

FORGIVENESS III

Sermon by Scott Lowther

Ephesians 4:32

September 18, 2011

We are to continue on the Forgiveness Topic. A couple of questions have come up and I feel I need to discuss those. Anytime somebody asks a question, if I get it more than once, I'll bring it up so we can address it because I figure more than one person would feel that way.

I'll show you where we have been, if you haven't been here.

DID YOU KNOW?

- **A CHRISTIAN IS FORGIVEN OF ALL SINS** **EPH 4:32**
That is taught some many places in scripture. It's tragic that we have to even discuss that.
- **OUR DEBT IS PAID IN FULL** **JOHN 19:30**
Jesus said "*It is finished*". Not it's going to be finished. *It is finished*.
- **OUR SINS DON'T PILE UP** **1 JOHN 1:7**
If we walk in the light as He is in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ continually cleanses us from all sin. So sin doesn't pile up before God after you've been born again.
- **SIN DOESN'T REMOVE OUR FELLOWSHIP** **1 COR 1:9**
Fellowship is a salvation issue. It is not a sanctification issue. The Lord who is faithful has called us into fellowship with His Son. That fellowship is part of what it means to be saved. When you sin you are not in and out of salvation. You are not in and out of grace. That's a Catholic doctrine not a biblical doctrine. You are always, always in God's grace. You are always in the loving mercy, kindness, compassion relationship with God. Romans 8 says there is nothing that is able to separate you from that. Nothing. That means no doctrine of men, no words of men, no thoughts of men. Nothing can separate you from that.
- **A CALL TO Gnostic TO COME TO GENUINE CONVERSION BY SAYING THE SAME THING , HOMOLOGEO, AS GOD SAYS ABOUT SIN** **1 JOHN 1:9**
Once that person does that, then 1 John 2:12 applies to them.
- **IF THEY DO THEN THEIR SINS ARE FORGIVEN FOR HIS NAMESAKE** **1 JOHN 2:12**

1 John is a fantastic book yet most people use it to pick and choose. It is a book you read in context and you read it cover to cover, chapter 1 to chapter 5, then you pull it apart. So you always want to get the whole thought of the book.



I'll share this with you. Some of you guys have been praying for a friend of ours, Lonnie. She has 3 children. I have known her for 20 years. I've known her husband for 20+ years. He had a brain tumor, the Lord delivered him. His brain tumor came back. Then Lonnie was in a car accident. She was in a coma; she came out of the coma today. So God is very faithful. She actually knew who she was, she didn't know where she was but she knew who she was. God was very gracious because they didn't expect her to live. The person that she hit when she had her heart attack and crashed is still in critical condition. I'll be going up Monday to visit them and my heart's desire and goal is to minister to that family. I don't know how old the guy is but he is in a coma as well and I don't know if he knows the Lord so my desire is to be involved in that somehow as well as bring some comfort to that family.

Let's talk about what we are going to look at today. The 2 questions that have come up are:

- 1) (Because we are forgiven) How am I supposed to act when I sin?**
- 2) What does biblical repentance look like?**

We'll talk about that so we can discern it biblically. Then we are going to deal with a really weird, kind of difficult, hard, passage from **1 John 5:16**. It's very hard. As a matter of fact I have never heard anybody speak on it but since somebody asked about it, here we go. It's really tough and when you read commentators on it, some of the best Greek commentators, Wiester, said this, "It's too much for me. I don't know." He's one of the preeminent Greek scholars and if he's not talking on it, well, here goes my feeble effort. So I'll give you 2 or 3 possible opinions. Now again, not to be dogmatic but we've got to give answers to questions.

This is an interesting text so let me just start with a few premises. God isn't like us. His forgiveness isn't like us. So don't use your weakness as a guideline to determine how God may or may not forgive. Take what God says and take him at his word. Now it is easier for us to forgive an enemy because we can say we are victims than it is to forgive a friend. We are still called to follow a biblical process in that. The reason it is easier to forgive an enemy is because you can say you're a victim but if it's a friend then

you've got to own the fact that you've chose that person to be your friend. So that's kind of on you and that's why it is easier for the enemy.

R.C. Sproul said this: **What do you do when a person says, "I've asked God to forgive me but I don't feel forgiven and I still feel guilty?" I hear that statement over and over again and so what I usually say to these people is this: "If you still feel guilty then pray to God again but don't go back to God to ask him to forgive you for the sin that is bothering you. Rather if you are going to ask him to forgive you of anything it should be for you insulting his integrity by refusing to accept his forgiveness. Who are you to refuse to forgive yourself when God has forgiven you? When God forgives his people he is not playing games. If he says he has forgiven you then he has forgiven you and if God has forgiven you then you are by definition forgiven."**

This is kind of harsh and in your face but the point of it is that's what we are talking about here. The reality of this is what the Lord has said. He goes to great lengths and great pains to talk about it. I want to continue with that. The 2 questions we'll address today and then we'll get back next time into Ephesians 5 and we'll be talking about family relationships, children, and all those other neat things.

Question: **What does biblical repentance look like?** Is it just saying "I'm sorry"? Is that what we are supposed to do? What are we supposed to do as a Christian if we do sin? What is this passage in **1 John 5:16** which says something in a nutshell of: ***There's a sin that leads to death and I'm not saying you should even pray about that one.*** Does that mean I can commit a certain kind of sin and then I'm going to die? Are there people who commit this sin? Is it a specific sin? Is it a bunch of sins? Is it failing to repent of sins? What is it because I want to know? It's a text that most people wrestle with and go "Huh, only the Lord knows."



