



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 2:1-2

“Advocacy and Discipline”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] We thank Thee, Lord, for this privilege. We thank Thee for Thy word and for the things that are contained within it. We especially praise Thee for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We thank Thee for his teaching ministry, and that he takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. We thank Thee for a great high priest who prays for us constantly. We thank Thee that he is at the right hand of the throne of God, and his prayers are deigned to keep the saints of God for whom he has died. And we thank Thee that that high priestly ministry is a ministry that is related to the New Covenant, which he has confirmed in his blood, and so, Lord, we rejoice in that, and we rejoice in the fact, that we are to use the Old Testament figure, we are on the breast and on the shoulder of our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. How wonderful it is to know, that we belong to Thee through him, and we thank Thee too for the word of God which is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and we thank Thee that it is an encouragement to us, and builds us up in our faith, and brings us along the way to likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the ultimate goal of the ministry of the Spirit. May, Lord, our time tonight be useful to that end. May it be a sanctifying time as we consider the Scriptures.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We are continuing our studies in Johannine theology, and tonight we are looking at the subject of “Advocacy and Discipline.” Hardly anyone would deny that the greatest question facing human beings is that posed by Job, “I know it is so of a truth, but how should man be just before God.” The Johannine answer to that question, “How should a man be just with God,” is given in 1 John 9, and perhaps even more plainly in 1 John’s 4 , 1 John 4:10, where the author writes, “In this, is the love of God, not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us, and sent his Son a propitiation for our sins.” That, it seems to me, is the answer to the question, “How should a man be just with God?” It is by virtue of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in propitiating our sins. He has paid for them. He has satisfied the divine holiness, and on that basis we stand before the Lord God in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, or the righteousness of God purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ.

A second great question arises soon after the solution of the first, “How should a man be just with God?” And this question is “What happens when a Christian sins?” The same apostle attempts an answer to this question, principally from the divine side of the matter, in 1 John 2:1 and 2. A third question may also arise in a thoughtful Christian’s mind. Assuming that there is a remedy for Christian sin, both from the divine and the human side, “What happens when a Christian refuses the remedy that is provided for his sin?” That opens up the whole question of biblical discipline or “operation hairbrush” as someone has said or “razor strap” for you old timers who remember the razor strap. I remember the razor strap. And John has something to say regarding that matter too, and it’s found in 1 John 5, verse 16 and verse 17. And he also has something to say about it, when he records the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Upper Room Discourse in John 15.

But tonight, we want to consider the subject of “Advocacy and Discipline,” and the first question, “What happens when a Christian sins?” raises the question of the advocacy

of Jesus Christ for believers, and then the second subject of discipline that second passage raises the subject of discipline, “What happens when believers refuse to take advantage of the remedy that is provided by the Lord God through Jesus Christ?”

So let’s turn first of all, again, my outline’s very simple, so I’m not putting it on the board. It’s just really two points. Advocacy, and 1 John 2:1 through 2 is the first subject we want to consider for a few moments, and then we’ll take a look at 1 John 5:16 and 17, and consider the subject of discipline.

Now, 1 John 2:1 and 2, and I’ll be reading from the Greek text, and, therefore, my translation may not exactly agree with any of your versions. “My little children, these things I write to you, that you sin not. And if any man should sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation concerning our sins, not concerning ours only, but also concerning the whole world.” The context of this passage in 1 John 2:1 and 2, has its beginning in chapter 1 in verse 5 where we read, “And this is the message which we have heard from him, and we report to you; that God is light, and there is no darkness in him.” From this, John infers that his children are those who walk in the light. He goes on to say, “And if we should say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and we do not do the truth.” So from this statement that, “God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all,” John infers that those who belong to the Lord, are those who walk in light; those who walk in holiness; those who walk in a likeness to the Lord.

