



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 5:13-17

"Assurance, Prayers, and the Sin unto Death"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are turning to 1 John chapter 5, verse 13 through verse 17 for our Scripture reading for today. The apostle is in the last chapter, for us at least, for what he has written. As one of you said to me this morning, it's rather sad that we are coming to the end of this great little epistle, I feel that way too, but we still have the message today, and the Lord willing next week we will conclude our study. Verse 13, the apostle writes,

"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," (The last clause found in the Authorized Version is one that is not genuine, and so we'll leave it out in our reading.) "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us:" (And incidentally when he says, he heareth us, he means to hear favorable. He heareth us, that is he hears and answers.) "And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

Now, I am going to read the next two verses, as I will expound them. You do have the expression "a sin and unto death, a sin and not unto death," but it is perfectly legitimate to render this without the indefinite article, for the original text is capable of either translation. Furthermore the word sin, the verb is in the present tense, and thus may have a durative sense, that is speaking of

continual or continuous sin, and I'm going to read it that way because that is the interpretation that I will follow, so as I read it, that lies in the background of my translation.

"If any man see his brother sinning 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 ask for information, for it, or about it or concerning it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death."

That passage, as no doubt you know, is a passage that has provoked different interpretations at least, four well-defined ones, and actually one or two more with some elaborations, and we'll say something about them later on, but generally expound the text from the standpoint of one view. May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are indeed grateful to Thee that on this the Lord's day, we may gather sing together the hymns that speak of our Lord and his ministry, pray together, listen to the word and respond to the message that Thou hast given us through the Apostle John. We pray that we may respond in a biblical way, that we may, in our Christian life, draw closer to Thee, and if there are those here who have not yet entered into that Christian life, we pray Lord that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the third person the eternal trinity, there may come conviction, regeneration and faith and trust in our Lord, that means eternal life.

We pray that Thou'lt guide us in our Christian life, and in the day in which we live. May by Thy grace we represent our Lord Jesus Christ in a favorable way. May others be drawn to him through the testimony of the believers here.

We pray for our country, and particularly Lord, as the leadership changes here this week, we pray that Thou'lt bless and undertake for the president elect and the men who are associated with him in government, and may Thy providential care rest over the United States of America in the future months.

We commit the church of Jesus Christ to Thee, the whole church composed of believers, who by grace have rested themselves for time and eternity upon the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross, and Father we pray for Believers Chapel, for it's elders, and deacons, it's members, the friends who attend here frequently, and the visitors today especially we pray for them. May today be a day in which we each grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We thank Thee for the outreach of those who labor here in the tape ministry and the publications and in other ways, the Bible classes and their personal testimony, Lord, bless each individual. We pray Thy blessing upon the staff and those who give of their lives sacrificially for the word of God here.

Now, we ask Thy blessing upon us as we sing. We pray that our singing may be pleasing to Thee, may express the biblical truth, and we would not forget, Lord, those who are ill and sick, who've requested our prayers, whose names are listed in our Calendar of Concern. We bring them all to Thee. We pray, O God, that Thou'lt give healing as it pleases Thee. That Thou'lt encourage, uphold the family, the friends and the physicians who minister to those who are sick.

Lord, we pray that in the experiences of life our thoughts may turn to him who loved us, and gave himself for us, and may we be reminded that in having trusted Christ, we have the assurance of the care of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in all the experiences of life. What a comfort that is.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] As you can see from the bulletin the sermon title for today is “Assurance, Prayer, and the Sin unto Death.” The Apostle John is drawing near the end of his message. He's made very plain the differences between true believers and the false professors, and as he concludes his epistle in effect, he reiterates his purpose of assuring his believing readers of their possession of eternal life and the privileges of it. That leads him into a discussion of prayer, and particularly of prayer for

those who may be in sin, or prayer that touches those who may be in sin. And so assurance, prayer and believers' sins are before him in this brief section that we have read.

What then is meant by assurance? Let me contrast it for the sake of our discussion with a related term, perseverance, or security. Perseverance, the perseverance of a believer, the doctrine that he will persevere in the faith, that he will not apostatize from the faith, that once having believed in Christ and come to the possession of life, he will never lose that life, is the human side of the doctrine. Eternal security is a term that is frequently used in connection with it, and that of course has to do with God's security of true believers in the faith that they have entered into. That's the divine side. But the doctrine of assurance is the certainty that we possess salvation now, through faith in Christ.