SINNING

What is biblical repentance? There are 3 elements.

➤ **INTELLECTUAL**

Means change of view of recognizing sin is involving personal guilt, defilement, and helplessness. So it's as change. Repentance means to change your mind but it means more than that. It means to change everything about the way you are thinking. Everything about your attitude towards things. This intellectual thing is you must come to grasp what you have done is wrong.

➤ **EMOTIONAL**

It is a change of feeling. It manifests itself in what the bible calls "godly sorrow". It's not, "*I'm sorry I got caught*", it's "*I'm really sorry that this would grieve my father and I'm sorry about the consequences that it has on other people.*"

➤ **VOLITIONAL**

It says, "*I'm not going to do that anymore. I'm going to seek God's grace and turn from it and pray for strength that this is something that is a fruit that is not going to keep manifesting in my life. It's something I've determined I want to turn from, I want to rise above it, and I want God to help me with it.*"

That's what the bible teaches is repentance are we are going to look at a lot of scripture. I've prayed a lot what I'm going to share with you and the only way I can insure what I'm sharing with you is right is by giving you tons of scripture. If you've ever written me an email and said I give too much scripture, you are in for the "King of All Too Much Scripture" sermon. I'll begin with this:

Luke 18:13 It's the attitude of the publican that said "**God, be merciful to me, a sinner!**" who beat on his chest and wouldn't even raise his eyes to heaven because of the feeling he had over the sin that he committed.

I'm going to read you something that Charles C. Ryrie wrote in "**So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ**". Usually he's pretty solid but in this case he's not. He said this: "**In both the Old and New Testaments repentance only means to change your mind. Is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? Yes, if it is a repentance of changing one's mind about who Jesus is. But no, if it means to be sorry for sin or to resolve to turn from it.**" That is a lie, that is a huge lie. That lie is a heretical lie. God doesn't want you just to change the way you think, his goal is to change the way that we behave. His goal is to work in us that which is pleasing in his sight.

I want to talk about repentance first before I define it. I want to really convince us all that's what the bible teaches is what should take place for people.

JESUS PREACHED REPENTANCE

Luke 3:8: *“Bear fruits in keeping with repentance”.*

Mark 1:15: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* This is Jesus’ message.

Matthew 4:17: *“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

Luke 13:3 in that great passage of Jesus dealing with tragedy in the world said *“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

Do we need more? That’s just Jesus.

John the Baptist said this in **Matthew 3:8-10:** ⁸ *Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.* ⁹ *And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.* ¹⁰ *Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

This message of repentance began from the very beginning of John the Baptist ministry and it continued through Jesus’ preaching. Jesus taught his disciples about repentance. His disciples actually went out and preached repentance in **Mark 6:12** *“So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.*

In **Acts 3:19** Peter starts with his great sermon at Pentecost and he says, *“Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”*

Continuing in **Acts 17:30** Paul again is preaching and his message is again on repentance and says *“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”*

So this message of repentance although many modern (I can’t even call them theologians) bible guys seem to deny its truth. The plain fact of the matter is it is so overwhelming taught in scripture that you have to be completely ignorant to ignore it. You have to have open animosity to it to ignore it. Jesus taught it. Peter taught it. Paul taught it. John the Baptist spoke on it. It continues throughout the New Testament. In the entire message through the Book of Acts you can’t find a single sermon that didn’t talk about repentance. So for Ryrie or anybody else to say *“No, it’s not required”*, I just don’t get it. The reality is repentance is what God has called us to do. Repentance was the call that went out when people taught and preached. The message was always to flee the wrath to come, to turn and be

saved. That should still be the message of the church – to turn from your sin, and come to faith in Christ, and embrace him for all that he is, and all that God has for you and him, and be saved. But to say, “*Well, none of that’s important and that’s all the work*” is to completely misunderstand the teaching of scripture and to completely reject the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

I’m going to define repentance now and you see it’s important, I hope, and you see that it is something that should be manifest in our lives when we came to the Lord and as believers we should continually walk in a state of repentance. Every time we are made aware of things that we are doing that’s not right we should turn from it and pray that God would strengthen us to do rightly. It’s a continual molding into the image of God’s Son. Just because we have been given freedom and forgiveness of our sin, doesn’t mean we abandon the spirit’s working in our mist. It gives us the courage and grace to continue to allow him to work in our life.

By the way, God never asks people. This was something I was talking to my brother about the other day. It was really funny and we were having this good conversation. He goes, “*You know what bothers me?*” I go, “*Oh, tell me true*” because whenever he says that he’s usually going to dump something on me. He said, “*What bothers me is when people say God ask me to do something. I never read anywhere in the bible where God asked anybody anything. God commands people stuff.*” I said, “*Oh, I see your point.*” He goes, “*So when somebody says God asked me to do this and I blew it off, do you think God sits there and goes “Oh, OK then, never mind, its fine. How about this instead? Maybe I have a Plan B or C or D!”* We have to really come to understand that when we are talking about God we are not talking about a human being. We are talking about the sovereign creator of everything who speaks the world into existence and who upholds everything in the palm of his hand and we exist because he said so. We are created for him and by him and exist for his pleasure and he leaves us here as redeemed Christians to be useful in his kingdom spreading. That’s the only reason we are still here.