The structure of his comments is gathered ‘round three antithetic texts, and they are laid down in the form of false claims, probably made by the heretics that John has in mind when he writes his book. Perhaps they were influenced by teaching similar to what came to be known as “later Gnostic tenets.” The tests are introduced, each one of them, by a conditional clause. Notice verse 6, verse 8, and verse 10, and let me read verse 6. “If we should say.” I just want you to notice the conditional clause that begins these sentences. “If we should say that we have fellowship with him.” And then there follows

an answer in verse 7, and then in verse 8, we read, “If we should say that we do not have sin.” And then in verse 10, “If we should say that we have not sinned.” So each of these tests that John discusses are introduced by conditional clauses. The tests are followed by the truths that are the antidotes to the errors that are referred to in the texts.

Now notice verse 6, “If we should say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not do the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” So we have the test, and then the antidote. The test; walking in the light. Then the antidote to the lying if we don’t walk in the light is to, rather, in verse 7 we have, “If we should walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship.” This is the opposite of walking in darkness. Now verse 8, he says, “If we should say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Then the antidote, the remedy, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins.” And then in verse 10, “If we should say that we have not sinned,” then chapter 2, verse 1 and 2 follows, “My little children, these things I write unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father.”

So the tests are followed by the truths, which are the antidote to the errors that are referred to in the test. Now when we come to chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, we’re dealing with the antidote to the claim of sinlessness in verse 10. “If we should say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” Now sinlessness, of course, is a sin. So he says, “These things I write unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we do have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” While John has said that such a claim would make God a liar, he now wishes to avoid giving his readers the idea, that sin is a normal phenomenon in the Christian life. If he refutes the idea that we have not sinned or in verse 8, “we do not have sin,” that might give the people the impression, that since we have sin, and since we do sin, then it’s all right to sin. So he quickly says, “My little children, these things I write unto you, in order that you sin not.”

And that statement, by the way, is made in such a way, that he refers to sin as an event. He's saying, "I'm writing to you, that you sin not at all." He's not giving us any reason for saying we can go out and sin in any particular time. In other words, every time we sin is wrong. Now, later he will, of course, say that Christians are individuals whose lives should not be characterized by sin. We should not expect to live sinless lives. He said that. But when we do sin, we can't say, "Well, nobody can live a sinless life, so it's okay for me to sin a little bit here and there." So he really has said in effect, "If we say that we do not have sin, we sin. If we say that we have not sinned, we sin. And at the same time, we should not sin." So that's very nice, isn't it?

We're not to sin, and when we do sin, it is to displease the Lord. But at the same time, there is no provision in Scripture for sinlessness. We should recognize then, that Christians are those whose lives are not to be characterized by sin, but they cannot expect to live sinless lives. But even when they do sin, they have displeased the Lord and gone contrary to his word.

Well, he will go on to say, that a life characterized by sin as a practice is not a Christian life. Notice chapter 3, for example in verse 9. Here he writes, "Everyone who has been born of God does not do sin." And when he makes that statement, he uses the present tense translated "do." So we can say, "It does not go on sinning. It does not go on doing sin, because his seed abides in him, and he is not able to go on sinning, because he has been born of God." That means that a Christian cannot have a life that is characterized by sin. A Christian is not sinless. He cannot say, "I don't have sin." He cannot say, "I have not sinned." But his life must be a life that is not characterized by sin. If sin is the characteristic of a Christian's life or a professing Christian's life, one might ask, "What is your salvation? What kind of salvation is it that does not save? What kind of salvation is it that does not give you some deliverance from your sin?" That's the whole point of salvation. Salvation is to give us deliverance from the penalty of sin, and it's to

give us deliverance from the power of sin in our lives. So while we do sin and while we have sin, even when we sin, we are at fault, and we cannot practice sin.

Now, I will raise another question later on. Is it not true, that the apostle speaks about carnal Christians? Yes, he does. And he will say something about that as well, and we'll see in a few moments I think, what he does say.