Of course, the fact that we say we possess salvation now, may suggest that we may lose it. That of course, has been the view of some who are highly respected within the history of the Christian faith. Wesleyans, for example, have believed very strongly that it is possible for us to have the assurance of salvation, but we may lose the salvation through sin, of which we may be assured at the moment. So assurance does not necessarily mean eternal security, or eternal perseverance in the faith. Assurance then is the doctrine by which we may be certain of salvation now. Security is the doctrine by which we affirm the certainty of salvation for believers now and forever. Essentially, security or the perseverance of the saints is the doctrine of the eternity of the spiritual life, or to put it into another way, it's simply the doctrine of eternal life.

The Apostle Paul, the Apostle John, our Lord all combine to teach the doctrine of assurance and also the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. For example, the Apostle Paul writes in Romans chapter 8, in verse 38 and verse 39, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." So he secures us. We persevere in the faith. We have assurance that we have life now and forever.

These doctrines of perseverance or security and assurance have never been extremely popular. The popular language has always been the language of doubt. We surmise. We suppose. It is probably true. We may perhaps assume, and many flatly deny the doctrine of assurance. For example, the Church of Rome in the Council of Trent says, "A believer's assurance as a pardon of his sins, is a vain and ungodly confidence." Cardinal Bellarmine, the champion in the 16th century of the Roman doctrines said concerning assurance that it was "a prime era of the heretics." Not all of those within the church, that church, have denied assurance. Augustine, one of at least the two greatest theologians within the church, some think the greatest, but at least one of the greatest said, "To be assured of our salvation is no arrogant stoutness. It is our faith. It is no pride. It is devotion. It is no presumption. It is God's promise."

I think it is therefore fair to say that some of the greatest of the theologians have affirmed most strongly the doctrine of Christian assurance and also the doctrine of Christian perseverance. John Calvin made a rather interesting statement in connection with it. He said that others contend. It's a matter of rash presumption for us to claim an undoubted knowledge of God's will.

Now, he said, "I would concede the point." Calvin was a very careful thinker as you can see. He said, "I would concede the point. Only if we took upon ourselves to subject God's incomprehensible plan to our slender understanding." In other words, he said, if think when we affirm an undoubted knowledge of the will of God with regard to matters, if you think by that that I am suggesting to you that I have an understanding or we have an understanding of his incomprehensible plan, our slender understanding is not sufficient to give us an understanding of his great plan. But he says, "When we simply say, with the Apostle Paul"—and we could add with the Apostle John or with the apostles or with the word of God—"we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit that is from God." Paul says that, by who's teaching "we know the gifts bestowed on us by God."

In other words, if we are simply saying with the apostles these great truths, "then how can they yelp," I love the way they spoke in the 16th Century, so he likens his opponents to dogs, yelping.

So he says, "How can they yelp against us without abusively assaulting the Holy Spirit because it was the Holy Spirit that said these things?" He goes on to say, "But if it's a dreadful sacrilege to accuse the revelation given by the spirit either of falsehood or uncertainty or ambiguity, how do we transgress in declaring its certainty. We are simply saying what the apostles have told us."

Now, the apostle, as I say, is drawing near the end of his epistle, and so the subject of assurance comes up in the 13th verse, then the subject of prayer in verses 14, and 15, and then that strange subject of sin unto death, in verses 16 and 17. The 13th verse states one of the preeminent, if not the preeminent purpose of the 1st epistle of John. "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." Bible teachers and students have for generations upon end contrasted that statement the apostle makes in the 20th chapter of his gospel, where he said, "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that believing ye might have life through his name." So in that propaganda document, Christian propaganda document, the Gospel of John, the apostle simply says, "I have written this gospel, using some of the signs, not all of them that Jesus performed to bring you to an understanding of our Lord, as the Messiah, the Son of God, and in that understanding you might have life."