REPENTANCE IS NOT BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION



IT'S NOT MY
FAULT

If a drunk stops drinking, if a wife-beater stops smacking his wife around, if a thief stops stealing – that’s not biblical repentance. That’s behavior modification. Behavior modification is man centered and it’s this world centered where on the gospel it gives repentance as **repentance towards God, Acts 20:21**. A guy who is just interested in changing his behavior has his eyes set on the people he’s offended, on the

consequences of his actions and how that pans out in his present life. A person who repents has their eyes set on the Lord saying, *“You know what, it’s not that I have done things that are mistakes, it’s that I have sinned.”* And that’s different.

The prodigal son when he comes to his senses, when he recognizes he has a change of attitude against God and has a change of attitude with his father, he says this in **Luke 15:18**: ***“I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and I have sinned before you.”***

So again behavior reformation is problem centered; repentance is always sin-centered. The man who reforms his life looks upon his actions and problems as false but not as wicked sin committed against God. If a person only wants to change his behavior always soft-pedals sin, never wants to admit sin, never wants to own it, always wants to make excuses or justify it, or say *“You know what, it’s somebody else’s fault.”* Where a person who is repentant owns it and says, *“I’ve sinned against God and I’ve sinned against you. Would you forgive me for my sin?”* Not, *“We’re all messed up and I just made a few mistakes and we all makes mistakes so sorry I got caught.”* Are we good? No, we’re not good. We’re good when we get right with God, then we’re good. Until we get right with God, nobody is good.



JUDAS

So repentance is not simply being sorry. Judas was sorry but his repentance drove him to hang himself. Judas didn’t repent biblically.

NINEVEH

Jesus gives an example of what repentance looks like in **Matthew 12:41**: ***“The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah.”*** So if you are studious you run back to **Jonah 5:3-10** and you see what that looked like. What did the men of Nineveh do? Without reading it this is what they do. They covered themselves with sack cloths, sat in the ashes, they humbled themselves, they turned to God, they forsook their violent and evil ways and they called upon the Lord with a willingness to do whatever he said. So Jesus calls that repentance.

DAVID

David committed adultery with Bathsheba, didn't he? Then he murdered Uriah but he repented in 2 *Samuel 12:13* because he acknowledged his sin and then he laments over it in *Psalms 51:4* **"Against you Lord and you only have I sinned"** and his sin broke him.

SAUL

Now Saul on the other hand, let's see the way he repents. Saul's repentance admits his sin but look what he says *1 Samuel 15:30* **"I have sinned** (well that's great Saul) **but please honor me before the elders of my people and before all Israel, come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God."** He's got **"your God"** and he's saying, *"Yeah, I messed up but please honor me. I want people to see me as high and lifted up. I want the praise of men. I want everybody's adulation."* Instead of, *"I need to own that what I did was evil and I need to ask you to forgive me, and I need to turn from it, and I need to repent of it, and I need to come to grips with it that God says "it is wrong".*

PETER

Now on Peter's repentance. Three times he denies Jesus. That would be a heinously evil sin but his repentance included bitter weeping. He wept over his sin. Jesus didn't condemn him for it; Jesus went to him and restored him. Jesus' statement to Peter was one of the greatest in the bible, **"Peter, you will deny me 3 times, but I have prayed for you, and when you are restored, strengthen your brethren."** Jesus' intercession for Peter is so critical in our understanding of what drives us to repentance. We just don't somehow all of a sudden get smart one day and decide to repent. Repentance is a work of God in the heart of a human being. It's a gift of grace that comes with us that drives us to repentance. We should pray as scripture says in the Book of Acts that God would grant repentance to people because it is not in and of themselves to be able to even do it. It is a work of God.

So let's summarize that. I'm going to define repentance from all that we read.

To repent is to change your attitude towards yourself, towards sin, towards God, and towards Christ. To repent is to change the way that you thought about your sin in relation to the world, the flesh, and the devil and this is what God commands his people, not suggest. He commands us to come in alignment with his thinking on the subject.

We saw that last week, as a Christian when we sin, what are we to do? I'm going to give you an

OVERVIEW

- Admit that we have sin. That's homologous. It is come into consensus and agree that what you have done is wrong.
- We are to own it and take responsibility for it. That's a big difference between saying, *"Let bygones be bygones, too bad."* It means you own it and you take the responsibility of the consequences that come from it. **Don't be deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man sows that will he also reap.** There's a consequence. Yes, we have been forgiven but it doesn't

mean sin up a storm and then pray for crop failure. It means that God's saying, "I have forgiven you. But if you commit that, there may be a consequence to you and that consequence might be great. You'll still be my son but the consequence will come nonetheless."

- We are to turn from it.
- We are to feel godly sorrow over it.
- We are to make it right.
- We are to seek God for the grace to overcome it.
- We are to take drastic action. Jesus would say "cut off your hand, gauge out your eye." Take drastic steps to do something about it.
- We are to resolve it.
- We are to flee from it, to forsake it.
- We are to thank the Lord that he has forgiven us of it and we are to rise above it and walk in newness of life.
- We are to walk not condemned with our head down but to recognize it is for that sin as well as all the others that we commit that the Lord Jesus gave his life. That is to drive us not to guilt and condemnation for **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** It is to drive us to the Lord. If you don't have that perspective on it, it will drive you from the Lord every time because Satan is a master of driving us away from the Lord with guilt.

Let's continue. In **James 5:16** there's another aspect of it. If you sin and it involves another human; if it's sin against a brother. **"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you would be healed."** So in the context of James saying the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective he said to also make those issues of brother to brother, sister to sister, brother to sister – make those issues right. Jesus would say, **"Leave your gift at the altar and go and reconcile with your brother"** because God calls us to be reconciled just as he reconciled himself to us.

