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## **Capital Punishment A Sin Worthy of Death.**

(2013)

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## Capital Punishment and a Sin worthy of Death.

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### Topics.

- General sins, sexual sins and spiritual sins that led to death.
- Jesus reduced God's laws and commandments down to two.
- All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.
- A sin unto death.
- The unpardonable sin.
- Hypocrisy and wickedness in the kingdom of God.
- Praying for brothers and sisters who are not sinning unto death.

**INTRODUCTION:** John in the New Testament talks about sin that leads to death. The following is firstly a list of Old Testament Scriptures that shine a spotlight on sins under the Law of Moses that lead to death and secondly an explanation of what John most likely had in mind when he said, "Do not pray for those committing a sin that leads to death."

1 John 5:16-17 ----- <sup>16</sup>If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. <sup>17</sup>All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

John in this verse is using the same language that Moses used when speaking to Israel in the following verse: -

- If a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree (Deut. 21:22).

### General Sins that Led to Death.

The following wrongdoings are sins leading to death (i.e., capital punishment).

Fighting.

Exodus 21:12 ----- <sup>12</sup>Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.

Hitting Parents.

Exodus 21:15 ----- <sup>15</sup>Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.

Cursing Father or Mother.

Exodus 21:17 ----- <sup>17</sup>Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

An ox that kills a Man or a Woman.

Exodus 21:29 ----- <sup>29</sup>But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death.

Intentional Murder.

Deut. 19:11-12 ----- <sup>11</sup>if anyone hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and attacks him and strikes him fatally so that he dies, and he flees into one of these cities, <sup>12</sup>then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there, and hand him over to the avenger of blood, so that he may die.

## A Stubborn and Rebellious Son.

Deut. 21:20-21 ----- <sup>20</sup>they (the father and mother) shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' <sup>21</sup>Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death

Kidnapping.

Deut. 24:7 ----- <sup>7</sup>If a man is found stealing one of his brothers, of the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. (Ex 21:16)

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## Sexual Sins that Led to Death.

A Wife who was not a Virgin before Marriage.

Deut. 22:13-14 ----- <sup>13</sup>If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then hates her <sup>14</sup>and accuses her of misconduct and brings a bad name upon her, saying, 'I took this woman, and when I came near her, I did not find in her evidence of virginity.

Now go to verse twenty: -

<sup>20</sup>But if the thing is true, that evidence of virginity was not found in the young woman, <sup>21</sup>then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Sex with Animals.

Exodus 22:19 ----- <sup>19</sup>Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death.

Women having Sex with Multiple Men.

Deut. 22:21 ----- <sup>21</sup>they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Adultery.

Deut. 22:22 ----- <sup>22</sup>If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.

An Engaged Woman who willing has Sex with another Man.

Deut. 22:23-24 ----- <sup>23</sup>If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, <sup>24</sup>then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

A man who Rapes an Engaged Woman.

Deut. 22:25 ----- <sup>25</sup>if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die.

A Priest's Daughter who Plays the Harlot.

Leviticus 21:9 ----- <sup>9</sup>the daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by whoring, profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.

## **Spiritual Sins that Led to Death.**

Sorceress.

Exodus 22:18 ----- <sup>18</sup>You shall not permit a sorceress to live.

Sacrificing to other gods.

Exodus 22:20 ----- <sup>20</sup>Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction.

Serving other gods and worshipping the Sun, the Moon and the Heavenly Host.

Deut. 17:3-5 ----- <sup>3</sup>whoever has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden ---- NOW GO TO VERSE FIVE ---- <sup>5</sup>you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones.

Not Listening to and Obeying the Priest.

Deut. 17:12 ----- <sup>12</sup>The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die

Speaking Presumptuously in God's Name.

Deut. 18:20 ----- <sup>20</sup>the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.'

False Prophets.

Deut. 13:5 ----- <sup>5</sup>that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God (see also Deut. 13:1-5).

A Brother that Leads people to False God's.

Deut. 13:6-9 ----- <sup>6</sup>If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which neither you nor your fathers have known --- NOW GO TO VERSE NINE ---- <sup>9</sup>you shall kill him.

A City that Leads People to False God's.

Deut. 13:13-17 ----- <sup>13</sup>worthless fellows who have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known --- NOW GO TO VERSE FIFTEEN --- <sup>15</sup>you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword

Blasphemy of God's Name.

Leviticus 24:16 ----- <sup>16</sup>Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death and all the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.

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## **He who is Hanged is Accursed of God.**

Deut. 21:23 ----- <sup>23</sup>his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

A hanged man is cursed by God not because they are being hanged, but because the reason they are being put to death is because they have committed gross sin against humanity and against God.

## **Fear of God Prevents Sin.**

Exodus 20:20 ----- 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin."

