

BACK TO BASICS

19. THE SIN THAT KILLS

Shortly after a person gets saved, he or she soon discovers that being a Christian is not a bed of roses. Rather, it is quite a battle. The Christian life is a struggle against formidable enemies. The child of God has three great enemies all of which want to lead him into sin. First, he has an ***Infernal Enemy***, the devil. Satan, the god of this age (2 Cor 4:3-4) and the prince of this world (Jn 14:30) has many devices for leading a believer into sin. He tells lies as he did to Eve (Gen 3:1 2 Cor 11:3) and when men believe his lies, they turn away from and disobey God's truth. *Do you recall that in David's case Satan used pride as his weapon and urged David to number the people and in this way defy the Lord ?* (1 Chron 21:1)

Satan is like a serpent who deceives and like a lion who devours. He is a formidable enemy. Then there is the problem of the flesh, ***the Internal Enemy***. The old nature with which we are born and which is still very much a part of us. True, we have a new nature (3:9) within us, but we do not always yield to our new nature.

Then of course we face the world, ***the External Enemy*** (2:15-17). How easy it is for us to yield to the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life. The atmosphere around us makes it hard for us to keep our minds pure and our hearts true to the Lord. How then does a Christian keep from sinning ? Well, this is one of the reasons why John wrote this letter ? He wrote to prevent sin ! Indeed he tells us in (Ch 2) “ *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.* ” (2:1) The subject of sin is prominent in this epistle. Indeed the word “ *sin*,” appears not less than 28 times, not including the words “ *unrighteousness*,” “ *wicked*,” and “ *evil*.” (1:7,8,9 2:1, 12) Evidently, it is in the heart of God that we His people, know precisely, the meaning of sin and its fearful and fatal results. Here in (5:16-17) John talks about the sin that kills. Now scholars acknowledge that this is one of the difficult passages in all the Bible. Kenneth Wuest is a great Greek scholar and he said this. “ *The present writer confesses his utter inability to understand this verse.* ” Perhaps we would have been better calling our study the prayer that restores rather than the sin that kills, for these two verses come in the context of prayer.

Do you recall that John has just finished telling us how to get our prayers answered ? In (5:14-15) he gives us an illustration of prayer that is answered, but now in (5:16-17) he makes an application of this prayer. You see, when Christians fall into sin, it is the will of God that we pray for their restoration and their repentance. Do you recall that when the Lord Jesus was talking to his disciples before his crucifixion He specifically looked at Peter and knowing that Peter was going to deny Him He said, “ *Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.* ” (Lk 22:31-32) You see, the prayer list of every Christian

ought to be full of brothers and sisters in Christ who have backslidden and gotten away from God. But there is one kind of Christian for whom it is useless to pray, and that is the Christian who has committed the sin unto death. Now in trying to simplify this difficult passage, I want us to consider three things.

(1) THE PRINCIPLE OF SIN

Do you see what John says ? “ *All unrighteousness is sin.* ” *Everything that is not right according to God’s standard is sin.* Now John divides the kind of sins that a Christian can commit into two categories. There are sins that are not unto death, and then there are sins that do lead to death, but less someone might think therefore that some sin is serious but some sin is not John hastens to add that “ *all unrighteousness is sin.* ” Now the Roman Catholic church teaches that there are two categories of sin. There is **Venial** sin that can be pardoned while on earth, but there is also **mortal** sin that automatically leads to death. So they would say that the sin unto death is a specific sin that comes under the category of a Mortal sin, you have to go to purgatory to purge for it. The Biblical view however, is that all sin is Mortal sin for the Bible says that the “ *wages of sin is death.* ” (Rom 6:23) Now we live in a world that wants to do away with the concept of sin.