Now, writing in the 1st epistle he says, "These things have I written to you that believe," (already believe) "on the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." So one gospel is written to bring them to life, this epistle is written to give them the assurance of that eternal life. I think it was very appropriate for John to write this epistle, because he has told us in his epistle that there was a lot of divergent teaching to which they were exposed. He speaks in the 2nd chapter in the 19th verse of some who had been with them, among them, but who now had gone out from them because they were not of them. As a matter of fact he says, "If they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they have gone out that it might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

Several times in the epistle in chapter 4 and chapter 5, he encourages them to be sure that they have genuine faith. He says, "We know the spirit of God in this way. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is not of God. That's the spirit of antichrist whereof you've heard that it should come, and even now is already is in the world." So in the light of the experiences it's not surprising that he writes about assurance. That fact that there had been individuals among them who've now left, that there were individuals who evidentially had made a profession of faith which was not genuine, caused him to raise the question of assurance, prayer and sin unto death.

Now, when we think of assurance, I don't want to spend too much time on this, when we think of assurance and the ways by which we may be assured of eternal life, let me sum it up by putting it this way. There are three means of assurance. One we may call external. That is the word of God outlining for us the basis of salvation in the blood of the cross. Our assurance is ultimately related to that which Jesus Christ the Son of God did in offering himself a sacrifice for us.

As the apostle puts it in the 10th verse of the 4th chapter, "Here in his love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The blood of Christ shed on Calvary's cross is that which secures salvation for us. It's the word of God that makes us sure of that. He did it. It's the word of God, and John is the one who has just told us, if we believe the witness of men surely we can believe the witness of God. It's the word of God that makes us sure. There is an internal means of assurance, and that is the witness of the Holy Spirit within us. John also has just spoken of that in the preceding verses. He has stated in the 8th verse that,

"There are three that bear witness, the spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. Of this is the witness of God, which he hath testified in his Son. 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 us of his Son."

So every genuine believer in Christ has the witness within himself. The presence of the Holy Spirit who has testified that we are the children of God, by virtue of what Christ did on the cross.

In the 8th chapter of the epistle to the Romans, the apostle there says much the same thing when he says, "The spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit. That we are the children of God." You'll notice he says, "Beareth witness with our spirit." Our spirit testifies having been brought to life by the regenerating work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It testifies that we belong to the Lord God and the spirit who indwells us testifies with our spirit. So there is an external evidence of the assurance of eternal life, and an internal means of assurance, the witness of the Holy Spirit. And of course we have gone through these chapters, and I don't have to tell you because if you've listened at all you know that the Apostle John has also set forth an evidential means of assurance, that is he has pointed us the necessary issue of the Christian life, the necessary issues such as Christian love. If we don't love the brethren, he has said we don't really belong to the Lord. If our lives are not characterized by the keeping of the commandments, we don't belong to the Lord. In chapter 3 he has stated in verse 8,

"He that commiteth sin is of the devil of the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God does not go on committing sin. His seed remaineth in him. He cannot go on sinning because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil. Whosoever doeth not righteousness goes on doing it."

We don't acknowledge at all that's it's impossible. We don't say that it's impossible for a man to sin. We simply say that a true Christian does not persist in sin. If he persists in sin, as we shall

see, divine discipline comes. His physical life may be taken. He cannot live his life out under the dominion of sin. The New Testament makes that so plain, it's amazing that we have discussions over it, but nevertheless we do. So these are the means of assurance. The work of Christ on the cross, the witness of the Holy Spirit, the believers works in his life.

Now, let me hasten to say it doesn't mean that you have to see that works in my life, or I have to see the works in your life. They may be invisible to me, but if they are genuine works of course they are well known to the Lord God because he's the one who's produced them. And so we do not have room within the Christian faith for authorized wardens of the spiritual lives of others.

Now, we have a lot of that in the evangelical church. Those who've set themselves up as the judges of others, but they are blind men and women, and let us remember that, but the facts are that a true believer, the result of his new life must manifest itself. Just as physical life must manifest itself. The French tell us, some of the French, tell us that the reason that babies cry, is that they're brought into life with great lights shinning upon them, and if they didn't have those great lights shinning upon them, if they were delivered in total darkness, they wouldn't cry. Well, my experience, the experience of you, up to this point at least is, the obvious sign of life is the noise that a little infant makes. There has to be noise in the Christian life. It may not be recognized by us, but nevertheless it is there.

