

SERIES: Authentic Christian Community/1 John, Wk. 4

By Pastor Bryan Clark

Message Title: This We Know Pt. 2

Release Date: Friday 2/28/2020

Verse 16:

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading to death*, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading to death*. There is a sin *leading to death*; I do not say that he should make request for this. (*NASB, 1 John 5:16)

So he's saying, "This is an example of a prayer in alignment with the will of God." So what's he talking about? Let's start with ...**committing a sin not leading to death**. You will notice that *leading* is in italics. That tells you it's not in the original text; it's inserted in there. So the literal reads *his brother committing a sin not to death*. Now when we read the words *life* and *death* it doesn't necessarily mean Salvation or not Salvation. As a matter of fact, I think sometimes we take these texts and we want to reduce them down to *in* or *out* — and most of the Biblical language isn't *in* or *out*.

Life is a metaphor for the life of God, so *death* would be the opposite of that. If I live my life in sin as a Christian, I'm not experiencing life. Even though I have eternal life, I'm basically experiencing the consequences of my choices, which is more death — it's the absence of life. And I think that's what he's talking about here. So when he's talking about **a sin not leading to death**, I think what he's talking about is what he talked about in Chapter 1, when he said, "If we say we have no sin, we are liars." Of course we stumble and fall, but when we do, "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So he is saying that sometimes we do blow it. Sometimes we do stumble, and it convicts us, and it grieves our heart, and there is something inside of us that says, "That's not the way I want to live my life; that's not what I want to do; that breaks my heart," and we agree with God that it is sin, and that's not the path of life, and we experience God's forgiveness. He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. That would be *a sin not leading to death*. In other words it's a sin; we feel the conviction; we confess it, and we stay on the path of life.

So the prayer that would be in the alignment with the will of God has to do with that: **if anyone sees** — which means we actually see it; we become aware of it — **a brother**, which is a fellow Christian — a brother or sister in Christ. So in other words, when I see a brother or sister in Christ involved in some sin, what do I do? I don't post it on Facebook. I don't call a handful of friends. I don't pick up a rock and throw it. The most powerful thing I can do is intercede — immediately go before the throne of grace and pray what would be in alignment with the will of God — that this person would understand that is the way of destruction, that there would be confession — there would be an agreement — this person would accept the cleansing power of Jesus and get back on the road of life.

I think the prayer also includes that, as believers in Christ, we would accept God's forgiveness. I think this is one of the big problems in the church; we talk about the forgiveness of God but we struggle to accept it. Six months later, we are still agonizing; we are still beating ourselves up over our failure and our sin. We have a tendency to think that as long as I beat myself up long enough, that is going to impress God. It's important to understand that's not humility; that's disbelief. God has said, "If you confess your sin, I'm faithful and just to forgive your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness." Faith would be to take God at His word. It's been washed away. It's over. Move on down the path of life.

So that's all part of the prayer — that the sin would be confessed, that the forgiveness would be realized and that person gets back on the road to life.

So what is *a sin leading to death*? I think it is then just the opposite of that. It is a sin that turns into another sin — a pattern of sins that continues to travel down a very destructive path. Hebrews 12 would be a good chapter to read, that reminds us that God as a Heavenly Daddy won't sit by and watch that happen. As a matter of fact, what he's already told us is, that if you can sin as a way of life, you have every reason to believe you've never really experienced the life-changing power of Jesus. Your Heavenly Daddy wouldn't just sit by and let that happen. If you read Hebrews 12, it says that God disciplines His children, because He loves His children, and He's going to do whatever is necessary to get His children back on the road of life — not out of His wrath, but out of His love. So what he is saying is, that if a fellow believer is going down that path, you can expect God to make that person's life miserable until something changes. And I think it implies, all the way to the point, where, if necessary, God simply takes His child home. If you're not going to get off that path, then I'm just going to take you home. The assurance is: rather than any chance you could ever go down that path to lose your Salvation, I'm just going to pull you home.

Now there are many examples of that. In Acts, Chapter 5, you have Ananias and Sapphira. In James, Chapter 5, you have someone who is sick because of sin, implying God's discipline. In 1 Corinthians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11, you have both examples of someone who is sick, and even sick to the point of death, because of sin. It's a Heavenly Daddy, saying, "You are going down a path of destruction. I'm going to do everything possible to stop you, but if you won't stop, then I'm just going to take you home." As a matter of fact, in 1 Corinthians 5, the text actually says "...so that your soul may be saved." In other words, if you could commit sin so grievous to God, that He just eventually takes you home, but you still don't lose your Salvation, then what's left that you could do, that would cost you your Salvation? It's God's statement of assurance that, "I'd take you home before that happens." So why don't we pray? That's what the text says.

