
THE TRAGEDY OF UNREPENTED SIN UNTO DEATH

1 John 5:16-17

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Sin has been the greatest problem man has to struggle with. “*Look around, you can see and feel its pang all around, its handiwork is clearly visible around us*”. Man was driven out of the beautiful garden of Eden because of sin. Sin broke the heart of God that He forsook Christ on the cross. Isaiah describes Christ’s suffering with such words as “*He was bruised because of our transgression...*” **Isaiah 53:3-6**. One thing is to commit sin another is to realize that God will judge all *our unconfessed or unrepented* sin. When we practice sin, we make ourselves vulnerable and most painfully we become slaves to sin. Apostle John in **1 John 2:1**, says, *I write to you that you do not sin...* in other words, this is no longer your nature, but peradventure if you sin, you need to repent from it.

The noun, tragedy means an event causing great suffering, destruction, and distress, such as a serious accident, crime, or natural catastrophe (*Oxford Dictionary*). Sin is the transgression of God’s word. While unrepented is an adjective which means not repented: not regretted and renounced (*Mariam Dictionary*). So, our focus is to examine the tragedy of a sin one did not repent from before death struck.

*¹⁶If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. ¹⁷All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. **1 John 5:16,17 (NIV)**.*

Our text concerns a very unusual subject. The subject is “*...Sin unto Death.*” The previous verses before verse 16, dealt with the great subject of prayer. John continues the theme of prayer and deals with a particular aspect of prayer. This is one area of our prayer life that needs a great deal of improvement. We need to be diligent in our prayers for each other. In **1 Thessalonians 5:25**, Paul admonished the Thessalonians, “*Brethren, pray for us.*” He needed the prayers of other people just as you and I need for others to pray for us.

I am afraid sometimes we are very selfish in our prayers. We pray for our own requests and the things we want and fail to pray for others who need our prayers. Our text has to do with intercessory prayer as it relates to the matter of sin in the lives of other believers. Here is a twofold division of sin. There is a sin not unto death and there is a sin unto death. There is no attempt on the part of John to minimize any act of sin, for he says in v. 17, “*all unrighteousness is sin.*” One of the real tragedies of life is the loss of an awareness of sin. All sin is serious! John gives to us in these verses a twofold designation of sin and reveals a wonderful truth about intercessory prayer.

This scripture and **Matthew 12:30-37** tends to be one of the most difficult scriptures as we tend to want to ask, at what point can we say a man has committed the unpardonable sin or at what point can we say a man has committed a sin leading to death...? Scriptural truth sometimes cannot be answered in isolation, if not every other scripture may automatically become void just because of one statement rather we look at scriptural truth from other scripture to give clearer understanding of an obscure scripture.

THE SIN THAT LEADS UNTO DEATH (UNREPENTED SIN)

1. **A Sin of the Heart:** The key to understanding the sin that leads unto death or let me say blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is seen in **Matthew 12:25**, where we learn that Jesus knew the thoughts of the Pharisees. Because Jesus knew their thoughts, He knew that their hearts were so hardened and so calloused that they would never be opened to Him or to His message of truth. Jesus accused them of committing the sin of “*blasphemy against the Spirit,*” a sin which “*shall not be forgiven*” (v. 31). Jesus went on to teach that our words reveal the true conditions of our hearts, for “*the good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil*” (v. 35). This is also true for the sin unto death. Here we see that it is an issue of the heart. The same thing happened unto Pharaoh, he hardened his heart and would not listen to wisdom and was doomed for it. So also, is everyone who hardens his/her heart and would not allow God’s word to have a place in His/her life, the tragedy of such may come too late. Notice John was not writing to *unbelievers but Christians* who do not allow God’s word to have a place in their lives, before long, they have drifted far away.
2. **It is A Progressive Sin:** People do not just suddenly or accidentally get to the point where they find it difficult to repent from sin they commit, inadvertently robbing themselves of the opportunity for forgiveness. Jesus spoke in Matthew of the Pharisees who blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, that they were unpardonable. It did not just happen that day. The sin that leads unto death is a sin that is committed as one hardens his heart to the

Word of God and refuses to walk with the Lord. If one closes his eyes to the light of God's will and turns a deaf ear to the teachings of His Word, something happens inside his heart. His heart begins to grow cold and indifferent toward God and toward the Spirit. If he continues to say "no" to God and "yes" to the devil, he will drift so far away from Jesus and will become so bitter in his heart toward God that he will never be forgiven. This is exactly what happened to the Pharisees! They had rejected the miracles and the teachings of Jesus until their hearts were so calloused that they attributed Jesus' mighty miracles to the power of Satan.

Consider a ship that was anchored to the shore and got loosed unknown to the owner, if not quickly seen, may drift and get lost into the sea. So is every child of God who do not pay attention to the word of God.

Sin is so deceptive that it will never tell you where it will stop you...

3. **A Sin of Choice:** As we live upon this earth, we are daily traveling toward eternity. At the end of this day we will be twenty-four hours closer to our departure from the island of time into the never ending ocean of eternity. Each day we either choose to humble our hearts before God and give ourselves to prayer, to His Word, and to doing His will in our lives, or we choose to harden our hearts before God and yield our minds and bodies to "*the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life*" (**1 John 2:16**). That is our choice in life. Either we humble our hearts before God, or we harden them before Him. Either we yield ourselves to the Lord, or we withdraw from Him. Either we walk "*according to the Spirit,*" or we "*walk according to the flesh*" (**Romans 8:4**).