Repentance means you change everything. You change your thinking, you change your behavior. It produces observable changes. When Jesus says "bear fruit" in keeping with repentance he means that I should see something different about the way that you're talking and acting now, than what you were talking and acting before, if you really repented.

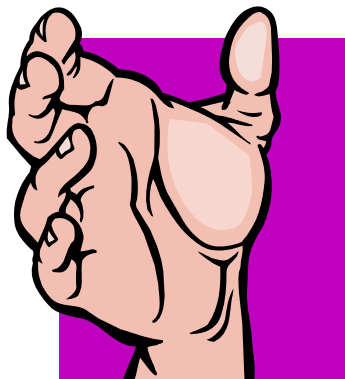
Zacchaeus said this in **Luke 19:8-10**, **"Look if I've taken anybody's money I want to make it right. I'm going to give four times to this guy, whatever it is I want to make it right."** Jesus says, **"Salvation has come to this guy's house."** He saw that he owned his sin; he saw that he turned from it; he saw that he was willing to make it right; he saw that he grieved over it, and he said "I want to do what's right." A person who is repentant is driven and consumed by a desire to do right. If you are not consumed with the desire to do right, we are probably not repenting like we should because we become hardened to the spirit moving in our midst.

What does biblical repentance look like? Paul gives us a great example in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 ¹⁰ ***For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret*** (I want you to see the fruit of real repentance biblically is a life without regret. It's like I'm not feeling condemned

now, there's no regret.) *whereas worldly grief produces death.*¹¹ *For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you,* (So in other words it's not your head down anymore. Real repentance, godly sorrow is producing life, it produces earnestness) *but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in this matter."*

Repentance is the greatest humility producer. Humility is the opposite of a sense of entitlement. Humility drives us to pursue and walk with the Lord. It's his loving kindness that draws us to repentance. It's the love and mercy of God that works in us that which is pleasing in his site and a Christian should always, always, be sensitive to where God is poking and prodding and saying, "*You know what, we need to work on that and change that.*" Not out of condemnation but out of love because God is so committed to conforming us to the image of his son, he will do whatever it takes regardless of cost. That's what it means to repent.

Why is the topic of repentance important? Why is it important at all? There are many reasons but look at **Luke 7:47**. Jesus simply said this: "*Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.*" *Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.*" Jesus is clearly connecting the appreciation of the forgiveness of God with our love for him. The greatest commandment is to "**Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.**" Right? We are clear on that. Jesus is saying if your perception of forgiveness is eschewed; if it's wrong; if it's temporal; if it's up and down; if it's in and out; if you're abiding by bad doctrine your love for God is small.



So how am I to come to grips with how I should truly think about God? When I realize that Christ died on the cross for each of my sins. When I understand that Jesus experienced the wrath of God in my place and it should have been me. When I come to the grips with the fact that I have been credited with the righteousness of his obedient life by a free gift. When I understand that God will only accept me in Jesus Christ and apart from him I have no good thing, that I am not good, not nice, not righteous, not worthy, completely sinful, hopeless and enmity with God - then and only then will I love God as I should love him. Because then and only then will I see my condition apart from him and with fear and trembling run to the savior and cling to him for all he's worth. I will see my need and I will see what I have been forgiven then those who have been forgiven much, love much. Jesus isn't saying that some

people are forgiven more than others. All of us apart from Jesus Christ should perish. All of us apart from Jesus Christ are in enmity with God. All of us apart from Jesus Christ are on the way to hell. Jesus Christ is a savior who saves us from that by his own grace and mercy without anything good in us, without any reason to save us, other than his kindness towards us. If you get that and you see salvation like that, then you can't help but love much. When you see forgiveness as a completely free, wonderful gift that God lavishes upon his people on the merit of Jesus Christ alone, then it changes the way you view everything. It changes the way that you live, it changes the peace that you have with God, it changes the risk that you are willing to take for him, it changes the way that you pray, and it changes the way that you behave. So as a Christian God calls us to come to grips with what he said.

My challenge to you is not to try and go point by point with what somebody else has said. My challenge to you today is search out the word of God and see what God says on the topic. If God has said, then let God be true and every other man a liar. What God has said is he has forgiven us of all of our sin, therefore go and sin no more. He has forgiven us of all our sin, therefore love him. You have been forgiven much and you can go boldly to the throne of grace, not fearful. Knowing that he will accept you and receive you because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on your behalf. That's the gospel and that's freeing and that's hope filled.

So that's basically repentance so it's easily seen biblically. When a Christian sins you go and follow that kind of thing. You hate your sin, you turn from it, you ask God to give you grace to overcome it and you don't want to do it anymore. You turn from it and want to do right. It's very simply seen. Repentance God works in the hearts of his people and it is manifest in fruit. It's not manifest in lip service, its manifest in action. You can tell somebody who is really sorry, can't you? And you can tell somebody who is not. You can tell somebody who is grieving over what they have done and somebody who is just placating you. And somebody who turns it and makes it your issue, "*Well, I wouldn't have done it if it wasn't for you!*" That's not repenting. That's blaming and justifying and God wants no part of that. God wants you to own it saying "**Against you Lord have I sinned.**" God says, "*Now we're saying the same thing. Let's move on.*" That's God's graciousness to us.

Like I said before, this is a very, very hard passage to discern. So let's read it and then we'll talk about it.

