

1st John 5:16-17—Sin Leading to Death.

Last week, we looked at the confidence in prayer that we can have in our prayer life through following Christ closely; walking as He walked. And, it's in this context of prayer from a righteous heart, that we see where God wants us to direct this prayer—toward brothers or sisters who are struggling with sin.

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death.

John begins by indicating that believers can intercede on behalf of other believers when we see them sinning. John describes the sin being committed and observed as an ongoing process. This is not an isolated event but something the believer is persistent in as a habit of life.

What kind of death, θάνατον, thanatos, does John mean here? He could mean spiritual death. This sin

leads to a loss of eternal life and so ends in eternal condemnation. John has used this word this way in 1st John 3:14 saying **14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death.** It's clear that John is saying that we who have Holy Spirit-motivated love for our brothers and sisters have passed from the state of being destined for eternal death in hell, to eternal life in Christ Jesus. It is also used this way in the Gospels. In John 51 **Truly, truly I say to you, if anyone follows My word, he will never see death.** Do believers physically die? Yes—they would not be able to go to heaven otherwise. The Pharisees, not understanding that Jesus is talking about eternal life and don't die spiritually, thought Jesus was crazy. But it's clear from many passages that Jesus was concerned with saving people from eternal death, not so much physical death. See the beginning of the story of Lazarus in John 11.

Which sin is in view?

Physical death as a consequence of sin is taught throughout Scripture and was accepted within Judaism. There are those sins that the Bible says cry out to God for vengeance. In Genesis he "blood of Abel": homicide, infanticide, fratricide, patricide, and matricide, The "sin of the Sodomites": non-procreative sexual acts (sodomy), according to Jude 1:7, The "**cry of the people oppressed in Egypt, the cry of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan**": oppression of the poor, and the last, "injustice to the wage earner": taking advantage of and defrauding workers (see James 5:4). Also, there are sins that are punishable as a requirement of the Mosaic law as resulting in the death of the sinner, which included murder, rape, and adultery, and others. We see it in the New Testament with the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. Their sin was lying to the Holy Spirit in such a way that it tarnished and cheapened the beautiful gift that many were making of all that they had; trying to fool God, like they could fool people. These are specific examples of sin marked out as especially egregious, and detested by God. But before we think "*whew, I haven't committed any of those, I guess I'm doing o.k.*" we need to remember that all sin can and does bring forth death if it is not cut off. James 1:14 **14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it has run its course, brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters.** So, no sin is "o.k." according to God. All sin is deadly.

We read in Hebrews 10:26-29 that a life of habitual sin, after knowledge of the truth, just ignoring what God has to say regarding sin, and living any old way that seems right to us leads ultimately to eternal separation from God. **26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has ignored the Law of Moses is put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot 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?** God will take vengeance on such a person, and especially those who call themselves Christian, taking Christ's name in vain, while they're doing it

What sins did God ask people not to pray for?

We read in Hosea 4 16-17 **16 Since Israel is stubborn Like a stubborn cow, Will the Lord now pasture them, Like a lamb in a large field? 17 Ephraim is allied with idols; Leave him alone.** In other words, don't join in the idolatrous worship that was going on in those places, do not have anything to do with those who can't tell true worship of God from these false-worshipping "houses of vanity", and "houses of wickedness—even if they're located at a place that was once called by God Bethel. We're not to have anything to do with those who practice wickedness and call themselves Christians (see 1 Cor 5:9-11). And why is it that we're not supposed to associate with such people? Why is there a point, which God gets to decide, not us, where we should no longer even pray for them? Because sooner or later, they're attitude of "God doesn't see" or "God doesn't care" about their sin will erode your Fear of God, and drag you into this attitude of sin.

let him ask and He will give life to him, to those not sinning unto death

So, we should pray for those who are sinning, that they should come back to God, and we should even pray for those who we may be tempted to judge are beyond hope! Even those who have committed sins that God says are worthy of physical death, if that person is still alive, should be prayed for. Even those who we are tempted to not want to pray for. In Acts 9:12-14, we read Ananias (not the husband of Saphira), didn't really like the idea of going and praying for Paul, since he had been murdering Christians left and right! Paul was a sinner who had committed sins worthy of death, under the Old Testament law. But Jesus replied in acts 9:15 5 **But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;** And so, we should never give up praying for even the most rank sinner, that they will be saved.

There is sin leading to death; I am not saying that he should ask about that.

I believe that John is on good scriptural and spiritual ground in saying that there is such as sin as can lead to spiritual death. It is apostasy that leads to spiritual death. This involves a total renunciation of Christ, in a permanent sense, and is the result of drifting away from God to the point of backsliding, and beyond to the point of apostasy. When Paul is teaching the Thessalonians about the Day of the Lord, when Jesus returns, we see him telling them in 2 Thess 2:3 **"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition"** It describes a time when those who had knowledge of Jesus, and may have even been saved, decide to separate from Him permanently. I do believe, that due to the wickedness of the times, the social pressure to disbelieve what God has said, the rampant sin around us, that "the love of many will grow cold" in apostasy. See Jude 5-13. Jesus encountered of this false-religion in the name of God in Matthew 12:30-31. We see a consistency here that the only ones that God asks us not to pray for those who have gone so far in their sin that they have rejected God completely and are "joined to their sin".

17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.

Every unrighteous act is sin—we all commit transgressions against God's law. We are all unrighteous in our actions at times. But, remember that "there is a sin not unto death." We can be forgiven, and this serves as an encouragement for Christians to pray for each other, especially regarding sins when they become aware of them so that we will confess and be forgiven. This is a part of the priesthood of the believer mentioned in 1 Pet 2:5 and elsewhere. **James 5:19-20 19 My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you strays from the truth and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that the one who has turned a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.** Far from encouraging us not to pray, both John and James are telling us to do our part in praying to bring back any person among them who might have "wandered from the truth." Living out the Truth of Jesus, walking as He walked is the Christian life. James encourages us that even one who is close to apostasy may be saved by God through the power of our prayer. So keep praying people!