offended.

It is important to notice that Jesus made a difference between them and the thorny ground. The seed came to more maturity in the thorny ground. We know that because with the thorny ground person, he "becometh" unfruitful. You cannot "become" unfruitful unless at one time you were producing fruit. Have you ever seen a fruit tree producing fruit that had no developed root system? The stony ground people did not last long enough to put down roots into the life of Christ. But the thorny ground people did. They lasted long enough to produce at least some fruit. They made it past the first wave of trouble and persecution "for the Word's sake," but over time ... little by little ... the cares of this world got them so busy ... and the lure of the deceitfulness of riches finally pulled them away ... and they "became" unfruitful.

Most likely there were both kinds of men in the group John describes in his epistle who eventually broke fellowship with him and the true believers. They had heard the WORD with joy at first and traveled with John and the apostles for a while. Some endured for a while, but just like John has written in this letter, when they find out true Christianity means repentance from sin, keeping the commandments of Jesus, crucifying the flesh daily, and yielding your life to the Lordship of Christ. Well ... that's another story. And then ESPECIALLY when they find out they cannot be a Christian and love the world nor the things in the world ... that's the last straw and they walk away from John and the apostles. They walk away from the teachings of Jesus. They may not realize it, but they are walking away not only from fellowship with John and the disciples, they are walking away from fellowship with the Father and the Son. They are walking away from ... LIFE ... and eventually on that path they will arrive back in spiritual death. The seed of LIFE was sown into them, but they are now committing the "sin unto death."

The Greek words translated "sin unto death" are "*harmatia pros thanaton*" and according to the Greek scholars the phrase literally means, "sin that tends to death" or "sin that will terminate in death." **All men die physically** whether they are Christian or not, so John is not talking about physical death. **He is talking about spiritual death.** The seed of LIFE was sown into these men when they heard the Word of God, but now they are making a decision that will "terminate in death."

Jude gives us the most precise description of the "sin unto death," the sin that will "terminate in death" that I have seen in the Word of God. He describes men who are "twice dead." What does that mean? Every man born on earth is born spiritually dead. But these men came to life at some point when they heard the gospel and were born again. But now they are dead again. They are twice dead. **It is a process, not an event. It is a path of sin that "tends toward death" and will "terminate in death" if they stay on it.** Look at this amazing description of it as revealed by the Holy Spirit through Jude,

Jude 1:12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds *they are* without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

First off, these men were still coming to church, attending the feasts, partaking of the Lord's supper without fear of judgement. They looked good, like clouds when you need rain, but there was no substance (like water), just appearance (clouds only). Watch the sequence Jude outlines, the path that "tends toward death," the path that will most certainly "terminate in death" unless it is repented of:

1. Trees whose fruit withereth.
 - a. Fruit can't wither on a tree unless the tree at one time had fruit.
 - b. But slowly, by a process, the fruit withers.
2. Eventually it is without fruit.
 - a. At first it just withered, but now ... there is no fruit at all.
3. They then become twice dead.
 - a. The light has gone out.
 - b. Not a single pixel of light left.
4. Plucked up by the roots.
 - a. No root in themselves anymore ... no spirit of God within them for the life of Christ to flow through.
 - b. They are completely severed from the Vine.

The commentaries focus on blaspheming the Holy Spirit, saying it is the "sin unto death" being spoken of here. But that is not what Jude or John is talking about in their epistles. Neither of them mentioned "blaspheming the Holy Spirit." Jude focused on the men who were turning the grace of our Lord into lasciviousness. Jude focused on those who were saying God's grace covers sin even when it is not repented of.

John is talking about those men who are walking away from being in fellowship with Jesus because they will not yield to His Lordship. They are antichrist, saying they can be Christians without keeping His commandments. They are denying the teachings of the Lord by saying you can love the world and be a Christian too. They are walking away from LIFE step by step, and that sin, unless repented of, will most certainly terminate in spiritual death just as Jude described it.

