

Bible Class

14th May 2026

Sin Unto Death

1 John 5:16

What is the Sin unto Death?



Passage for Consideration:

1 John 5:16: *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.*

What is this sin unto death?

That is the question. And while we are at it, what does this verse mean?

There are several other questions which arise when reading this verse:

- How does a man know when a brother sins a sin NOT unto death?
- How does a man know when a brother DOES sin a sin unto death?
- Who is the one who shall ask, and who is the one to give life?

Let us deal with understanding the first question, and this will assist in explaining the extra ones.

All sin corrupts and separates from God and offends God, (Psalm 51:2-5) and God cannot look upon sin. (Habakkuk 1:13) Sin is what has spoilt the relationship with God.

Definition of Sin

Sin is defined in several ways:

- Sin is the transgression of the law - 1 John 3:4
- All unrighteousness is sin – 1 John 5:17
- Whatever is not from faith is sin – Romans 14:23
- To know to do good and do it not – it is sin – James 4:17

Forgiveness of All Sins

Yet through Christ Jesus, His dear Son, the loving God has devised a way that these sins can be covered over, remitted, blotted out, forgiven.

This is explained in the following verses:

1 John 1:7:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Forgiveness is dependant upon walking in the Light. That means with understanding and actions in the direction of an obedient pathway

1 John 1:9: ***If** we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Just as there is no grading of sin (James 2:10, Romans 3:23) there is no grading of forgiveness.

NOTE: It is true however that some sins carry more consequences than others. But it is dangerous to think that some sins are not as offensive as others: It can lead to wondering, “If it’s just a little sin, do I really need to confess it?” Jesus taught: Luke 16:10: *Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.*

Returning to our verse in question, we read the words: *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.*

The sin that is not unto death, is therefore a forgiven sin.

All sins can be forgiven **if** they are confessed ******(except one exception which we will return to)******

Titus 2:14

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

See also:

Romans 8:38-39: *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Praying for one another

So the words of John in this verse can be understood, that if a brother or sister see another brother commit a sin, and that brother admits and owns that sin, and acknowledges that backsliding, then the witnessing brother and sister should pray earnestly for the sinner. This is established by Exodus 32:31-32, Job 42:7-9, and especially James 5:14,15:

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

NOTE:

Living private lives and keeping things secret is not conducive to effectual prayer! How can we pray for one another, if we do not know what is wrong? We should not fear brothers and sisters being judgemental. That is their problem – and their sin, and we should pray for them on that account as well! But keeping things secret from one another is not advisable: James 5:16: *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

(some like being confessed to but rarely admit anything, beware of such, as it is an imbalance, and shows weakness)

Unconfessed sin becomes a sin unto death

Of course, it is for the sinner to admit and confess his sins to God, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Confession is important, as it shows acknowledgement, ownership, understanding of wrong doing, and above all contrition. See Psalm 51:3,4 and 1 John 1:9, and especially Psalm 32:3-5.

What if there is no confession of sin? - **This is a sin unto death**

Proverbs 28:13:

He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy.

The fig leaves used by Adam showed guilt but not repentance. If he was repentant he would have offered himself as a covering for his wife. As a result he compounded his sin. In the end he did admit and own up. But still suffered the consequences of that sin.

It is taught clearly in the New Testament that brothers and sisters who commit sins and live a life of wickedness and show no repentance cannot be treated in the same way: John in the verse we are looking at says specifically: *I do not say that he should pray for it.*

They are treated in a different way: see Matthew 18:15-17, Romans 16:17-18, but especially 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

Such an one is not covered from their sins, and will suffer eternal condemnation.

Is this the end? No. Even from that predicament there is hope – a living dog is better than a dead lion, we recall the dramatic example of King Manasseh of Judah for example. We recall the teaching of the parable of the prodigal son. We pray in our hymn, for the Lord “to bring thy wanderers back” ...

But sin without confession is a sin unto death.

What if we sin and forget we have sinned?

We are in grave danger. But awareness that we do this, and acknowledging we do this is a sign of a contrite heart – David prayed thus: Psalm 19:12,13: *Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*

This leads on to two last points.

Sinning deliberately from which there is no turning back is a sin unto death.

This is similar to sinning without confession, but it is setting out a pathway deliberately and continuing along that direction without caring about the consequences.

Divorcing and remarrying is a case in point, which seems commonplace amongst those who claim to have a knowledge of the Words of God. But the Scripture is clear: Presumptuous sins, - presuming that we can escape condemnation - cannot be covered or forgiven. See

Hebrews 10:26 -30: *For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongs unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.*

In Eureka Volume 2 of the Brown copies, and page 230-231, there is an interesting passage where it describes those at the time of the Fifth Seal who in the face of persecution abandoned their faith, and instead offered sacrifices to Roman pagan gods, and openly cursed Christ, for the sake of

present ease and comfort. They then, after the persecution subsided, when convenient, quickly rejoined their ecclesias, those who had suffered and expected to be treated the same. There was a strong objection to this, and a division occurred. Those on the right side of the Word of God were called the Novatians, after Novatius who first pointed out that they had committed a sin unto death. If there is a profession of sorrow, but no amendment of life, then no wonder that the Spirit said to the Ecclesias *Thou hast a name that thou livest but are dead.*

This is a last point. (see ** earlier)

The Holy Spirit was given to the Disciples and Apostles in the first Century, in the forms of Spirit gifts to substantiate and provide evidence that what they were saying was true. Receiving the power of God in this way was incontrovertible evidence which could not be denied by those who witnessed, and those who heard, it provided great authority to those who did not have the benefit of the Divinely Inspired New Testament collection of Gospels and Letters. Additionally the Apostles bestowed these gifts also by the laying on of hands, and a second generation received a limited form of the Power of God, to continue; that process. After the Letters and Gospels, and the Book of Revelation was released by John on Patmos, and the Scripture readily available the Spirit gifts were withdrawn – see 1 Corinthians 13:10.

Jesus warned his disciples specifically to beware abusing this power of God. Such abuse would be presumptuous sin, it would be perverse, and of the gravest insult to God. They had received a wonderful faith affirming gift. If that did not persuade them of the Truth of God, then nothing would. So blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could not be forgiven:

Matthew 12:31-32: *Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaks against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.* See also Mark 3:28-29

Hebrews 6: 4-6: *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

We think of Saul the first king of Israel, Judas Iscariot, Ananias and Saphira who committed sins unto death all in this way.

Summary

God is well aware of the human condition and knows our frame (Psalm 103:14) He in His mercy and grace has devised a way of salvation from the very beginning (Ephesians 1:4) and is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He provided His own dear Son. But if that sacrifice is despised and lightly esteemed (1 Samuel 2:30), then the sinner is in grave danger of backsliding into a position of having a seared conscience (1 Timothy 4:2) – one which does not recognise or acknowledge guilt – this is a sin unto death, from which there is no remedy.

2 Peter 2:20-22: *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. 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. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

Brother Terry