

# 1 John 5:16-21 | What We Know (And Maybe Don't Know) at the End of 1 John

## Verses 16-17

- Here John gives us **an example** of **praying according to God's will** and the confidence we have in that
- Pray and God will respond (v. 16<sup>a</sup>) (Cf. 14)
- Then we have this mysterious section (16<sup>b</sup>): “**There is a sin leading to death and I am not saying you should pray for this**”
- What does this mean? Hard to say (the key has been lost to us—though his audience knew)

There have been several suggestions:

### 1. Maybe John is referring to heinous or ‘mortal’ sin?

- **Mortal Sin**
  - E.g. The Roman Catholic Church distinguishes between **venial sins** (minor transgressions that may be excused or overlooked) and **mortal sins** (serious transgressions that deprive the soul of saving grace)
  - In Roman Catholic belief a Christian who commits a mortal sin and dies without **formally confessing** it hazards damnation.
  - The **Reformation largely rejected** that belief, holding that one who embraces Christ as Savior is declared by God to be forgiven and acquitted once and for all.
- **Heinous Sin**
  - E.g. Murder
  - But what about David and Paul—both murderers who were forgiven?

### 2. Maybe John is referring to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (aka The Unpardonable Sin)?

- **Mark 3:22, 28-30**
- It is to reject (as evil) the witness of the Holy Spirit about Jesus
- Only committed by **non-believers**
  - This may be the case with the “opponents”
- But is John referring to believers in **verse 16**?

### 3. Maybe John is referring to apostasy?

- **Someone who was truly saved and then rejects Jesus later**
  - The possibility depends on one's theological/soterological perspective
  - Can a true believer leave the faith (apostatize)?
  - Were the “opponents” in 1 John counterfeit believers or apostates?

### 4. Maybe John is referring to physical death as discipline from the Lord?

- E.g. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)
- E.g. 1 Corinthians 11:28-30
- Cf. Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11

## Which is it?

- 1. Is John referring to heinous or ‘mortal’ sin?
  - 2. Is John referring to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (aka The Unpardonable Sin)?
  - 3. Is John referring to apostasy?
  - 4. Is John referring to physical death as discipline from the Lord?
- It is not #1 (not Scriptural divisions—**see v. 17**)
  - It is probably not #2 (text about believers) (though meaning of U.S. debatable)
  - It may refer to #3
  - #4 is possible (but is physical death in view?)

Maybe we don't know...

## Here is what we do know:

- John was providing an illustration about praying according to the will of God
- He was doing so by invoking something that was very clear to them (the key is lost to us)
- But the **general tone** of it is clear to us in having studied **1<sup>st</sup> John**

= Sin is serious and we are called as believers to confess it, repent of it, forsake it, and pursue righteousness instead

- Realizing that it can lead to grave consequences if persisted in (**reap what you sow**)
- Though we are not sure what it is, John is referring to some sort of sin (or continuance in sin) that is deadly
- So, we call each other to live in holy fear before God

## We can also glean at least this:

- **As believers we must take loving responsibility for each other's spiritual well being**
  - John says that **prayer** ought to be our response to one who is doing wrong
  - Intercessory prayer (Praying for others)
- **How does that compare to the reactions we often have?**
  - This is **inviting** God in and **it works** (Cnt. condemnation, gossip, rejection)
    - Intercessory prayer is true care (normative)
    - James 5:16  
**Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.**

That much we know. We may not know what “**a sin leading to death**” means. But **what we do know** is enough to keep us from any such sin... here is what we know at the end of **1 John**:

### Verse 18

#### **We know... that no one born of God sins**

- Not that we won't sin (**1:8-10**)
- **Sins** = Verb in present tense, active voice (continue on in something)
- NIV = **We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin...**
- NLT = **We know that God's children do not make a practice of sinning...**

That is not what a Christian does (we have been **born again** and have a **new nature**)

- We **repent** of sin (**confess**) -- As opposed to continue to practice
- See **Romans 5:20-6:18** (NLT)

#### **We know... that no one born of God sins**

Why? (v. 18<sup>b</sup>)

- **He who was born of God** [Jesus] **keeps him**, and the evil one [Satan] **does not touch him**.
- We have been delivered from the power of sin and Satan (**KEPT BY CHRIST!!!**) (NLT = **Holds us securely**)

**We know** that we are not to continue in sin by the nature of salvation

### Verse 19

#### **We know... that we are of God**

- We also know this by the **nature of salvation**
- But, what **1 John** has been telling us is that we know this **evidentially** (Tests: **Belief, behavior, brotherly love**)
  - We do not pursue sin—we repent of sin
  - We pursue right living—we walk in the light
- This is the **evidence** that we belong to God
  - **We know that we belong to God because we do not continue in sin**—we repent of it (vv. 19<sup>a</sup> + 18<sup>a</sup>)

- **We know** that (John says, **but do you know?**)
  - Is your lifestyle one of repenting of and forsaking sin? (transformed progression)
  - Or is your lifestyle one of pursuing sin and you know it?
    - If the latter:
      - 1. You have not been born again
      - 2. You are in serious rebellion
      - I John wants you to be uncomfortable
      - John draws a line in the sand
      - There are not 50 shades of grey (it is black and white)
        - ... the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (v. 19<sup>b</sup>)
      - You are either **walking in darkness** (you continue in sin)
      - Or you are **walking in the light** (you repent of sin and pursue right living)
      - See 1 John 1:6, 2:4-6

## Verse 20

### **We know... that the Son of God has come**

- This has been the concern of the whole book—That we have **the right Jesus**
- ... **He has given us understanding**... (v. 20<sup>b</sup>)

### **...in order that we might know Him...** (v. 20<sup>c</sup>)

- This is the **goal**—This is what we have been given (the Gospel)
- The goal is not right living—the **gospel goal** is **knowing** Jesus
  - Knowing Jesus **produces** right living
- Jesus is to be enjoyed and Jesus is to be obeyed

### **This [Jesus] is the true God and eternal life** (v. 20<sup>e</sup>)

- We know that Jesus is God (the only true God)
  - Cnt. Culture, New Age, JW, Mormonism, Islam, Christian Science, etc

### **So we can confidently live for Him**—and not lesser gods or things

- **Little children, guard yourselves from idols** (v. 20)
- NLT = **keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts.**

### Anything that you are valuing in an ultimate way

- Meaning it forms your identity and behavior and worldview and sense of self
- Money, position, possessions, power, people, passions
- These are all less than Jesus
  - It is not that they are meaningless—They are just **not ultimate**
  - So stop living as though they were!!! (the proof is in the pudding)
    - That is not what God has for you Christian
      - We **know** Jesus—We **are of** Jesus—We **are in** Jesus

### This is what **we know** from studying 1 John

- The only question is: **Does the world know this about you from studying your life?**

Your life will soon be past and only what has been done for Christ will last

### Timothy 4:7 (NLT)

**6 As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near.**

**7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.**

**8 And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.**

The **time** is short, **the day is near**—**next week** we will start talking about **the return of our Lord** – **this week**, live for Him!