Some time ago they took a poll in France which stated that 90% of the French population no longer believe in sin and only 4% accept the concept at all. Today the problem with our world according to many is not sin. It is the lack of environment, it is a lack of education, it is a lack of understanding, it is the lack of equal opportunity. Today you rarely hear sin mentioned on the television, and radio. Karl Mininger a great physchiatrist, wrote a book entitled “ ***Whatever became of Sin ?*** ” Today they call adultery a loving relationship, but God calls it sin, they call homosexuality an alternate sexual outlet, but God calls it sin, they call abortion the termination of a pregnancy but God calls it sin. “ *All unrighteousness is sin.* ” Its,

(a) *The Failure to Obey the Commandments of God:*

Do you recall what John says in (3:4) ? He says that “ *sin is the transgression of the law.* ” John describes sin in one word lawlessness ! Sin is when God says, “ *Thou shalt do this,* ” and you say to God, “ *I will not.* ” Sin is when God says, “ *Thou shalt not,* ” and you say to the Lord, “ *I will do so.* ” Someone has said, “ *sin is a clenched fist in the face of God.* ” Now there are three ways that a person can express his sinfulness. *He can sin through thought, he can sin through word, or he can sin through deed.* The Lord Jesus covered all three in the Sermon on the Mount. He covered the sin of **Thought**. He said that if a man lusts after a woman he has committed adultery in his heart. He dealt with the sin of **Words**. For Christ said if a man calls his brother a fool he is in danger of the fiery hell. And Christ dealt with the sin of **Deed**. He said do unto others as you would have them to do unto you. You see, there is no area of life that is not covered by a principle or a commandment ! Every sin, every transgression whether it is done in thought, word, or deed all three violates the commandment of God ! My Is this not what sin is ? It’s a failure to obey the commandments of God ! It is rebellion against God and God’s will for your life ! Tell me, do you know something of its power in your life ? Do you know something of its

influence in your heart ? (a)

(b) *The Failure to Honour the Character of God:*

You see, only God is righteous. Do you recall the words of the psalmist ? “ *For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.* ” (11:7) But all of our righteousness is like filthy rags before a righteous God. So when we as God’s children sin we dishonour the very character of God. This is why all unrighteousness is sin. Isn’t it amazing how we as believers try to rationalise and trivialise sin in our lives ? “ *Well, I am not a soul-winner because I am too busy in my job, and I am too shy to begin with, but God understands.* ” No, God does not understand and all unrighteousness is sin. “ *Well, I ought to be giving at least a tenth of my income to the Lord, but I’m just head over heels in debt, but the Lord understands.* ” No, God does not understand and all unrighteousness is sin. “ *Well, I know that the Lord’s Table, and the Word and Prayer are appointed by God, but sometimes I don’t feel like going out, but the Lord understands.* ” No, God does not understand and all unrighteousness is sin.

There is a pernicious doctrine that is taught today in universities and colleges called “ ***Situational Ethics.*** ” It teaches that right and wrong are not absolute they are relative. What may be right in one situation may be wrong in another situation and vice versa, but the end justifies the means. If a woman can afford to have a pregnancy wonderful, if she can’t then abort the baby. But John says “ *all unrighteousness, no matter why you do it, is sin.* ”

Charles Spurgeon said “ *It is never right to do a little wrong to obtain the greatest possible good. Your duty is to do the right, the consequences are with God.* ” (1)

(2) THE PENALTY FOR SIN

For John says, “ *there is a sin unto death, I do not say that he shall pray for it.* ” (5:16) Or “ *there is a sin leading to or leaning toward, moving in the direction of death.* ” Now I don’t think that John is talking about a specific act of sin, but a condition of heart, an attitude of spirit that leads toward death ! You see, all unrighteousness is sin, but some sin is worse than other sin. All sin is hateful to the Lord, and should be hateful to a Christian, but some sin is punished with death. Now in order to understand this I want to answer 2 questions.

1. What does John mean by a sin leading unto death ?

Well, if we remove one word the meaning becomes a little clearer. “ *There is sin unto death,* ” or “ *there is a sin which leads to or leans toward death.* ” I think this is a condition of heart, a rebellious, recalcitrant attitude that leads toward death.