1 John 5:16-17: ¹⁶*If anyone sees his brother* (Now this says brother so we must be referring to a believer, maybe?) **committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life--to those who commit sins that do not lead to death.** (Now here's a crazy statement) **There is a sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.** ¹⁷**All wrongdoing is sin, but there is a sin that does not lead to death.**

The truth of 1 John is there are 40 some odd tests of life written to combat gnostic heresy. The point of the book is clearly that John wants to address that gnostic thinking that Jesus didn't come in the flesh, that sin doesn't matter, that flesh is evil so it doesn't matter what you do with it and so there's no sin and it's an illusion and that Jesus taking on flesh would be an illusion. That's the argument that is back and forth and we saw that already.

I'm going to try to give you 3 main ways that people who do talk about this say they are acceptable views. Then I'll steer towards what I think God would have us get from this. There's a huge amount of scripture coming your way.

Galatians 6:7: *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever man sows, that will he also reap."* What we have here is a passage that appears to say that as a Christian you can commit sins and there is going to come a time when either the kind of sin or type of sin or the amount of sin, God will take your life because he has had it with you. That's what it appears to say by a casual reading.

We have in **Acts 5** Ananias and Sapphira come in and Peter says, *"Hey, is that what you sold the land for?" "Sure is". Boom –he's dead. "Haul his carcass out of here."* Sapphira comes in, *"Where's my husband?" "Well, he's dead. He said this is what you sold the land for. Is that it?" "Yes, that's what we sold it for."* Boom – she's dead. And you say, *"Gee, I'm use to the Old Testament God opening the earth but the God in the New Testament, what's up with that?"*

Then you have in **1 Corinthians 11** this great passage on the Lord's Supper and I know you guys have read it. Paul says *"Look, you guys are failing to discern the body of the Lord."* (He's not just talking about Jesus; he's talking about the body as a church) *"You are not discerning it; you are treating each other bad. That's why some of you are 3 things:"*

- **Weak**
- **Sick**
- **Death** (He used the term "falling asleep" to kind of remove the blow. But "falling asleep is death for the Christian)

Paul said, *"Some of you guys are weak, some of you guys are sick and some of you guys have actually died because of that sin."* You go, *"Wow, that's heavy duty."*

Then in **1 Corinthians 5** Paul says, *"Look, there's a guy who has his father's wife. That's messed up so turn the guy over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his soul would be saved."* Now this guy is obviously a believer and Paul is saying *"Turn the guy over so that Satan kills him because his behavior has become such that God is done and his soul will still be saved."* Because an unbeliever doesn't have a saved soul now, does he? So that's a tough one.

TO BELIEVE OR NOT BELIEVE
THAT IS THE QUESTION



Shakespeare

So you've got Ananias and Sapphira - maybe, maybe not believers. You've got the guys in 1 Corinthians 11. Well, they are going to have the communion thing but maybe they're not believers and maybe that's why they are dead. Maybe they partook in an unworthy manner because they didn't receive him as savior. People want to debate that. But the guy in 1 Corinthians 5 – that's a no debater. That's just clear. God says, "I'm taking his life. I'm done with him."

So the first way of looking at this passage is it appears that scripture would teach that a believer can commit a certain type of sin or a persistent rebellious type of sinning that God will take his life. Throughout the Old Testament you'll see the same kind of thought. You'll see *Isaiah 14:11* where God tells Isaiah, "**Then he said to me pray not for those people for their good.**" So God is telling Isaiah, "Quit praying for them. I'm not going to do them good. I'm going to bring discipline and judgment."

He said the same thing in Jeremiah *in James 5:19-10* ¹⁹ **My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,** ²⁰ **let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."**

SINS

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So we have throughout scripture this apparent descriptive saying of that death and life and sin causes death and **the wages of sin is death**. How does that apply to a Christian because I believe that when scripture calls me and tells me all of my sins have been forgiven and I am as white as snow as Jesus Christ, and I'm forgiven in him. So what does that mean? That first opinion would say it means that God isn't mock **whatsoever you sow you'll reap**, and God is dead serious about the way his people behave. That's a strong view. The Roman Catholics kind of gravitate towards this and as a matter of fact from this passage

they pull their doctrine of **mortal** sins and **venial** sins. A mortal sin is basically is a sin that leads to death. The venial sin is one that doesn't. So they pull that theology from this passage.

Proverbs 10:27 "**The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.**" The bible tells us that we should obey our parents and honor them, that it would go well with you. It comes

from promise. So scripture, Old Testament-New Testament, is very clear that one of the benefits of walking with the Lord was that the Lord would give you a longer life if you walked with him. That was a promise throughout the Old Testament that we clearly see and he said that's it's better to go that way because it's a better blessing for you. Now there's an error that would come with that that says, *"Everybody who is dying or sick, then that means that's they've committed a sin that leads to death and I should look to them and say, "Shame on you. Unless you live to be 100, shame on you."* That's not what the bible teaches and we are going to look at that. Roman Catholic theology uses these verses to say you need to confess a mortal sin but a venial sin you do not. They say you don't have to confess a venial sin and here's why: It's a good and pious practice but not necessary. So they have it messed up.

Let's look at what this passage does say. Is it true that a believer can continually, willfully, reject the ways of the Lord and God will take his life? Let's look at some text here and figure this out. Let's really keep in mind God's purpose. Why does God have us here as his people? He has his believers here for one reason: To further his kingdom, as vessels for him to further his kingdom. Are we in agreement on that? He saved us to serve him here. The best thing for me is to get saved and go be with the Lord but if I'm still here, I'm not here because it's best for me. I'm here because it's best for the Lord's purposes for me for now. So if that's the case, that's an understanding.