If sin does occur in the believer's life, it is not irremediable. He has an advocate. “My little children, these things I write unto you, that you do not sin. And if any man should sin, we have an advocate with the Father.” What is an advocate? Well, an advocate a legal defender. He's someone who stands for me. He's like a lawyer who represents me in a case and, furthermore, this advocate that we have is called “Jesus Christ the righteous.” He is the righteous one. How does he advocate for us? Well in the first place, he's the propitiation for our sins, and so stands for us, so far as our sins are concerned. He has accomplished the atoning work. The judgment of God has fallen upon him; the judgment of God upon the sins of his people. They are laid upon our Lord Jesus Christ, and he has borne them. My sins have already been borne. Heaven has no further claims against me, because my advocate has stood for me, and has borne my penalty. Therefore, heaven itself cannot lay any claims against me. I just appeal to my advocate. He has paid for my sins.

Someone might say, “Well, we have to receive that by faith.” Yes, that's true. Faith too, is guaranteed by what he accomplished on the Cross. If someone should say, “We must do this by faith,” and that's not considered in what Christ has done, I simply ask this question, “Is unbelief a sin?” Well yes, unbelief is a sin; that he died for my unbelief. He's paid the penalty for my unbelief, and he's secured not only my righteousness, but he's secured the faith which he gives me in his own good time, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So he's the propitiation. He's the satisfaction for my sins.

Now, that means he's my representative. But he doesn't stop then. He has ascended to the right hand of the Father, and there he continues his ministry as great high

priest. One of the characteristic things about the priest of the Old Testament is that he offered his sacrifice, and he did his advocacy for the same group of people. When the priests offered their sacrifices, it was for the people of Israel and those who are identified with them; the Gentiles who became part of the company of Israel. Likewise, the Lord Jesus Christ has died for the same people that he represents in heaven. He represents in heaven, the same people for whom he died. The priest did not offer indiscriminate sacrifices for everyone, but for the people of God, so that there is a continuity between the ones for whom the priests sacrificed, and the ones for whom he advocated, as the priest, the high priest in Israel. So likewise, the Lord Jesus Christ. The priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is one of the greatest of the evidences of the special character of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. All one has to do is to study the priestly activity of the priests in the Old Testament to realize that there is a continuity between the work of priests as the one who performs the sacrifice, and then the work of the priest who advocates for the people for whom he offered the sacrifice. So the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven is at the right hand of the Father advocating for those for whom he died. That's why we read, incidentally, in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John, “I pray for them. I don't pray for the world,” because he is the advocate for the people of God. It's all so plain; all so clear; all so special for the people of God. What a wonderful advocate we do have.

Now the *fursprecher*, which is the German word for “the one who speaks for us;” the advocate; the *fursprecher*. *Sprecher* means in German, “to speak,” and *fur* means “for,” or the *fursprecher* for those he represents, the Bible says, because Jesus said that he was going to pray the Father, and the Father would send us another advocate. Do you remember that in John 14 in verse 16? The other advocate is the Holy Spirit. We have an advocate at the right hand of the Father, and we have an advocate indwells us permanently; every one of us. So we have two advocates. Incidentally, the word that our Lord uses for “another” is a word that means “another of the same kind,” so the one who

is our advocate in heaven is like the one who is our advocate on the earth. Well as a matter of fact, the one in heaven is the second person of the Trinity, and the one on the earth is the third, and it's the Father, the first person, who is the initiating force behind the activity of redemption. So another advocate.

Now, being righteous, as we read here, he only undertakes righteous causes. He only represents righteous causes. He's never an advocate for unrighteous causes, but he's our advocate. So, evidently, our cause is a righteous cause. Why is it a righteous cause? Well, because he has offered the sacrifice by which we have righteousness, so he is our propitiation, and he advocates for us a righteous cause because he himself has seen to it, that our sins have been paid for, and we have now been clothed with the righteousness of God so that our cause is righteous, by virtue of what he has done. Further, the judge is not, in this case, an implacable one, but the Father. Notice, “We have an advocate with the Father.” Now, I think, that's very interesting, because you might think that when a believer sins, some do think this, that when the believer sins, he falls out of the possession of salvation, and the Father now becomes his judge. But the text says, “My little children, I write these things unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate, not with the judge, but with the Father.” So the Christian sin does not break the link of union with the godhead. The link of communion is broken, but not the link of union. “We have an advocate with the Father,” so that justice since he's the righteous one, justice pleads with love for the release of the believer from any penalty.

