**Lessons from a Lockdown**

**Volume II**

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**Day 81**

**1 John 5:16-17**

If 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. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

***Questions for Personal Reflection:***

1. How do I explain "sin that lead to death" and "sin that does not lead to death"? If all wrongdoing is sin, how can some sin lead to death but other sins not lead to death?

2. Is John saying that it is okay to sin as long as that sin does not lead to death? Why?

3. What is my attitude toward scriptures that are difficult to understand? What do I normally do?

4. Why should I pray for brothers and sisters in sin?

5. How quickly do I repent of my sins?

***Insight:***

Is there a list of sins that do not lead to death and another list which do lead to death? If all wrongdoing is sin, shouldn't all sin lead to death? What is John referring to? Taken in isolation verse 16 seems to suggest that there are two categories of sin. This implies that for as long as the sins we commit are not those that lead to death, we are safe. So we should only avoid sins that lead to death. But interpreting verse 16 in this way would violate a fundamental rule in interpreting the Bible: A scripture cannot have a meaning that violates another scripture. In fact, the other words of John in the same letter prevents us from interpreting verse 16 as providing for a safe set of sins that we are free to commit because they do not lead to death. Earlier in his letter John said all sin is lawlessness (I John 3:5) and he made no qualifications. If all sin is lawlessness then all sins merit punishment. In the very next verse John says "all wrong doing is sin." But he also repeats that there is sin that does not lead to death. So in John's mind, there is no conflict between all sin being a violation of God's law and at the same time there being sin that does not lead to death. How do we explain this?

When we sin, it does not necessarily result in our *spiritual* death, at least not right away. In James 1:13-15 it says:

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it *gives birth to sin*; and *sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death*.

It is full-grown sin, sin that we have tolerated and nurtured that can lead to death. If we are unrepentant of our sin, then it can lead to death.

Therefore, sins that do not lead to death are sin that we as sinners are repenting of. In contrast, sin that leads to death is unrepented sin. In other words, it is not what sin you commit which matters. One person may commit immorality but it would not lead to his spiritual death if he is repentant, while another may commit greed and this lead to her death because she was unrepentant. Thus, what determines whether a sin leads to death is the heart of the sinner, not the type of sin. John himself says that Christians will not continue to sin. In Hebrews it says that, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left" (10:26). It also says that it is impossible for those "who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance" (Hebrews 6:6). This means that while God is patient with us, our sinfulness can reach a point where we can no longer repent. By then we have "a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12). We will never know how close or far away we are from that point of no return once we sin. Would it be wise then to sin and see how far we can go? Is it wise to tell ourselves that its fine for us to sin now, since we can always go back to God later? How could you tell that you would be able to return to God later? Just because someone, by the grace of God, was able to repent after years of being away from God, it does not necessarily mean that you could as well. For every person who has successfully returned to God, there are countless others who were not able to. You don't even know how long you will live. How can you promise to return to God later, if you don't even know that there will be a later for you?

So we should continue to pray for our brothers and sisters who still show signs of willingness to repent. We don't know how much time they have so we should not give up on them in our prayers. The moment a fellow disciple confesses to us a sin or as soon as we find out or notice that a brother or sister is in sin, we should pray for them.

Let us pray for the repentance of our sins and the repentance of others for their sins. May God be merciful to us all.