There are sins of omission and there are sins of commission; there's sin of choice and sin of neglect; sin of ignorance and deliberate sin; there's sin of weakness and sin of willfulness; there are sins of Peter and sins of Judas; so there's all these different kinds of sin scripturally. In the Old Testament there was no sacrifice for what the Jews called the "high handed sin". In other words, if you sinned accidentally there were sacrifices for it. But if you went and killed your neighbor on purpose, there was no bull sacrifice for you. There was a rock concert for you! That's what you got. What God was saying is, *"Send them to my courtroom and I will deliver justice. Send that kind of sin directly to me."* God would say, *"You disrespect your parents, bad news for you."* Throughout the Old Testament you see that. God wasn't showing his hard side. God was showing his righteousness against sin.

What we got to look at when we look at scripture, say you look at the Book of Acts, there's descriptive text and there's prescriptive text. Descriptive means it's just recording stuff that's happening. It's not doctrine, it's not an epistle, it's just recording something that's happening. A lot of times you see this and say, *"Wow, Ananias and Sapphira died, why? Are we supposed to do that, are we supposed to call people up in the church and watch them pass dead in the front part here?"* No. It's not doctrine telling you what to do; it's just the Holy Spirit recording this happened. You don't need to know all the details, this happened. This is a recording of what happened. So you go to the Epistles for your doctrine not to Acts or something else to figure stuff out. It's a historical book telling us what happened. That's all it's telling us.

The passage that we are looking at here, is it a believer commits one of these sins and then there's no reason to pray for them? Now again the error of that would be everyone who is sick or is dying is doing so because they committed a sin that leads to death. That's the error that comes from it. The Word of Faith movement fuels from this kind of stuff. I'll give you a verse that should really help us understand death. As a matter of fact it's the verse the Lord gave me for Keith Michaels funeral. Its ***Isaiah 57:1***

“The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.” Do you see that? They are not being taken away because they are evil. God’s saying here that the righteous people he often takes away to spare them from experiencing evil. So just because somebody dies young it’s not indicative that they are committing a sin to death. So keep the whole counsel of God in mind. Are we looking at somebody here who has committed a horrible sin and God’s taking their life? Repented sin is not a sin leading until death. Discontinued sin that you turn from and walk away from and flee from, that’s not a sin that leads to death. Responding to the Lord’s discipline as he disciplines you for bad behavior is not a sin that leads to death. So is the death physical or is it spiritual? That’s what we have to discern next.

FIRST OPTION: The first one is a widely held, pretty popular view. It doesn’t do much for your confidence level with the Lord, does it? If you’re like, *“Gee Lord am I going to mess up and you are going to smite me dead? That’s terrifying. That’s scary. Why would you do that if Jesus bore the penalty of my sin? I don’t get it. Why is John telling me to not even pray about this? It’s freaking me out. So let’s just ignore it and move on.”*

SECOND OPTION: Some people equate it to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit from Matthew 12:31. That’s absolutely not true. As a matter of fact the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, my firm conviction of that and I stand with a lot of people who believe the same thing, that sin cannot be committed today because you have to be there, see Jesus in the flesh and attribute Jesus’ miracles and the working of the Holy Spirit, to say that is the context of that. I don’t think you can commit it today and people say, *“Well, no it’s the rejection of Jesus Christ as your savior.”* I say, *“Is that the unforgiveable sin?”* They say, *“Yes.”* And I say, *“Then you are condemned because there was a time in your life when you rejected him as your savior so what do you do with that? Have you ever heard the gospel when you didn’t respond?”* *“Well, yes I have.”* *“Then you committed that sin, you just condemned yourself.”* You better hope that’s not the case but I believe that scripture teaches emphatically different that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin including the one you experienced beforehand when you willfully rejected him. So the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was written to the Pharisees who should have known better who accused Jesus of performing miracles by Satan. So it’s not a sin for us today. I’m just throwing that one out. It doesn’t deserve much time.

The next one John is talking about the gnostic heresy so let’s read our text again and see if we can pick some points from it. The issue is the gnostic teaching is not whether or not a believer is going to sin and die. The issue that John is combating here is Gnosticism which was Jesus didn’t come in the flesh and what is really true about sin. Is there such a thing as sin? Is there sin at all because I’m thinking that since flesh is evil, the Lord would never take on evil and then it doesn’t matter what you do with your flesh, so just party it up and live anyway you want. That was the mindset and John was writing to combat that.

PHYSICAL DEATH



SPIRITUAL DEATH



So John says in **1 John 5:16** *“There is a sin that leads to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life-- to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.”* So here we have a very clear mindset from John saying if I’m taking this verse out of context and I’m just pulling it out of the bible I’m reading something that I am not liking, I’m reading something that’s making me very uncomfortable, I’m reading something that’s scaring me. But we have to take it in context of the whole book. John was writing to the gnostic. I went through the whole bible and I couldn’t find one single instance where a truly repentant person was not forgiven. I couldn’t find any, I couldn’t find one. So is this saying that a believer can commit a sin and it’s over for him? Is it physical death he’s talking about here or is it worse, is it spiritual death?