Now, the subject of assurance introduces the question of prayer for him. He says, this is the confidence that we have in him. That if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us, and if we know that he hears whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have desired of him. So this is the assurance that he has already spoken about in chapter 3, verse 21 through verse 24. To hear, as we said, means to hear favorably. This is one of the great promises of life. That is if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. I know someone says, "Well, it's very difficult for me to know what is in accordance with his will." Why of course it is. We can only be sure of things that are specifically set forth in the word of God. That's why it's so important for you and I to know the word of God, so that our prayers may be in harmony with biblical truth, and when they are then

we can be sure the Lord hears us, and he will answer our prayers, of course he will answer them in his own time, but he will answer those prayers that are in harmony with the word of God.

Some have even suggested, "Well, if we don't know what his will is, how can we even pray?" Well, the Scripture invites us to pray. We have the assurance that prayers in accordance with his will are answered. It seems to me the reasonable response to that is to pray. The Lord Jesus prayed accordingly. He knew what was the will of God, and yet in Gethsemane he could pray, "O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not that which I will, but that which Thou doest will." He obviously, in his divine personality, knew what was within the will of God and what was not, but he regarded prayer as a means to the accomplishment of the will of God, and so every Christian even those who have the strongest views of the sovereignty of God, in that there is a decretive will of God that determines all events. If he is true to the word of God, if he has a true faith in that he will pray. He not only will pray, he'll be characterized by his prayer. He'll be a man of prayer because those two great truths are taught in the word of God. The sovereign, determination of the Lord God of everything that comes to pass at the same time the exhortations for us to pray.

Are you having difficulty understanding that? It's a reminder of the fact that you are a finite person. You'll never understand it as the Lord God understands it, but we hope to have better understanding when we leave the company of the darkened minds of those who are about us.

Now, he says if we ask anything according to his will. I have a friend who is now with the Lord, as we had some years ago, an interesting discussion about this. He was a banker. This morning I was not very clear in my speech, and someone came up and said, "I thought you said, he was a biker." [Laughter] Well, he was a banker, and he was no biker. He was vice president of a California bank, and a very godly man. I'll never forget this man because he has a tie that started here and stopped about here. [Laughter] And I said, "Fritz, your tie, this morning," I said, "your tie is not really tied too well." He said, "It's tied that way on purpose." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, when I buy a new tie, and this is a relatively new tie, I tie it that way, and then when it gets a little dirty at that place on the knot," [Laughter] he said, "I move it up a little bit, until finally near the end

it will be something like that tie you are wearing." [laughter] And he could have gone and said, "And that is why I have a larger bank account than yours." [Laughter] But he was a very godly man, and very earnest about the word of God, and he said to me, "I'd like to ask you a question about John 14:13 and 14, in which the Lord you remember in the upper room discourse says that, Whatever you ask, I will answer, if you ask me anything I will do it for you" You read those verses and you'll find that's what he said.

Now, he said, "Lewis, I consider that an unconditional promise, and so therefore I rarely pray that because I want to be as sure as I possibly can that that's the right prayer because it's going to be done." And I said, "Fritz, I think that you need to consider 1st John 5, in verse 14, in connection with it, where the apostle says, 'This is the confidence that we have in him that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' Then we are acquired by the analogy of Scripture to compare passages to construct our doctrine of prayer." And is suggested to him in my own way, that whatever we pray in the will of God, we have the right to expect an answer, but that doesn't mean that every petition that we offer to God will be answered as we hope it will, but rather if it's in the will of God. So now, we have these reasons for assurance. We have these reasons for confidence in prayer.

George Mueller said something that I thought was very interesting. He said that for many years in his life, Mr. Mueller you know lived to be ninety-three years of age. Born in 1805. Died in 1898, and he said, "For many years I lived by getting up in the morning early, praying and then eating breakfast and then considering the word of God." He said, "I discovered in my own experience that it was much better to reverse things." He said, "It's much better to get your spirit happy with the Lord," I would say happy or joyous with Lord, "So I started getting up in the morning and reading the Bible, and I found that by reading the Bible, it caused me to confess, to express worship and praise and all of the things that one naturally does reading Holy Scripture."