2. Who can commit this sin ?

Well, according to John a Christian can, for he speaks here of a “ *brother,* ” and he speaks here of prayer. Now that is very important because that automatically tells us what kind of death he is talking about here. John cannot be talking about spiritual death for he tells us in his gospel that the person who trusts Christ “ *is passed from*

death to life.” (Jn 5:24) It is impossible for a man to pass back from life unto death. My God will part the Red Sea to let Israel go into Jordan but He will not part the Rea Sea to let Israel go back into Egypt. Furthermore, there is no example in the Bible of any Christian losing their salvation, of once having gained eternal life, they slip back into eternal death. So John must be referring to physical death.

What a word of caution for us as believers ! You see, its possible for a Christian so to continue in an attitude of rebellion against God and allow sin to dwell in his life, hindering the testimony and effectiveness of the church, that the Lord will take his physical life. God will send him to glory ahead of time. He will be saved “ *so as by fire,*” but he will suffer loss. (1 Cor 3:15) I am told that swinging out over the waters that go down to the Niagara Falls are several warning signs, each warning you to turn around or be swept over the falls. Finally, a last sign reads, “ ***Beyond this sign is the point of no return.***” Do you know something ? We live in a day and age when professing Christians push God, but the Bible teaches us that its possible to push the Lord too far. Is that what you are doing ? Is your lifestyle so dishonouring to the Lord, that the Lord may have to take you home ? Is your attitude of rebellion such, that God may have to remove you ? There are examples of this in the Bible. In fact we are told on three separate occasions of Christians who committed sins unto death. There was,

(a) *THE SIN OF SPIRITUAL DISOBEDIENCE:*

There was someone in the church at Corinth who was living in open immorality, either with his mother, stepmother, or perhaps his mother in law. Furthermore, the church was bragging about it. They were openly talking about it. So Paul gives them some advice from the Lord.

He says, “ *Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*” (1 Cor 5:5) Now this man was not going to hell, he was going to heaven, for though he had lost his reputation, he had not lost his salvation. (a)

(b) *THE SIN OF SPIRITUAL DECEIT:*

Do you recall what happened Ananias and Sapphira ? They sold property but kept back part of the money. Now at this point nothing wrong had been done, but then they told the church that they sold the property for the full amount that they gave to the church, when in reality they had sold it for more and had kept back part of the money for themselves. Immediately Peter came on the scene and said, “ *why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost ? Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God.*”

(Acts 5:4) And as he heard those words Ananias fell down and breathed his last and great fear came upon all who heard it. My are you trying to fool around with God ? Are you trying to fool God ? God may step into your life and remove you ! (a) (b)

(c) *THE SIN OF SPIRITUAL DESECRATION:*

Do you recall what was happening at Corinth ? There were believers there who were turning the Lord's Supper into a orgy of eating and drinking ? Do you know how God responded ? God moved into Corinth in governmental judgment and removed some of them ! Paul says, "*For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep.*" (1 Cor 11:30) You see, there comes a point in the life of a Christian that if he persists in a sin, stubbornly flaunts his sin in the face of God, he crosses God's deadline and leaves the Lord with no choice but to take his life. There is one thing that is true of a Christian as of a non-Christian. Its this, God will let neither one get away with sin. Now there is some of thinking, "*Well, I know a Christian who has lived for 30 years in sin and God has not took his life.*" No, you know a man or woman who has lived 30 years in sin, and God never took his life, but you do not know whether that man was a Christian or not. ***As a matter of fact, any man who lives 30 years in sin and calls himself a Christian is a liar.***

For no Christian can habitually live in sin ! Do you recall what John says in this very letter ? "*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.*" (3:9)

Dr. Homer Lindsey, once the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Jacksonville has written something that has shaken me. Let me gave it to you ! "***Many church members must not be saved because if they were living the way they live, God would kill them.***" Could it be that the Lord is saying of you and me, "*He's no use to Me any more, he has lost is effectiveness I am going to take his life.*" (1) (2)

(3) THE PATHWAY FROM SIN

What is the route that the Lord has mapped out for us if we are to rescue a sinning brother ? Well, it begins with

