

26-1-18 – A Sin Unto Death

Last week I ended by trying to explain why some of the theories on I John 3:8-9 are not viable. I did a pretty lousy job, evidenced by my wife saying: “I have about 1000 questions.” So very quickly I’m going to tackle that again.

1 John 3:8-9 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. **9** 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.

I believe the sin in this verse is rejecting the doctrine of Christ, which is that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is the Son of God, is the Christ born of God, and so on. This is evidenced by the many times that John brings it up in I and II John. And the fact that he plainly says that it is the transgression in II John 7-10.

The 1st theory that needs debunked is that that the one who cannot sin is the new man of the believer. The reason this is not correct is simply that it takes these verses completely out of their context to reach a conclusion. What is the context?

1 John 3:7 Little children, **let no man deceive you**: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

Chapters 2-5 are all about learning who are the deceivers and who are the true ministers of God. Who are the tares and who are the wheat.

1 John 3:10 In this the children of God **are manifest**, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

There is no way that having an internal new man that cannot sin manifests anything. The old man in the flesh still sins. Simply being made a new creature in Christ doesn’t magically show the world that one is of Christ. And someone who isn’t in Christ can fake being in Christ. This theory simply endorses the idea that one who is in Christ doesn’t practice sin. We already showed how that idea is complete nonsense.

The second theory – the one most propagated by mid-Acts dispensationalists – is that this sin is taking the mark of the beast. That idea also takes these verses out of their context. Event though that interpretation puts this sin in the proper time frame, it takes it out of the context of the passage.

How could anyone deceive you, that they are a messenger or prophet of Jesus Christ if they had the mark of the beast? The first theory doesn’t really manifest anything, while this theory manifests too much. If one came among the brethren in the end times with the mark of the beast, it would be impossible for him to deceive them that he had the Spirit of Christ and his teaching was of God. He would certainly be manifesting that he is a child of the devil, but he would be impotent to deceive.

Since last week I have found out that there are four interpretations from mainline Christian organizations. I just want to show them to you so that you are aware of them. We will read through them with little comment, because all of them ignore the context of the passage surrounding the verses.

1. **Progressive Sanctification (Most Common Evangelical View):**

1. **Meaning:** Believers still struggle with sin and may occasionally fall (like losing temper, speaking hurtful words), but they don't *habitually practice* sin as a lifestyle.
2. **Focus:** A believer's *orientation* changes; they repent and confess, unlike those who justify continuous unrighteousness, who align with the devil.

2. **Wesleyan/Holiness View (Instantaneous Sanctification):**

1. **Meaning:** Believers can experience a second work of grace where the *root* of sin (inbred sin nature) is removed, leading to a life where love for God replaces the desire to sin, though they can still make mistakes.
2. **Focus:** A deeper cleansing, achieving practical perfection (though not infallibility) in love.

3. **"Sinless Seed" / New Nature View (Rooted in Regeneration):**

1. **Meaning:** God's divine life ("seed") in a believer makes the *habitual practice* of sin impossible; it's contrary to their new spiritual DNA.
2. **Focus:** Contrasts the *source* of actions—a child of God manifests their divine nature (righteousness), while a child of the devil practices sin.

4. **Calvinistic/Reformed View (Emphasis on Christ's Work):**

1. **Meaning:** Jesus came to destroy the *power* of sin, breaking Satan's hold. Those who continue in sin aren't truly Christ's because Christ's power in them defeats the devil's work.
2. **Focus:** A real change occurs; those who tolerate sin are siding with the devil, not Christ.

None of these have anything to do with the text that surrounds them. All of them change the verses to read practices sin or habitually sins rather than commit sin. They all ignore "he cannot sin," because it is inconvenient to their doctrine. So none of these can really be considered as true interpretations.

Today we are going to finish this study by looking at yet another controversial passage. It is one that I think that I have been getting wrong for a long time also.

1 John 5:16-17 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. 17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

For quite a while I have looked at this sin unto death and thought: “That’s taking the mark of the beast.” And it may be. But after just emphasizing so much the context of the verses, I think we should look at the full context to see what else it may be.

If your Bible doesn’t have paragraph markers, the paragraph begins in verse 14 and goes to verse 17. I wanted to be sure that paragraphs were relevant and not added in like chapters and verses, so I looked it up. The Greek New Testament had paragraph markers in it, so paragraphs are part of the original text and aren’t simply man’s inventions to help the reader like chapters and verses.

1 John 5:14-17 ¶ And **this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:** 15 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. 17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

That is the entire paragraph. If we stay in the context of this paragraph, what we are looking at is physical blessings. He is briefly saying that they will get physical blessings from God in the form of answered prayer.

The paragraph before that is giving them assurance of their salvation.

1 John 5:10-13 ¶ He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. 11 And this is the record, **that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.** 12 He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. 13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; **that ye may know that ye have eternal life,** and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

Now if we think about what John is trying to communicate to these remnant saints, it seems that he is saying that those who have eternal life in Jesus Christ will have their prayers answered and receive blessings according to His will.

This is the confidence they have in Christ. If they ask according to His will, He will give them the petitions they desire. These petitions include giving them life – IF they haven’t committed a sin unto death. The life that he is giving them here isn’t eternal life. He has just assured them of that in the last paragraph. The life he is giving them is mortal life. In other words, he is healing them.

We have other passages we can compare this to.