He said, "Then I came down to breakfast, and my spirit was happy in the Lord, and through the rest of the day, I had already prayed as I read the word of God, things would occur to me, and I

would pray in the light of Holy Scripture." And he said, "That has been going on now for many years, and I have found that it means a great deal to me." I think that's good advice for all of us to remember. To read the word of God, and in the reading of the word of God there will come to you things over which you need to pray. There will be conviction, correction, all of the things that the word of God does for us.

Now, finally we come to this last section in which, the apostle is talking about the exception of sin unto death. I'd like to suggest to you that perhaps what is going on in John's mind is something like this. He said, "I have written this epistle to bring you to assurance of eternal life. That you may know you have it, and I have mentioned prayer as one of the blessings of eternal life, but now you may pray for someone, and you may find that this individual for whom you've prayed, and surely it's the Lord's will you might think to pray for your fellow Christians, and particularly those who may be wandering from the path of the teaching of the word of God. You may discover in praying for them, that instead of your prayers being answered, your Christian friend dies. You might be puzzled by that, in fact, you might be upset by that, and so I'd like to suggest to you that there is an exception. You may be praying for someone who has sinned sin unto death, and you should not be surprised if you pray for some Christian who obviously needs your prayers, and the individual is not given life by the Lord God, but rather he dies.

You shouldn't therefore think that you don't have eternal life. Your assurance should not be shattered by the fact that you pray for someone, and the prayer is not answered because you think that answered prayer is a test of the reality of my Christian life. So now that raises the subject of discipline in the Christian life. There are different ways in which we may suffer of course. We may suffer voluntarily, as the Apostle Paul did when he gave himself to the service of the Lord. We may suffer in an educatory way, that is the things that we experience may be means by which the Lord is educating us. As Peter tells us in chapter 1, verses 6 and 7 of his epistle. We may suffer simply because we are identified with Christ, and the world's carrying on its quarrel with Christ, by

persecuting us. But we also may suffer for disciplinary reasons, for correction, and the apostle, I think, possibly has that in mind here when we writes,

"If man see his brother sinning sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, let's us pray, and he, the Lord shall give him," (that is the brother) "life for them that sin not unto death. There is sin unto death. I do not say that he should ask for information about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not unto death."

So in this way he would encourage prayer and discourage discouragement in our praying. I said there are many ways in which this text has been taken. Verses 16 and 17, some have taken these words as being a reference to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, as set forth in the gospels, such as in Mark chapter 3. In my opinion, and this is my opinion you must understand. You must study it for yourself, when he says if any man see his brother sin, sin which is unto death that would let me know, he's talking about a Christian brother. A Christian brother cannot be guilty of eternal sin, and the fact that he talks about a Christian brother in the beginning makes me think that that is in his mind, in verses 16 and 17. So I would not accept that interpretation, and further blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is mentioned only once in Holy Scripture. It's a definite sin related to a historical situation, when our Lord was here as God-man, he still is the God-man, but there is an immense difference because now he possesses a glorified body, then he possessed the body that was given him in his birth, so the situation is never parallel ever after, and that's why we never have a reference to the unpardonable sin in the epistles. It's has been also taken, this passage, as a reference to apostasy. That is an individual who has come to know Christ, but who has apostatized from the faith.

Now, in my opinion, that is not taught in the New Testament. The tenses of the verb in verses 16 and 17, suggest not an act by which we may apostatize from a profession, but we are talking about a brother, and we are talking about continuous sin, so I wouldn't accept that interpretation although, there are some Christian brothers who take that view, and then it has been

taken as a reference to the Mosaic capital offenses. In the Old Testament there were certain sins that brought physical death. Out of that incidentally arose the distinction between moral and venial, which we know, if we've been listening to Dr. Daniel on Wednesday night, as characteristic of Roman Catholic theology. I do not think that that is specifically what John has in mind, although, the expression, "sin unto death" is terminology that is very similar to several passages in the Old Testament, and in those passages, incidentally, the reference is to physical death, so at least that would be something to bear in mind. What I think this has, and what I think the apostle has in mind is that he is talking about a brother that is a Christian brother, who engages in persistent sin.