I do not say that you should make a request for this. (Vs. 16b)

I think what the text is saying is: if someone is going down that path, experiencing God's discipline, the one thing we can't ask for, or that wouldn't be in alignment with God, is to say, "God, I know this person is living a really sinful life, but please take the pain away. Make that person's life really nice, in spite of the sin." I think God is saying, "You can't ask for that, because I won't do that. I'm not just going to let my children self-destruct without discipline."

Verse 17:

All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not *leading to death*.

You get the impression that the false teachers, because they were engaged in very immoral lifestyles, were saying, “Hey, if sin is such a big deal, how come God hasn’t whacked me?” And that’s the reason for the previous discussion. If you’re not a child of God, God doesn’t discipline those who aren’t His children. Hebrews 12 says, “A mark that you are a child of God is that God disciplines you.” But, in the process of saying that, the believers may have thought, “Well, there are certain sins that aren’t that big of a deal, because God apparently isn’t whacking them. Therefore, maybe some sins are okay.” And so John comes back and says **...all unrighteousness is sin**. If you are involved in private sin, and if you are thinking because God hasn’t whacked you, it must be okay, you need to rethink that — because it’s only a matter of time before everything comes crashing down. God will not sit by and let His children self-destruct without His loving hand of discipline. So John comes back and says **...all unrighteousness is sin**. I don’t think the text is saying there are really bad sins and not so bad sins — you know, there are mortal sins and then there are other sins. There is nowhere where the Bible teaches that. Sin is sin; **all unrighteousness is sin**. It is more the idea of a pattern. If you as a Christian stumble and fall, and you feel the conviction of that — you feel the grief of that; you confess that sin — that is not a sin unto death. You experience God’s forgiveness and you get back on the road of life. But if your sin becomes a way of life; it becomes a pattern; it becomes your living; then God steps in with His discipline.

Verse 18, what else do we know?

We know that no one who is born of God sins; (Vs. 18a)

Now the key is in the grammar there, and we’ve looked at this in Chapter 3 extensively. The one who sins as a way of life — in other words, if you can sin as a way of life and that doesn’t bother you — you have every reason to doubt whether you have ever experienced the life-changing power of Jesus. You just can’t be born of God, and have the seed of God, and have the power of God, and have the Spirit of God in you, and sin, and it doesn’t bother you. So basically he’s saying, that option is off the table for the child of God.

We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. (Vs. 18)

There’s a fair amount of confusion around that verse as to whether the second **...born of God...** is talking about a person or whether it’s talking about Jesus. If you have a King James, it says, “He was born of God keeps himself,” which is saying that the “He” is a person — probably an unfortunate translation. When you look at *born of God*, it looks like identical phrases in English. But they are actually not, and the difference is captured in the NASB — for example, with the difference between one who *is born* of God and one who *was born* of God. Basically what I think the text is saying — and this is the position the New American Standard takes — is that if the one *who is born of God*, which is a verb tense that says at one time you were not, but you became born of God, and from that time on, you are a child of God. In other words it had a starting point. But the one *who was born of God* is a tense that says, one who was always born of God. In other words He has always been God. In other words, “From the beginning was the Word;” He has always been the Word — had no starting point. So the idea is this. If you are a child of God, you’ve been born of God; you are in the One who has always been God — always been born of God. And He is the One committed to keep you — which means to guard you or protect you or hold on to you — and the enemy cannot touch you. Now this sounds very much

like the words that Jesus spoke to John in the Gospel when He said, “Hey, if you’re in Me, you’re in the Father’s hand — and no one can pluck you out of the Father’s hand.” It’s actually a wonderful statement of security.

So after coming off of this discussion about *a sin unto death* and, if necessary, God will actually take you home if you just aren’t going to get off that road, he comes back and says, “If you are born of God, you are in the One who is God, and His commitment is to hold on to you and guard you to the finish line.” You have this picture of the enemy and it says, “Cannot touch you”. It’s a picture of — cannot grasp you or cannot hold onto you — maybe create this imagery that you are going down a bad path as a Christian, but God has a hold of you with a firm grip, like around your waist. And there’s the enemy and he’s got you by the ankle, and he’s trying to pull you one way, and God’s pulling the other way. The assurance is, there is never any doubt as to who is going to win this tug of war. There may be times when the enemy gets a hold and does some damage, but God will never let go. And the One who is God is the One you’re in and who promises, “I’m going to hold on until the finish line and I will not let you go.”

So what do we know? We know that, at the end of the day, God keeps His promise and will hold on until the finish line.

Verse 19:

We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of the evil one*.