James 5:12-18 ¶ But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and *your* nay, nay; lest ye

fall into condemnation. **13** Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. **14 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: 15 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.** **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 availeth much. **17** 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.

James says the prayer of faith will save the sick and forgive his sins.

But aren't his sins already forgiven if he is in Christ? This can be very confusing. We have a hard time grasping the idea of there being a difference between forgiveness of sins for eternal life and the forgiveness of sins for physical blessing because our blessings are not physical.

Because we are blessed with spiritual blessings in heavenly places, that is where our hope lies. So when we talk about our sins being forgiven, we realize that our hope won't be realized until Christ returns. We will have no blessings physically, until we have a new physical body.

But with Israel, it always was and will be about physical blessings. Not only in their promised kingdom, but also in the here and now.

There is, of course, forgiveness of sins in Christ before the Father. That is what John is talking in

1 John 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

In the next paragraph he is speaking of confidence in that fact by receiving physical blessings. Those blessings come as a separate forgiveness of sins, which I don't totally understand, but which is evident in the Jewish scriptures. There is a difference between eternal condemnation and physical condemnation.

When the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery to Jesus, what did he say to her after all the accusers left?

John 8:10-11 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? **11** She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, **Neither do I condemn thee:** go, and sin no more.

Doesn't that seem incredible? God in the form of man isn't condemning sin? But Jesus is speaking of physical condemnation, not spiritual. They were ready to stone the woman to death, but Jesus will not physically condemn her.

Again, after Jesus cured the lame man, and he found him later on in the temple, what did he say to him?

John 5:14 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: **sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.**

*Physical sin had physical consequences. There are abundant examples of this. To take away the physical consequences, the sins that were committed had to be forgiven. Both on an individual level and a national level. We have many examples of this. David, a man after God's own heart, had his sins forgiven in Christ. But when he committed murder and adultery, that sin wasn't forgiven and caused the physical death of the child conceived.

*An opposing example we have is the man who was sick of the palsy. He was carried to Jesus in a bed.

Matthew 9:2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; **thy sins be forgiven thee.**

The result of this forgiveness wasn't eternal life, but physical healing.

Matthew 9:5-6 For whether is easier, to say, **Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?** **6** But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) **Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.**

On a national level, we can see the opposite occurring when the nation's sins had not been forgiven.

Josiah was the possibly the most righteous king Israel had ever had. And yet, we read in

2 Kings 23:25-26 ¶ And **like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.** **26** Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, **because of all the provocations that Manasseh** had provoked him withal.

Even though Josiah tore down all the alters and destroyed all of the wizards and spirit guides and idols and workers of iniquity, Israel wasn't forgiven because of the sins of Manasseh. This was even after Manasseh himself had turned back to God at the end of his life. So we can see that forgiveness of sins is tied directly to physical blessing.

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.

It is evident, I believe, that the life that is given to a brother that sins is physical life. If it were eternal life, then all the remnant would have to do would be to pray for the eternal life of all their Jewish brethren and all Israel – literally – would be saved.

Therefore, it seems to me, that the sin unto death would also be talking about a sin that is worthy of physical death. I think this is made more plain in the next verse.

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

What? There is a sin that is not unto death? If we are talking about spiritual life and death, what possible sin could there be that is not unto spiritual death? That would contradict every precept of the scriptures.

But if the death is physical death, that makes a lot more sense. The law of Moses is filled with sins that aren't punished by physical death.

My conclusion, then, is that if the life that is given to them in verse 16 is physical life, and the death that is a sin not unto death is also physical death, then the sin unto death is a sin deserving of physical death.

I don't believe it is taking the mark of the beast for several reasons.

1. He is talking about 'a brother.' That would be part of the same group in verse 13, that believe on the name of the Son of God, and they know that they have eternal life.
2. He is talking about physical blessings in this paragraph, which indicates he is talking about physical life and death, not spiritual life and death.
3. The confidence they will have is the same as in James. The prayer of faith will raise the sick and their sins will be forgiven them so that they can be healed.

The question then becomes: what is the sin unto death?

You will notice that it seems again to be a singular sin, just as in chapter 3. But it also seems that the sin not unto death is singular.

Here's my guess, and it is only a guess.

1 John 3:14-17 ¶ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death. **15** Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. **16** Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. **17** **But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him,** how dwelleth the love of God in him?

When we looked at these verses earlier, I said that a false prophet or teacher would be a double murderer because they could cause spiritual death and physical death. That is in verses 14-15. But in verse 17, he is saying the same as James says in James 2: Faith without works is dead. In that time of great tribulation, even before the mark of the beast is required to buy or sell, there will be a lot of poverty caused by nation warring against nation.

Revelation 2:8-10 ¶ And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; **9** I know thy works, and **tribulation, and poverty**, (but thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of **them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan**. **10** Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Those who say they are Jews but are not are the tares that we talked about. They are the false prophets and teachers that Satan sows among the remnant churches. But you also see here the physical poverty (along with the spiritual wealth) before the real suffering begins. In Israel things will be much worse than in Asia Minor.

So what is written in I John concerning those who still have worldly goods and deny them to a brother in need is also what we read about in James.

James 2:14-17 ¶ What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? **15** **If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body;** what *doth it* profit? **17** Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

My guess would be that the sin unto death is a sin such as this that denies a brother or sister physical needs and leads to their death.

My guess would be that a sin not unto death would be a similar sin, but which doesn't lead to the death of a brother or sister.

But I'm probably wrong.