Now, persistent sin is something one cannot continue in forever because it brings one unto discipline. It means this: you as a believer in Christ, you cannot persist in sin forever. The discipline of the Lord God is the discipline of a heavenly Father who cares about his children and also about his work, and so he disciplines. He does punish his children. Chastises them, if you like a better word or another word. He chastises them. The person who persists in sin throughout all of his life, John and Paul unite in saying that person's not a believer, but it's possible for a believer to persist in sin for a while, but he's subject to discipline. Let me remind you of one well-known place in Corinth, where believers around the Lord's table were imbibing a little bit too much of the wine. It was not Welch's grape juice because the apostle says that what they were drinking was intoxicating, and he says for this cause because of the disorders at the Lord's table, some are weak, some are sickly and some have fallen asleep.

Now, when he says fallen asleep, he doesn't mean passed out. [Laughter] Weakly, weak, sickly, fallen asleep there's an increasing severity of judgment, falling asleep is the Christian term for a believer's term for a believer's death. Paul talks about that in 1 Thessalonians 4, and other places also. So when he says some have fallen asleep, he means the Lord in discipline has taken their physical lives, so when John writes, "If any man sees his brother sin sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give them life for them that sin not unto death. There is sin unto death." He means life and death in the physical sense. There is sin unto physical death. Other instances of this

of course are found in the word of God. One thinks of Ananias and Sapphira although, in that case we don't have any assurance of persistence in, but at least sin unto physical death.

Therefore I think that when the apostle writes here his words, he is talking about persistent sin and that persistent sin of a believer. When he says brother he's not talking about reverend ether. Brother so and so has preached yesterday. He means a believer in Christ, and he's talking about their persistent sin, and he says that if a believer persists in sin that persistence in sin may lead to physical death.

Now, if you are asking me what is this particular sin he may have in mind, then obviously you may be reading the Authorized Version, which speaks about "A sin unto death. A sin not unto death," as if it is one particular sin, but if you understand this, as I suggest that you should understand it, that is eliminate the indefinite article, then of course we don't have any particular sin, but we have any sin of rebellion, disobedience in which a believer persists. So since the articles are lacking, and since in verse 17 to underline that he says that "all unrighteousness is sin."

It's obvious he's speaking generally. Any sin that one persists in which is within the whole body of sin, generally. Persistent sin exposes one to the possibility of a disciplinary chastisement of physical death. Willful continued sin then of any kind. If we are looking at the Epistle of 1 John, we would think of what he has been talking about in the epistle. Unrighteousness, unlove among Christian brethren and sisters. All of these things he has spoken about. In other words, to put it in the language that all of us can understand, sometimes we are fit for heaven when we are not fit for the earth. In other words, having been brought to faith in Jesus Christ, a true faith, if we persist in sin, the Lord may find it necessary to take our physical life. The reproach brought upon his name by our sin is reason to take our lives physically. It is a very solemn thing to think about isn't it? "Sin unto physical death" is something for all of us to think about. Therefore, we don't have anything from this particular context to make us think that John is talking about a definite sin. There are no particular clues to any specific sin. He's talking about sin of all kinds in which a believer may persist.

Many years ago, I had a lady come up to me at an American Keswick Conference, in which I was one of the speakers, and I had spoken on this in the Bible hour, and she asked me. Before she asked me the question, she told me about some members of her family, and specifically one member of the family that she wondered had perhaps committed sin unto death, and she wanted to know whether she should pray for that individual because she thought that maybe they had committed sin unto death. John does say there is "sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it."

It sounds as if he is not expressing himself one way or the other. He's not saying you shouldn't, not saying that you should, but if that word, this different word *erotao* here in this instance means to ask for information, as I think there are some clear instances here in the gospel, then what I think he is saying is there is persistent sin unto death, I do not say that it is our business to ask for information about it. It is not our business to pry. It's our business to pray. And so I encouraged her to pray. I think that's the way we should treat it. We should not set ourselves up as those who are the spiritual judges of other people. That's not our task to be examiners of the fruit of the lives of our fellow Christians.