Whether or not we understand this principle, it is the truth of God's Word. The real factor which determines our choices in living each day is the heart. Are our hearts focused upon ourselves and what we want, or are they focused upon Jesus and what He wills? *The heart of the problem is the human heart.* Therefore, the author of Hebrews echoed so many warnings regarding our hearts. We read in **Hebrews 3:7-13**: . . . "*Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, . . . Therefore, I was angry with this generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; . . .'*" *Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest anyone of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

These words, quoted from **Psalm 95:8-11**, remind us that the biggest problem with God's children (with New Testament Christians, as it was with Old Testament Jews) is the problem of keeping our hearts right with God. We would all do well to heed the admonition that God gives us in **Proverbs 4:23**:

“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” This was the real problem with the Pharisees in **Matthew 12**. They had hardened their hearts, and the devil had such a grasp upon their souls, that they even began to attribute the miracles Jesus performed to the power of Satan! If they rejected Jesus to the point that they blasphemed the very Holy Spirit who gave Jesus the power to teach and to perform His miracles, there was no hope left for them.

How It All Begins

Let us study some of the specific sins that can be committed against God and the Holy Spirit and can result in the hardening of our hearts. Let us be warned that those who persist in these sins will erect a greater and greater spiritual barrier between themselves and their God, so that one day their hearts will become so calloused that they will never repent of their sins and be forgiven.

Resisting the Spirit:

We can sin against the Spirit by resisting Him and His Word. This was the sin of which Stephen accused the Jews in **Acts 7**. He had preached a great sermon on that occasion, tracing the purposes of God all the way through the Old Testament from the time of Abraham on. In his sermon he had boldly spoken of how God had continued to work His purposes throughout the history of the Jews despite all their sin, unfaithfulness, and idolatry. In the passion of boldly preaching his sermon, Stephen declared, *“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51)*.

Refusing To Obey God

One can be guilty of the sin of *“resisting the Holy Spirit”* by refusing to listen to God’s Word. The way God speaks to people today is through the Bible, His holy Word of Truth. Every person who rejects the truth of God and refuses to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ is guilty of the sin of *“resisting the Holy Spirit.”* It is as if the sinner is in a wrestling match with Jesus Himself. Through the message of the Holy Spirit, Jesus tells the sinner what to do to be saved. If he refuses to do what Jesus commands, he resists the Holy Spirit in the process. Every time a person says “no” to God’s Word, he not only resists the Spirit, but also hardens his heart in the process! The sin of *“resisting the Holy Spirit”* is the opposite of the attitude that James declared we all need toward the Word of God. He wrote, *“Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21)*. This is the attitude that we all need to avoid the sin of *“resisting the Holy Spirit.”* It is an attitude of repentance and humility. It is an attitude that renounces our own selfish will so that we can turn to the Lord and to His holy will. The Word of God makes a distinction between sins

committed through weakness and ignorance and sins committed wilfully against the Lord.

Willful Sins

The distinction between an unintentional sin and a willful sin is discussed in **Hebrews 10:25** the author warned Christians against the sin of wilfully forsaking the assembly, adding in verses 26 through 31, *For if we go on sinning wilfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Those who defiantly sinned under the law of Moses died without mercy. The writer of Hebrews asked, *"How much severer will be the punishment for Christians who turn their backs on Christ?"* When a child of God who has been washed by the blood of Jesus and has been given the marvellous gift of the Holy Spirit sins wilfully, he tramples Jesus underfoot and insults the Holy Spirit of grace! May God help us to understand how serious it is to tell Him, "I know what Your will is, but no one can tell me what to do!" Such a defiant attitude will harden the heart and drive between the sinner and His Father in heaven a wedge of sin that can never be removed. David, a man after God's own heart, prayed in **Psalm 19:13**, *". . . keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I shall be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression."* Presumptuous sins are willful sins that we know in our own hearts we should not commit. Some people, rather than prayerfully looking to God for His strength to overcome such sins, defiantly engage in those sins without regret. If one continues in such sin and refuses to repent and turn to the Lord for forgiveness, his heart will become hardened. Finally, he will reach the point the Pharisees had reached; he will lose all desire to repent and walk with the Lord in obedience to His holy will!

The Tragedy

"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." **Revelation 21:8.**

Precisely when God is telling us about the new heaven and new earth, God tells us that He will separate all that is evil from his people and from his creation—the

cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars.

All these are descriptions of character. This does not mean that all who have been guilty of these sins will be excluded from heaven. But those men and women who do not turn to God in repentance. They do not look to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and cleansing. They do not see a need for a Saviour, and so they die in their sins.

According to Ryle, “*Most men hope to go to heaven when they die; but few, it may be feared, take the trouble to consider whether they would enjoy heaven if they got there.*”

Here is the tragedy of unrepented sin: *The sinner could not be happy in heaven and cannot be happy in hell.* Sin is a complete dead end. It leaves you with no place to go. Sinners will want to be out of hell, but they cannot be in heaven.

The new heaven and the new earth will be the home of righteousness: “*Nothing unclean will ever enter it*” (**Rev. 21:27**). If it is the home of righteousness, and nothing unclean will ever enter, how could we be there? Only through the cleansing that comes from Jesus Christ.

Another tragedy is physical disability, sickness, and most dangerous physical death.

Conclusion

A short distance above *Niagara Falls* there used to be a sign which read, “*Past-Redemption Point.*” The meaning of that sign was obvious. If a boatman drifted beyond that sign, the current would become so strong that he would find it impossible to turn around and avoid the falls.

When a sinner delays his obedience to God, he can reach the “*past-redemption*” point. He can resist the Holy Spirit for such a long period of time that his heart is no longer capable of being softened. Some have already passed that mark in their hearts. Only Jesus knows for sure. Be warned that such an invisible line exists. If we trifle with the grace of God and make a game out of our Christianity, one of these days we will cross that line, and it will be too late to repent.

References

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