I like this word that is used here for “with,” in the phrase “with the Father,” because it's the word that suggests the closest of relationships. It has been rendered by some men, “addressing the Father.” This preposition translated “with” is the one that basically has the idea of facing. It's used in John 1:1, where the writer of the Gospel says in the prologue, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” Now, since we're talking about an eternal being who is with another eternal person, when we say he was “with the Father,” it means he was with the Father in

communion with him throughout the ages of eternity. Eternity's so vast, it will blow your mind to even try to think about it. You will break your mind if you try to think about it too much; but the Son, and the Father, and the Spirit in eternal communion with one another. Now, that word is the word translated “with.” The Son, “the word was with the Father.” Think of the communion of the ages, and ages, and ages of the past. So the idea, is the idea of the closest of relationships. “Well, if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father,” addressing the Father. So the moment that a believer sins, our advocate stands up for us.

Incidentally, the text makes it very plain, that the advocacy is instantly effective. It says, “If any man sin, we have an advocate.” It doesn't say, “If any man sins, and confesses his sin, then we have an advocate,” but “If any man sins,” sometimes even before we know we've sinned. Immediately we have an advocate. We have an advocate even if we may not realize that we have sinned. “If any man sin, we have an advocate.” Advocacy begins at the moment of sinning. Advocacy is not limited to confession; restoration of communion is, but not advocacy. So, “If any man sins, we have an advocate.”

Do you remember Peter's experience? Well, Peter was first among equals among the apostles. He was naturally a target of the evil one, and in Luke chapter 22, verse 31 and 32, we read, “Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired you to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not, and you, at the time you have been converted strengthen your brethren.” So long before Satan even knew about the fact, long before Peter knew that Satan desired to sift him as wheat, the Lord said, “I have prayed for you.” So the advocate's case is acceptable to the judge, because of course, of what the advocate has done. Someone has written a little stanza that goes, “Though the restless foe accuses, sins recounting like a flood. Every charge our God refuses, Christ has answered with his blood.” So he's the propitiation for our sins. Now John adds the words, “not concerning ours only, but concerning the sins of the whole world.”

I recommend to you a little paper that Sam Storms has written entitled, “A Study of 1 John 2:1 and 2, and the Extent of the Atonement.” It’s an excellent little paper, and answers the question of what is meant by the statement, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but the sins of the whole world.” But just like John has done in so many places in his Gospel, and in his Epistle, and even in the Book of Revelation, when he thinks about our sins, and then the sins of the whole world, he’s thinking about the sins of Jewish people, and then the sins of Gentiles as well. Incidentally, some of more recent scholarly study on this text has confirmed that too. So “He’s the propitiation for our sins,” John says; our believing Jewish people’s sins, and for the sins of Gentiles as well; the people of God scattered abroad. They are included as well in this. He does not write at all about those who don’t belong to the people of God. He writes about the people of God, and he calls them “the sins of the whole world,” because they are Gentiles as well as Jews; just as we saw in the case of John 3:16.

Incidentally, today I had an interesting thing happen. Dr. John Gersner was here, I remember, about a year or so ago, and Dr. Gersner incidentally said, “He would, he would come back for another series of meetings,” but he called me today, and asked me to read a paper for him, and I had tried to get him on Saturday. Well, it so happens he’s in Fort Worth and was not at home. But he had made a statement concerning John 3:16, and I had remembered vaguely the statement, but wasn’t exactly sure what it was, and I went back to try to find some notes that I had made of Dr. Gersner’s messages. There were six or eight pages of notes that I had taken, and I had forgotten where I had put them, and I looked in my file on the “extent of the atonement,” and they were not there where I had expected them to be, and so I thought, “Well, I’ll just call Dr. Gersner, and ask him precisely what he said.” So I called home and, of course, he wasn’t there as I said, and then I looked around and did find them, and went ahead and put essentially in the message Sunday morning, what he had said when he was here; that Christ was given for believers throughout the world. Well, today he called me, and I told him about my