It is beyond the scope of this teaching in 1st John for me to do an in depth teaching on the subject of "**blaspheming the Holy Spirit.**" But let me give a very brief review so you can know for sure that it is not the "sin unto death" John is talking about;

Mark 3:22-30 And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

Mark 3:28-30 Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: (29) But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: (30) Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

The Holy Spirit was doing signs and wonders through Jesus as a witness that Jesus was the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. The Pharisees and scribes rejected Jesus' claim to be the "light of the world," the Christ. Jesus said,

John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

This was one of the ways the Father would "draw" people to Jesus, by the demonstration of the works of the Father through the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit. One purpose of the manifestations of power was so the people would believe that Jesus is the Christ and be drawn unto Him.

The Pharisees and scribes were justifying their unbelief by saying the power working through Jesus was not of God, but was actually the power of the devil. This is how they resisted the "drawing" of the Father for them to come to Jesus. If they continue to resist the "drawing of the Father by the Holy Spirit" forever, they will never come to believe in Jesus as their Savior. If they die in that condition, they will die in their sins. Once they are dead there will never be another opportunity for them to be forgiven ... not in this world, not in the world to come. When does a person receive the forgiveness of sins? When are his sins remitted?

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

It is when a person believes that Jesus is the Christ and receives Him as their Savior. That will never happen if he resists the "drawing of the Holy Spirit" until the end of his life. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit the way they did it causes them to resist the drawing of the Father to come to Jesus as their Savior. If they persist in that sin and never come to Jesus, there is no way for them to be forgiven, not in this world, nor in the world to come. There is no plan B for them to be saved. It is Christ or perish.

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit causes a person to resist the drawing of the Father to Christ. **It keeps spiritually dead people dead.** It is the sin that prevents spiritually dead people from ever being born again unto spiritual life. Only in this life do we have opportunity to be saved. There is no salvation after the grave.

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit keeps spiritually dead people dead. It cannot be the "sin unto death" because ... those that commit it are already dead.

For a person to commit the "sin UNTO death" ... by definition ... he has to be alive when he commits it. Both John, Jude, and even Peter (if we had time to study his epistles also) describe this same process of people who turn apostate by walking away from Christ and His commandments. Peter goes so far as to say,

2 Peter 2:20-21 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. (21) For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

1 John 5:17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

One of the things you hear many preachers say is that "sin is sin." Hard to argue with that statement. John isn't arguing with it either. All unrighteousness is sin and the wages of sin are death. No good preacher will minimize the dangers of sin. But what many of those preachers mean when they say "sin is sin" is that all sin is equal. That is simply not true. You can start with the law of Moses and find that out by looking at the different penalties for different degrees of sin. The penalty for some sins were pretty minor while the penalty for other sins were ... your own life. If you stole a sheep, you might have to restore four sheep. But if you commit murder ... did you know there was not an offering for murder? There was no specified sacrifice for it ... except your own life. If you murdered, your only chance to not be killed by his family is for you to flee and live in a "city of refuge" the rest of your life. If you came out of there, you would almost certainly be killed by one of the family members of the person you murdered. That's quite different from, "restore four sheep for the one you stole."

In the previous verses, the apostle John encouraged us to ask the Father for "life" for them that commit sin not unto death. He is not wanting to minimize sin. Remember early in this letter he wrote, *"These things I write unto you, that you sin not."* We have been made free from sin. But again, John is not writing a doctrine of perfection. He is writing about walking in the light of the new nature and about walking close in fellowship with God so that if we do commit "a" sin, we don't run away from God ... we run to Him, confess our sin, repent of it and trust the blood to wash us clean again.

"Sin unto death" begins when you start contradicting what Jesus taught. One way to do it is to say His teachings do not apply to New Testament Christians. That is pure heresy because Jesus told His apostles to teach new believers everything He had taught them.

Another way to do it is when you begin to say, "sin is not sin" or that God's grace "covers your sin" rather than "sets you free from it."

Another way to do it is to say you can't stop sinning when the truth of the matter is, you have already been set free from sin when you were born again. Saying you can't stop sinning is denying Christ by denying what He said,

John 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

James says to "bridle your tongue" as the first step out of sin. The power of life and death are in the tongue. Begin saying only what the Word of God says about you. And then suffer in the flesh by saying NO to sin. Keep yourself strong by giving much time to praying in other tongues,

Jude 1:20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.