

## THE SIN UNTO DEATH

**TEXT: I JOHN 5:16, 17**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. Regarding the "sin unto death," Albert Barnes wrote, "There has been great diversity of opinion in, regard to the meaning of this passage, and the views of expositors of the New Testament are by no means settled as to its true sense."
2. Much has been written on the "sin unto death" (5:16), and many sermons have been preached about it.
3. Many years ago, a preacher named J. Harold Smith preached a powerful message entitled, "God's Three Deadlines."
4. Dr. Smith said these were "God's Three Deadlines."
  - (1) Blaspheming the Holy Ghost or committing the unpardonable sin (Matthew 12:31, 32).
  - (2) Sinning away your Day of Grace (Prov. 29:1; Gen. 6:3; John 12:38-40; 6:44).
  - (3) The Sin unto Death (I John 5:16).
5. Personally, I think blaspheming the Holy Ghost or committing the unpardonable sin, and "sinning away your day of grace" are basically talking about the same thing.
6. Proverbs 29:1 says, "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."
7. Genesis 6:3 says, "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man."
8. Furthermore I agree with J. Harold Smith, who taught that while the unsaved are in danger of blaspheming the Holy Ghost or committing the unpardonable sin, or "sinning away their day of grace," only Christians can commit the "sin unto death."
9. First John 5:16 says, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death..."
10. So Bro. Smith was right when he said, "Only lost souls can cross deadlines one and two, a saint cannot cross those. The third deadline can only be crossed by a member of the family of God, a true born again believer."

### **I. IT IS NOT ANY PARTICULAR SIN**

1. It should be noted that there is no definite article in the original Greek text. And there is no indefinite article in the Greek language. This is literally, "There is sin unto death."

2. Therefore, the "sin unto death" is not any particular sin as distinct from other sins, but refers to an entire sinful attitude. The epistle of I John warns about the danger of continuing in sin, and the verb rendered "sin" in I John 5:16 means "continually sinning" (cf. 3:4, 8).
3. The warning here in I John 5:16 suggests that whatever it is it is no mere isolated action. It refers to persistent sin.
4. Verse 17 says, "All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death." Not every sin leads to death. If that were the case, this world would be filled with corpses, because Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

## **II. IT IS VISIBLE TO OTHERS -- "If any man see" (5:16)**

1. I have "seen" people commit the sin unto death on several occasions. We have had members who refused to get right with God and met strange, untimely deaths.
2. God killed one backslider in Atlantic City just as he was pulling the lever on a slot machine. After all the trouble he caused me and our church and his wife and his children, I wasn't surprised.
3. I have seen several Christians, some members of this church, commit the sin unto death.
4. John says, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask..." A sin which is not unto death refers to sins that do not appear to be incurable. The sinner is not obstinate and does not appear to have "crossed the line."

## **III. IT RESULTS IN DEATH**

1. It is called "sin unto death" (5:16). John cannot be referring to spiritual death because that would contradict many other Scriptures.
2. John warns that this could happen to a "brother" in Christ (5:16; cf. 3:14). The sin unto death is committed by Christians.
3. Our Lord said in John 5:24, "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."
4. "Passed from death unto life" means he is now saved. He is a born again child of God (cf. I John 5:1, 4).
5. "Shall not come into condemnation" means he shall not go to hell.
6. John 3:15 & 16 says he "should not perish, but have everlasting life."
7. John 3:18 says, "He that believeth on Him (Christ) is not condemned."

8. Our Lord said in John 10:28, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."
9. So John cannot be referring to the second death (eternity in hell) in I John 5:16. He is speaking of physical death (cf. Acts 5:1-11; I Cor. 5:1-5; 11:29, 30).
10. First Corinthians 11:30 says, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." "Sleep" refers to death. It is a euphemism often used in Scripture for death.
11. First Corinthians 11:30 teaches that God often chastens backsliders with sickness, and if they still will not repent He may kill them.
12. Hebrews 12 deals with this important subject. Hebrews 12:9 says, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"
13. When a backslidden Christian continues in sin, his salvation is not jeopardized, and he cannot revert to his unregenerate state of spiritual death. But in certain cases, he may incur the penalty of physical death.
14. James warns, "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren" (James 1:15, 16).
15. Apparently there were people in Old Testament times, like Achan, who committed this sin unto death (Joshua 7).
16. David almost committed this sin. Second Samuel 12:13 says, "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."
17. This implies David would have died had he not repented. Persistent sin and persistent impenitence can result in the sin unto death.
18. In I John 5:16, John says, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask..." "He shall ask" means, "He shall pray" (cf. 5:14, 15 -- "ask") that the offender may be brought to true repentance, and may be delivered from crossing the line and committing the sin unto death.
19. This should motivate us to pray! We all know weak, backslidden believers, and some of them are near and dear to us.
20. Barnes said, "How many a prodigal son has come back to fill with happiness an aged parent's heart! How many a dissipated husband has been reformed to give joy again to the wife of his youth, and to make a paradise again of his miserable home!"

21. When we get to heaven we will find out that many backsliders were rescued from this terrible judgment because of the fervent intercessory prayers of others.
22. But some have gone too far into sin. "There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" (5:16) indicates that once a person crosses the line praying will not do any good.
23. The LORD told Jeremiah, "Pray not for this people for their good" (Jer. 14:11).

**CONCLUSION:**

*There is a line by us not seen,  
Which crosses every path;  
The hidden boundary between  
God's patience and His wrath.*

*To cross that limit is to die,  
To die, as if by stealth,  
It may not pale the beaming eye,  
Nor quench the glowing health. (author unknown)*