experience. He said, “Yes, that’s precisely what I said, and furthermore,” he said, “that’s exactly what I meant.” And he launched into another exposition of John 3:16. I said, “Well, what do you think of what I said?” He said, “That’s exactly right,” and he continued to expound the text and he said, “Furthermore, I don’t understand people who turn to John 3:16, because I think that’s one of the strongest texts in the whole of the Bible on the definiteness of the atonement.” So same old Dr. Gersner. He has, but anyway, I recommend to you Sam’s paper on this topic. It’s an excellent paper, and if you can come up with a better answer than he has come up with there in that paper, then more power to you.

Let’s turn over now to our other text in 1 John 5:16 and 17, where John gives us a very interesting text that has to do with biblical discipline. The fact and the degrees of Christian discipline are set forth in such nominative passages as 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 30. You’ll remember the apostle says in 1 Corinthians 11:30, that there had been difficulties at the Lord’s Table, and some of the believers had come before the other believers, and they had brought their own food, and they were eating their own food, and drinking their own drink, and some of the Christians who came who didn’t have a whole lot were coming to the Lord’s Supper and the love feast that accompanied it in those days, and they were not having sufficient food. And so as a result of coming ahead of time, and drinking their own drinks, and eating their own food, well, some of the Christians had actually gotten drunk at the Lord’s Table, and so the apostle wrote those words in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, and he warned them that by so doing, they were displeasing the Lord and sinning. And then in a statement which expresses the fact and the degrees that are part of biblical discipline he said, “For this cause, because of your disorders at the Lord’s Table, some are weak, some are sickly, and some have fallen asleep.” Three degrees of biblical discipline expressed there; weakness, sickness, and then physical sleep, a reference to physical death. So these are the degrees; weakness, sickness, physical death. So the apostle, the Apostle Paul expresses there, the fact and the degree

of Christian discipline, and notice that Christian discipline issues finally in body sleep; not soul sleep, body sleep. That’s what he means when, “For this cause some of you sleep.” That’s the ultimate degree of biblical discipline.

Now this passage, 1 John 5:16 and 17, in my opinion, bears on that topic. We read, let me read the verses, and again I’m reading the Greek text, and you’ll notice that I will leave out an article here and there that may be found in your version. The reason is that the articles are not in the original text. “If any man shall see his brother sinning sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for ones that are sinning not unto death. There is sin unto death. Not concerning that, do I say that he should ask. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not unto death.” There have been a number of suggestions as to the meaning of “sin unto death.” For example, John Stott, in his excellent little commentary on the Johannine epistles or 1 John says that, “What he probably has in mind, is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit; sin unto death.” And he links this with Mark chapter 3 in verse 29. Maybe it would be wise to turn over to that passage too. Mark chapter 3 in verse 29. Here the Lord Jesus, it’s in the context of the passage in which men accuse our Lord of being in league with Beelzebub, and our Lord in answer to that says, “Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit does not ever have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin or everlasting sin.”

Now, John Stott says that this passage here, “sin unto death,” is probably the same thing as that passage there, “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” By this he means, “deliberate, open-eyed rejection of known truth, which leads to moral and spiritual obtuseness, and individuals who commit that sin,” Mr. Stott says, “die spiritually.” His view, he recognizes has difficulty with the word “brother,” because we read here, “If any man sees his brother sinning sin which is not unto death.” And so he points out first, that John does not refer to any, to the one who commits sin unto death as a brother, saying it’s the one whose sin is not unto death who is turned to brother. “He whose sin is unto death, is neither named or described,” Mr. Stott says.