Let’s look at 1 John just as a book, the only other place where sin and death are linked up together is **1 John 3:14** *“We know that we have passed out of death into life* (So death and life. John is not talking about physical death; he’s equating death and life with salvation and not being saved. He’s talking about death spiritual, life spiritual. He’s not talking about just dying. He’s talking about spiritual life and spiritual death. We are going to see it in context of that passage as well as the one we are looking at.) *because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death.”* So it’s not the person who is dead physically, is it? He’s dead spiritually. John is saying that what we know here is that somebody passes from death to life because they loved the brethren. That’s a test of whether or not you are a Christian. A Christian should love the brethren. If a man says he loves God but hates his brother, he deceives himself and the truth isn’t in it. So John is not talking about there’s people walking zombie. He’s saying spiritually dead people don’t love the brethren even if they say they love God. We know that we passed from spiritual death to spiritual life if we love God’s people. You’re like, *“Oh man, that’s a tough one. I rather have the sin that leads to death.”* It’s harder isn’t it? Its like, *“Lord, I see that’s your desire, let that be true of my heart. Give me a heart for your people.”*

This is John’s command in **1 John 3:23** *“That we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”* So John message here to the gnostic is to come to Christ, to admit your sin, to turn from it, to confess it, to say the same thing as God does, to receive forgiveness of sin, then **1 John 2:12** is true of you in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin. **He has forgiven us of all our sins for his name’s sake.** John says his message here is two-fold. That the problem between death and life is whether or not you love God and you love his people.

That's the message and this is his commandment ***that we believe in the name of his Son and we love one another just as he has told us.*** This is his mindset. Death and life is not physical death and physical life; its spiritual death and spiritual life. John's commandment here is that we believe in the name of the Son of God. His message is to believe on Christ. To come to grips with what the Lord has said. If you're gnostic, if you're a guy here who says Jesus is not the Son of God, he is Michael the Archangel because you are Jehovah Witness, you know what, believe on the Son of God and you will live. If you believe in Michael the Archangel, you will perish. Jesus said unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins and he's taking the name of God from Exodus and saying, "If you don't believe that I'm God, you are going to die in your sin." If you are Mormon and go Jesus and Lucifer are spirit brothers, you are going to die in your sin. You have to come to believe what God has said concerning his son. That is his commandment again, it's not a suggestion. That we believe in the name of the Son of God, Jesus Christ and we love his people. That's God's desire.

John says what he wants is the commandment of God and if you received it. He said in ***1 John 5:13. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."*** The context of 1 John he is talking about spiritual life, spiritual death. He's not talking about a physically dead sin, a sin that is going to cause God to take your life. I believe he's talking about spiritual things. I believe he's talking about regeneration or perishing. You interpret scripture that are difficult by passages that are abundantly clear. So can a believer commit an eternally damning sin?

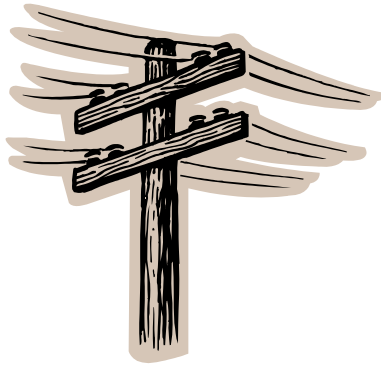
I had a person in membership class the other day who said, *"I love the church, love everything about the church, but you said you believe in eternal security and I don't, so should I still join?"* I said, *"Is that an issue for you?"* And he said, *"I believe that you can lose your salvation."* And I said, *"I'm sorry."* He goes *"But other than that, I like it."* I go, *"Then you should come. I'm not going to debate you over it, I'm going to try and win you over."* Because Jesus is my savior. He's not somebody who makes me savable. He has saved me and he has saved you. You need to take the whole counsel of God. God wants you to have confidence. John says here, ***"I write these things to you who believe in the Son of God so that you may know."*** God wants you to have confidence, he wants you to know, not hope. So his pleading is can a believer commit an eternally damning sin?

1 John 5:18 ***"We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning."*** So John is answering our own question. Can somebody who claims to be a Christian keep on committing sins that take him eternally to hell? Absolutely. Just because you claim to be one doesn't make you one. But can a real, born-again Christian commit eternally damning sins? John here says "No." He answers his own question.

In verse 17 he just got done saying there's a sin that doesn't lead to death, doesn't lead to eternal death. What sins are those? Those are sins that Jesus covered. What sins do lead to death? The ones that he didn't cover. John says *"We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning."* So a true Christian will not continue on unbelieving. A true Christian will not keep on sinning. A true Christian God will drive that person to repentance and the longer a person goes on, without coming back to the Lord, the longer a person goes on without repenting, the longer a person goes on without

owning his sin, maybe only confirming that he went out from us because he was never part of us. It's not whether or not you can lose your salvation; it's whether or not the person is saved. Jesus said in **John 6:37** *"All the Father gives me are coming . . . and I'm not losing any."* So Jesus said he's not losing any, I'm taking his word for it. So if you're one of the "any" he's not losing you. He's not going to lose you but he won't keep those he doesn't have.

1 John here is very clear. What if I don't come back to repentance? What if I continue on my way? **1 John 2:19:** *"They went out from us, but they were not of us; (Why John?) for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us."* I really believe God's heart on the matter is this: Sin is a serious business. God is dead serious about and we should be too.