(a) CHRISTIAN OBSERVATION:

Look if you will at (5:16) That is Christian observation. "*If any man see his brother*" the word "*see,*" means more than one just happening to see a brother doing something wrong. The word has the idea of having actual knowledge that they are living in sin. John does not say that "*if a man hears that his brother has sinned.*" No, John is not taking here about gossip or rumour. ***Do you know what the favourite indoor sport of many believers is ?*** Carrying tales ! Spreading rumours, telling what you heard someone do, telling what you heard someone say and you do not even know if it is true ! No, John is not talking about gossiping. You see, when the Lord saved us He put us into a big family, and there is something that I am able to contribute to your life, and there is something that you are able to contribute to my life. Now because this is true then we are to see one another's failures and faults.

You think about the finest Christian you know ? Stay with that person long enough and you'll discover faults. We come into contact with others and we see them sin ! Have you noticed how easy that is ? Have you not discovered that you are expert in scrutinizing the lives of others, but you are an amateur when it comes to sin in your own life ?

We are often like the man who was eating limburger cheese and got a piece of it in his moustache. First of all he said that the room smelled rotten, then the front porch, and then he stepped out in the garden and he exclaimed, “ *the whole world is rotten.* ” Everyone but me ! Is that not how you feel ? Well, John tells us that the proper response to a sinning brother begins with (a) and continues with,

(b) CHRISTIAN INTERCESSION:

“ *If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask* ” (5:16) John is encouraging us to pray for a brother in spiritual need. ***Is that what you do ? What do you do when you see a brother sin ?*** What is your response when you see another believer do something he ought not to do ? Do you pick up the phone and call nine other Christians ? Do you say, “ *I didn’t think he was going to last in the first place. I didn’t have a lot of confidence in him when he joined the church. I knew it would just be a matter of time.* ” You see, when we know about sin in the life of a fellow believer two things ought to be true. First of all we should be an eye witness and not an ear witness and secondly we should be talking to the Lord on our knees, not telling others on our feet.

My ***do not become a censorious critic !*** Pray for him ! Say to yourself, “ *there but for the grace of God go I.* ” The Christian attitude is intercession. The Christian way is to go to the Lord in prayer. If you are going to talk about another Christian, do your talking on your knees ! Is this the pathway that you follow when you comes to a brother or sister in spiritual need ? (a) (b) And then,

(c) CHRISTIAN RESTORATION:

Do you see what John says ? “ *If any man he shall ask, and He shall gave him life,* ” (5:16) In other words, our prayers can rescue a man from losing their testimony and possibility losing their life. My do you realise that you can have a part in the ministry of restoration ? Think of those who have stumbled over sin, think of those who have grown cold spiritually, think of those who are out of the will of God, think of those who no longer meet with the Lord in the atmosphere of prayer and in the mediation of His Word. Paul says, “ *Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted.* ” (Gal 6:1) Do you know of someone that is away from the Lord and living in sin ? Have you prayed for them ? Are you praying for them ? Are you praying that God will restore their zeal, fervency and love for the Saviour ?

If you see a brother or sister committing a sin you should pray for them asking the Lord to restore them, but if you in your praying you do not sense that you are praying in God’s will, then you should stop, indeed sometimes the Lord seems to say “ *it is enough, stop.* ” In the prophecy of Jeremiah the Lord says, “ *Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me, for I will not hear thee.* ” (7:16)

The nation of Judah had reached the point of no return before God and the Lord had

decided they needed to be punished and corrected, and so He says to Jeremiah, “ *It is to late too pray.* ” **There is the sin that kills !** It can kill the effectiveness of a child of God, it can kill the power of prayer, it can kill the reputation of a church, it can kill a Christian. Tell me, are you trying to fool God ? Are you playing with fire ? Are you pretending a piety that you do not possess ? My with all the fervour of my soul. Be real with God, “ *keep short accounts with God,* ” lest the Lord remove you from this world, for there is a sin that kills !