He has second thoughts, however, later on in about his own statement, because on the next page he tries to defend the meaning of “neighbor;” a professing brother for the turn. The Johannine usage of the term “brother,” however, is always of an individual who is a believer. Furthermore, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a specific historical sin, committed only during the time when the Lord was here in the flesh on the earth. It’s never mentioned throughout the rest of the New Testament. Isn’t that interesting; that those references to the sin unto, to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, are only mentioned in that one historical context? Isn’t that interesting? You know why it’s interesting? Because there isn’t an evangelist traveling around, that doesn’t have a sin on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, because that’s a good way to scare people. If you’ve committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, that’s the eternal sin, for which there is no forgiveness, and that’s a good way to scare people. I don’t know of any evangelist who doesn’t have a sermon on that, and almost all of them say it can be committed now.

I think a careful study of that passage in Matthew 12, and Mark 3, the parallel, will show that it was a sin that could only be committed while Jesus Christ was here in the flesh, because sin against the Holy Spirit is greater than sin against the Son of Man, but there is no such distinction now. Sin against the Holy Spirit is no greater than sin against the Son of Man today, but there was a difference when our Lord was here in the flesh, and appeared to be only a man. It was sin, but it was even more flagrant to sin against the clear manifestation of God, and the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. That’s why, in the rest of the New Testament, we have no reference to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The apostles and others don’t mention it. They didn’t have any sermons on it, so far as we know. I’m sure they would have been astounded to hear some of the sermons that are given today. They would stand up in a meeting and say, “Wait a minute. Wait a minute. That’s the wrong interpretation. See Lewis for the correct one.” No, they would be very careful to point out that, that was only committed at a certain [inaudible] only shows that Mr. Stott, who is one of the best of the Bible teachers living today, like all of

us, inconsistent at times, because [inaudible] point that the term “brother” doesn’t go against another viewpoint, which is really the same as his viewpoint. Remember in the Old Testament there were many sins for which the children of Israel suffered physical death, and those particularly were committed with what the Old Testament calls, “a high hand; willfully presumptuous sins.” There was no forgiveness in the Levitical cultists for willful sin, as you know.

Some early Christian writers carried this distinction over into the new age, and out of it ultimately arose the ecclesiastical distinction between mortal sins and venial sins. Venial sins are those that are forgivable. Mortal sins are those that are unforgivable. Venial sins are those for which the oil of extreme unction is offered in the Roman Catholic Church as a person dies. Those that are other sins, well, they can only be paid for in the fires of purgatory.

Again, we seem to have a form of apostasy, and the term “brother” militates against this. “If any man see his brother sinning sin not unto death.” What John is talking about, is a brother’s sin; not the sin of a person who’s not a brother, not a member of the family of God. So I just suggest to you, that we take another interpretation, and that we refer the “sin unto death” to a believer’s persistent sin that leads to physical death. “If any man see his brother sinning sin which is not unto physical death, he shall ask, and he will give for him life.” In other words, if I see my brother sinning sin, which is not of the degree that leads to physical death, I may pray for him, and God will answer and give life; that is, give deliverance. “There is, however,” he says, “sin unto death.” In other words, there is such sin that it leads to physical death. Now, it’s not “a” sin. He doesn’t say “a” sin. He just says “sin.” He says, “I do not ask , I do not say that he should ask concerning that.” Now, he uses a different word for “ask.” It’s really a word that means “to ask questions about.” So he says, “I do not say that he should ask questions about that.” In other words, that’s something that is beyond our asking. We shouldn’t say with reference to the brother, and we cannot expect an answer. Is he sinning sin unto physical

death, or is he not? We don't know that. That's in the hands of the great disciplinarian in heaven. “All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not unto death.”