We should combat it in ourselves, we should get the log jam out of our own eye before we go after our brother's speck for otherwise we've got this telephone pole that's beating them to death and we are talking about their issue. It's like, *"Hey, let me get this beaver dam out of my face so I can see that speck!"*

God's heart is sin is a serious matter. It is such a serious matter that God gave his Son so he could forgive you of it. That should so move your heart that you are constantly in a state of sensitivity to him. *"Lord search me and try me. Is there some wicked way in me? Lead me to the way of everlasting. Show me Lord how I am not like you. Help me to grow in developing those relationships with other people. In what areas do I not look like Christ to you?"*

John comes along with a warning and says, "There's a sin". His whole context here is on intercession. Did you see it? Let's go back real quick. His context here is on praying. He says, **1 John 5:16-18** *"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin that doesn't end in death (A brother who is sinning who is not eternally damning himself, but he's a brother. What do I do?) he shall ask and God will give him life (You pray, you intercede for him. You go to him and say, "The Lord has better for you. I'm praying for your repentance, buddy. I want you to come back to the Lord. I'm calling you to that.") and God will give him life to those who commit sins that don't lead to death. But there is a sin that leads to death and I'm not saying that you should pray about that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. ¹⁸ We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him."*



This passage is on intercession. How do I know how to intercede? If God puts somebody on my heart, I plead with the Lord for them. Maybe there is a guy that doesn't know the Lord and his sin is "unto death" and maybe one day I don't have that heart and passion for him like I used to and God is saying, *"It's time for you to move on."* And at those times in my life are some of the scariest experiences I've ever had. When I say, *"You know what Lord, I don't see anything going on with this guy and my heart's broken for him because I know he is going to hell. Do I shake the dirt off my shoes and move on? I feel you stirring my heart for something else and this passage rings in my head **"there's a sin that leads to death and I'm not saying you should pray about it"**. His fate is certain, he's beyond repentance, his conscience is seared."* And it's terrifying to see the condition of people apart from Christ. But it is tremendously comforting to see those who are saved. If you see your brother turn from Christ, you pray. If the person is born of God, the text says "he will come back". That's the test, it's not what he says, it's what he does. Does he come back? If he comes back, he's born of God. If he doesn't come back, he shows that he is a false brother. He shows that he made a profession without any possession. The text is clear. If he continues to depart he indicates he is a false brother. Let him settle down in his world of death, which is his home, and will be his destiny.

You oh people of God walk with the Lord all the more as you see that day approaching. Sensitive to his spirit, praying for those who need him, witnessing with everything that you got, living your life for him in such a way that you recognize that your sins and lawless deeds don't hinder God using you, don't keep you separated from him but he has made a way where you are completely righteous with him and he wants you to walk in newness of life and he wants you to be sensitive to him.

So that's my effort at that really tough text. If you don't agree with me, I don't know what to tell you. It's really hard; it's a hard saying who can receive it. Maybe everyone has all these different opinions. Maybe you think you can sin and die. Then don't do that. But I am convinced it's the other way because I am convinced that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin and that a Christian cannot commit a damnable sin because Jesus Christ paid for every one of them. When I was damned, when I was without hope and at enmity with God, when I loved darkness rather than light and refused to come to light because my deeds were evil, while I was hateful, ignorant, God-defying, God-despising, God put forth His Son and demonstrated His love towards me that while I was a sinner, a wretched, lousy, no-good sinner, Christ died for me. His death for me set me free from the law of sin and death and it covered every one of my sins that I ever committed that I ever will commit today, or I'll ever commit tomorrow, and he will present me because it rests on him alone. He will present me before His throne without spot, wrinkle, or blemish because He is faithful. God will not belittle His Son's sacrifice. God will always forgive His people because for God to not forgive His people would be to make little of what Jesus did when Jesus paid that penalty and it would make little of Jesus' sacrifice which was intended to glorify His Father. God will never, ever, disown His Son or belittle His Son. Therefore we have great confidence and you can say *"I am forgiven of all my sin. Therefore I have fellowship with God because He is faithful."* Therefore He who began a good work will be faithful to complete it and though a righteous man falls 7 times 7 times he will get up because the Lord is able to make him stand. If one of Jesus' little sheep, everyone here is one of his sheep, if you ever wander away, the Lord will hunt you down like a dog and bring you back. He will bring you back because God will not lose any of His own. That's the confidence that we have. So I pray that you take this passage to heart. I pray that you wrestle through it. I pray that it changes the way that you pray for people and I pray that in all these things, it drives your love for Jesus more. If you don't see yourself as forgiven much, you are not going to love much. So debating forgiveness, arguing about forgiveness, directly, proportionately knocks your love for the Lord down and I pray that it goes the other direction.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you so much for the day that you gave us today. Lord I love difficult text. I don't know why. Not because I'm a good studier but because I pray a lot. And I pray Lord that your word here would be a healing balm to your people. That it would bring life to them, not fear, not condemnation, not terror, that we would walk in repentance before you God always sensitive to the leading of your spirit, always humbling ourselves before you, always recognizing Lord we are entitled to nothing apart from your Son, but in your Son we have everything. And Lord that we would take this passage that seems to be so threatening and it would be comforting. That Lord we are confident, this we know that we have eternal life. This we know that your people do not continually, habitually, live their life dominated and overrun by sin for you will not allow it. So Father I pray that you would search out my heart again. Would you see if there be some wicked way in me? Would you bring forth those

attitudes or those actions that haven't been modeling the difference that you make? Would you show them to me Lord that I would turn from them? I thank you Lord that you cover each and every sin. I thank you Lord that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from all sin and I pray for each one in this room that you would do that for all of us, Lord. That we would leave with our heads held high, not under condemnation but rejoicing because we have been forgiven so much. Just give us a glimpse of how much we have been forgiven that we would leave rejoicing and being glad in you. And for that we are careful to praise you in Jesus' beautiful name. And everybody said. Amen.