I love this little story, or this little cartoon that Mr. Schulz, a long time ago had in the Sunday paper. Lucy is looking at Linus who's got his little finger like this, and she says "What's the matter with you?" And Linus says, "I have a sliver in my finger." "Ah ha." Lucy says, "That means you are being punished for something. What have you done wrong lately?" And Linus says, "I haven't done anything wrong." "You have a sliver hadn't you? That's a misfortune isn't it? You are being punished with misfortune because you have been bad." And Charlie Brown's looking at all of this, and he says, "Now, wait a minute" and she interrupts him, "What do you know about it Charlie Brown? This is a sign. This is a direct sign of punishment. Linus has done something very wrong, and now he has to suffer misfortune. I know all about these things. I know." And as she is halfway through the sentence, Linus is looking and he says, "It's out. It just popped right out." [Laughter] And Lucy, very disappointed turns away with frown on her face, and starts walking off and Linus says, "Thus endeth the theological lesson for today." [Laughter]

Well, you know there are lots of Lucy's in the midst of the Christian family, who are often very, very anxious to point to things that have happened in our lives as evidence that we have sinned, and therefore we are suffering the misfortunes. Well, it's possible of course that that is true, but it's not our duty it seems to me, to the judges of the spiritual fruit of others. Let me sum it up. While sinning saints are to confess their sins, and spiritual ones are to pray, we all remember that we may face divine discipline. Suffering comes from all of these sources, but one the sources is discipline, chastisement because we have been disobedient.

Many years ago I had a good friend. He was a Braniff pilot. He had, I thought, a genuine conversion. He, after he had been converted, he began to listen to the tapes of the chapel. Carried it with him when went on trips away from Dallas. Sent them out to his friends. Gave them to his fellow pilots. Asked them to read it. He gave all the indications outwardly that he was a true believer. He had been in his life, not an ideal husband, but things appeared to be changing so far as we know, so far as I knew at least, And then one day, I read in the paper. Well, as a matter of fact, I was awakened at night about 1:00, and his wife called and she said, and I am going to use another name. She said Robert's dead, and the story came out that he had told her. Called her from Denver, where he had gone, he had called her and said, "The weather is so bad we are not able to get back tonight. I will see you tomorrow when the weather clears." He had come back and he had gone with one of the flight attendants to spend the night, at least the earlier part of the night, in a cabin he possessed on one of the lakes north of Dallas, and coming back in the midst of, it may have been a storm. It may not have. I have forgotten the details. He was going around the curve. He got off the road. Hit a tree and was killed.

I had the funeral, I had to have the funeral, and not knowing everything, and not knowing everything now. I made the statement, as I say it was probably twenty years ago, I made the statement in the midst of the message that Robert was a Christian man, who had believed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is the only time it ever happened in all of my Christian ministry. There was vocal objection in the audience. I don't mean someone stood up and said, "Dr. Johnson,

he wasn't a Christian," but several of my friends were in rows, they were seated with some members of the family and friends, and in those rows there were some audible expressions of disagreement with the Christian profession of this individual. It illustrated the fact that the kind of life that we live, and even the kind of death we die, in this case, may be a reproach to the faith that we profess. So let me read David's prayer to you. It's the kind of prayer that we ought to have for ourselves. It's the kind of prayer that we ought to have to for ourselves.

"Who can understand his errors. Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me." (Notice the word dominion.) "Dominion over me, then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from," (The Authorized Version says, "the great transgression," as if there is one thing, but the Hebrew text has no article.) "From great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

It seems to me that's the kind of response we should have to a great passage like this. If you are here today, and you've never believed in Christ, "sin unto death" is not the kind of death you may commit. You are headed for physical death already, and living in eternal death, and the way by which God in his grace may grant you deliverance from eternal death, spiritual death, and the assurance of resurrection after you die physically, if our Lord does not come is found in our Lord's sacrifice on Calvary's cross. May God in his grace bring conviction to your heart. May you flee to that cross, receive Christ as your own savior, and in his grace through the Holy Spirit, live a life that is pleasing to him. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, in the solemn texts of the word of God, we find reasons to ask ourselves questions concerning our own relationship to Thee. May we not lose the value of

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submission to the word of God, and reflection upon our own personal lives in the light of it. Be
with us now as we part. In Jesus' name. Amen.