Why is all this given? Well just above, John has said, verse 13 , “These things I write unto you [inaudible] eternal life. You who believe in the name of [inaudible]. This is the bonus which we have with reference to him, that whatsoever we ask according to his will, he [inaudible] so ever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we've asked from him.” In other words, he's saying, “I want you to know the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. I've written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life, you who believe in the name of the Son of God.” Now, one of the ways you may know that you have eternal life, is when you ask in prayer for certain things, you get them. But suppose you don't get what you're asking for. John in effect is saying, “Don't be discouraged. That doesn't mean you're not a believer, because it may be that the individuals for who you are asking, have committed sin unto death, and then when you pray for them, there is no answer.” So this is given in order to allay a feeling of lack of assurance when we don't receive answers to prayers that we have made. I want you to know that you have eternal life, and I want you to be bold, and I want you to realize that whatever you ask or whenever you ask things according to his will, he will hear you, and you're going to have your requests. That's one of the evidences of the fact that we're children of God. We pray. We get answers to our prayers. But on some matters, we might not get the answer that we think, and it may be because the individuals involved have committed sin unto death; physical death. The use of the term “brother” leads to the physical view of death, and then of life, and you'll notice that there's nothing definite about the sin. He doesn't say what this sin is. In fact, he doesn't use any indefinite articles. He just says, “sin, sin.” You may sin, sin unto death, and there is sin that is not unto death. I gather then, because of the use of the present tense, “sinning sin unto death” that this is not a particular sin, but any sin in which a believer persists, so that persistent sin is what he has in mind.

I think the Authorized Version translation has lead people astray, so let me read it again. “If any man see his brother sinning sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he, God, will give him that brother sinning sin, life. He’ll answer your prayers, give him life for those who are sinning not unto death. There is sin unto death. I do not say that he shall for information concerning that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not unto death.” So persistent sin [inaudible] I think that this text as F. F. Bruce has said is a text that amounts to a deprecation of praying for the dead. If praying for the dead were a scriptural thing, this is one of the texts that says, “No, that’s not something that we should do.” I rather am inclined to think that he’s just saying, “I don’t think you should ask for information.” When you see a brother sinning sin, you’re not to ask, “Now, is that unto death or not unto death?” But you should pray for the brother, and if it’s not unto death, God will give life. If it’s unto death, and he dies, then you shouldn’t feel, “Well I’m not a Christian. My prayers are not being answered.” So it seems to me that what he’s simply saying is, “There is such a thing as a believer persisting in sin; persisting in sin until finally God, since the believer is a reproach to the faith, and a reproach to the clan because of Christ, he takes that believer’s life to be with him.”

Some years ago, I was at a conference in Keswick, New Jersey, and a woman came up to me and wondered about the sin of a relative of hers that she was very well acquainted with, and I had the privilege of pointing her to this passage here and saying, “Well, that’s something that is to be with God. You pray for your relative. You don’t know whether it’s sin unto death, and I certainly don’t.” I do know that it is possible for believers, by their lives, to bring ill repute upon the body of Jesus Christ. There is such as thing as persistent sin that leads to physical death.

Now, there is a passage in the Old Testament, and I know I’ve gone over a couple of minutes, but I would like to read this just as a way of conclusion. It’s Psalm 19, verses 12 through 14. Listen to the Psalmist because this is the same thing, except it’s in the Old Testament context. Psalm 19, verse 12 through verse 14. “Who can discern his errors?

Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins. May they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.” Great transgression is likely sin unto death. He talks about his sins. “Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant from willful sins. May they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.” I think that’s the meaning of that Hebrew word *pashi*, and then the adjective that modifies it, *rav*. Great transgression. And that’s a good prayer, isn’t it? “Lord, keep me from sinning, and if I do sin, help me to go immediately to my advocate, confess my sin for restoration of communion. Deliver me from persistent sin, and the inevitable discipline of a loving, heavenly Father.”

We have a Father you know, and he’s a loving, heavenly Father, but he’s a Father, and therefore, he disciplines his children. It’s a great thing to have a Father who disciplines, and one who’s holy and righteous is even better.

Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word and Thy truth. We thank Thee for the solemnity of the fact, that there is sin to physical death. Deliver us from our sins, and, Lord, keep us from great transgression.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.