Again John’s just laying out, “This is the playing field.” We’ve talked about this. This is the world’s operating system and the architect of that system is Satan himself. The system is designed to look attractive, but ultimately destroys, and the world is caught in this system, and the only way out is to believe Jesus is the Son of God. So again, he creates this picture that, “I have a hold of you; the enemy’s on the attack but, at the end of the day, My team wins — no doubt!”

Verse 20:

And we know that the Son of God has come,
(We talked about the reasons why we know this are overwhelming)
and has given us understanding so that we may know Him... (Vs. 20a)

This is the first place in the text he changes the Greek word for **know** to the word that means to *know intimately* — to know personally, as a husband knows his wife. In other words, the case is being made that you have to **know** in order to *know*. These are the things you have to know. Intimacy is built on security and safety, not on fear and insecurity. So what he is saying is, you need to know this, in order to **know Him**, in order to experience the intimacy, in order to dance with Jesus in the light.

...that we may know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols. (Vs. 20b-21)

This we know. Anything other than this is counterfeit; it's artificial; it's idolatry. What do we know? *We know* that we have eternal life, because it's a gift of God's grace. *We know* that when we pray, He hears us; He loves us; He has the power. But sometimes we may not get the answer we want, for reasons we may not ever know. It doesn't mean He doesn't hear us. *We know* that if we have been born of God, as His children, we are *in* God, and no matter how much the enemy tries, he can never have us. Sometimes it may look like this brutal tug of war, but He's not letting go, and He's going to get us to the finish line. *We know* this, and he says *we even know* that God gave us the understanding, so that we could know this, in order that we might have life.

It's really important to understand that there shouldn't be an ounce of arrogance or self-righteousness in what John is saying. He's been very clear all the way along. It isn't that we love God; it's that He loves us. He's the pursuer. It isn't that we saved ourselves; it's that He saved us — it's that He did the work; He sent His son; He sacrificed His Son; He offered up His Son freely as a gift. At the end of the text, He says that God **gave us the understanding so that we could know this** and believe this and experience His life. The reality is: God did it all! But please understand this: God **did** it all — which is the basis by which we can **know**, that we are the children of God.

I talked about the fact that our workplace, our neighborhoods, our schools are filled with people that are in pain. They are broken; they are in despair; they feel the hopelessness; they feel the pressure; they feel the insecurity; they wonder if there is any answer to the problems that just won't go away. Yet the answer is right there. This text reminds me, that apart from the grace of God giving me what I need to hear it, and to understand it, that would be me. I'm not smarter; I'm not more clever; I'm not more humble; I'm not more anything. Apart from the grace of God, that would be me sitting at the bar taking another drink to somehow numb the pain, to get through one more day, me in despair, wondering, "Is there an answer; is there a solution; does it have to be this way; is life always going to be so disappointing, and will my soul starve to death?" Apart from the grace of God, that would be me — and those people are all around us. I understand that. But for reasons we will never understand, while that could be me, it's not me. It could be you. You're not smarter; you're not more clever; you're not more intelligent; you didn't just figure something out. Apart from God's grace in lifting the blinders and giving you the understanding you need to get it, that would be you. But it's not — and you know that you are a child of God! I hope we never lose the wonder that, for reasons we'll never know, God chose you to be His child.

Authentic Christian community starts with experiencing a radical new birth, which comes from trusting in Jesus as Savior. God has invited you to *dance with Him in the light*. In the light, it exposes our "rats", and that's the moment of truth, where either we face our rats, we confess our sins, and He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins, or we pull back into the shadows, back into the darkness to hide our sin, and seek a counterfeit Christianity. **True Christian community is the dance with Jesus together in the light.** What connects us together is that we all have within us the same Spirit of truth. If we know and understand this message, we have to be compelled to share it with those who are in darkness. How could we possibly know this and remain silent, while those around us suffer in the darkness? **Let's care enough about the people around us to at least invite them to join the dance.**

Before we go today, I'd like to say a few words about what you can expect in my teaching series the next couple of months. Next week, we'll be airing a series we first ran about a year ago. It's

called *Life After Death*. We heard from so many of you about this subject that we're running it again, starting Monday, so please join us. Arnie and Kara will be back with me, and I know you enjoy them as much as I do. Then in April, we'll go on to Part Three of my Genesis series, *Fear or Faith*. This will focus on the lives of Isaac and Jacob. And at that point, I'll introduce a friend of mine, Nat Crawford. I've known Nat for many, many years, as a young man in our church, and as a fellow pastor in our city. And I'm really excited to have Nat with us, and he'll be joining me for the daily discussion of the messages. I'm looking forward to all we have planned to share with you over the next couple of months. So I hope you'll be joining us.