Concerning the fear to the LORD the Bible says: -

- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding (Psalm 111:10).
- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Proverbs 9:10).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom because it should motivate us to life a life of doing what is right and good and not a life of wrongdoing.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom because it should motivate those who do not know the love and grace of God to seek Him and to live a life of doing what is right and good and not a life of wrongdoing, especially since wrongdoing can lead to the death penalty. While those who do know God's love and grace are motivated not by fear, but by the love of the Lord and it is from this heartfelt love that they desire to honour God and bring a good testimony to the name of Christ.

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## **Jesus reduced God's Laws and Commandments down to Two.**

Jesus reduced all these laws down to the following two: "Love God with all your heart and mind" and "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31). James the brother of Jesus calls the law, "Love your neighbour as yourself," the Royal Law (James 2:8). Our neighbour embraces every human and not just those who attend Christian churches.

No sane man or woman deliberately inflicts harm on themselves in fact sane people not only do whatever they can to avoid being hurt, but also do everything they can to protect themselves from pain and loss it is in this sense that Christians are called to love their neighbour as themselves.

It means respecting a person's right of life (thou shalt not kill), their home and family (thou shalt not commit adultery), their property and possessions (thou shalt not steal). Respecting their reputation (thou shalt not bear false witness) and in thought respecting their right of life, home, family, property, possessions and reputation (thou shalt not covet), but it goes beyond these because it also embraces doing whatever we can to protect others from pain and harm as we endeavour to protect ourselves.

Any religion of any nation or religious institution that claims to believe in God, but behaves contrary to these two laws is not acting in the Spirit of God or according to His will even though they maybe claiming to be acting in his name.

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## **All Wrongdoing is Sin, but there is Sin that Does Not Lead to Death.**

1 John 5:16-17 ----- 16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

Some may wonder how are we to know if a certain brother or sister's sin is unto death when all sin is of the same nature and kind with our own sin? And how are we to know if those confessing to believe in Christ are true brothers or pretenders (i.e., involved in Christ's Kingdom for their own advantage and gain).

John throughout this letter has repeatedly said, those who are the children of God are those who endeavour to life a lifestyle that honours God and those who love

their brothers and sisters in Christ. Whereas those who are of the devil are those whose lifestyle shows they are indifferent to God's honour and who have no love for those in Christ's family (1 John 3:10-15).

### **A Sin unto Death.**

Since there has been great diversity of opinion in regard to "The sin that is not unto death" and "The sin that is unto death" We will consider the three most common since they all contain a different, but valuable aspect of truth.

These three are: -

1. The Law of Moses.
2. Civil Death.
3. The Unpardonable Sin.

#### **1 THE LAW OF MOSES.**

Moses said to the people of Israel: -

- If a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree" his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. (Deut. 21:22-23).

Some say that when John said, "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death do not pray for him" he was referring to the Laws of Moses which demanded that certain sins that were so wickedly corrupt the sinner was to be put to death. Under Moses law murder, kidnapping, purchasing a kidnapped person, adultery, incest, rape, sex with animals, worshipping other gods, false prophets, blasphemy of God's name and such like things all brought the death penalty.

It may seem strange to consider that those confessing Christ could be involved in any sin that would warrant the death penalty, but consider the following: -

Peter said: -

- Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer (1 Peter 4:15).

John wrote: -

- Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:15).

Added to this throughout the history of Christianity certain religions confessing Christ have murdered those they considered heretics and tortured and burned alive those who would not surrender to their particular doctrines and all this in the name of God.

THUS: the reason some conclude that John was saying do not pray for those who practise such gross and wicked sins that will result in a judgment to eternal death. Since though they are confessing Christ they are full of hypocrisy and pretence and bringing a most terrible testimony to God, to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Christian faith.

#### **2 CIVIL DEATH.**

Others say it refers to crimes committed against the legal laws of the country or nation for which the offender was sentenced to death. They teach that brothers and sisters in Christ should pray for a person who has been judged and condemned to death if the alleged accusation against them was false and therefore the verdict of condemnation to death was unjust so it would be perfectly right for them to pray that the condemned would be spared of the sentence of death.

BUT: if the alleged accusation proved to be true and the offender under the law of justice deserved to die they should not pray that the offender who had been sentenced to death would be spared of the penalty that the legal justice system and court had pronounced upon them.

Thus in this context the, "Sin not unto Death" would refer to offences which might be pardoned under civil law and of which the punishment should be rightly altered. While the, "Sin unto Death" refers to offences against the civil law which are proven to be true and therefore the magistrate has no power to pardon, nor under the law of justice should the punishment be altered.

**NOTE:** Those who hold to this theory are not saying that we should not pray that an offending criminal should not find repentance and God's grace that leads to eternal life, but that they should not pray that they would escape justice.

### **An Example of this Principle.**

Years ago I heard a testimony that for me showed true faith. A minister who took the Good News of the gospel into prisons shared how a man who had brutally murdered and was on death row was brought to repentance by the love and goodness of God and found forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This man's life was transformed in such a manner that the prison minister wanted to use his testimony to lessen his death sentence. The new convert said, "No I will not use my new found love for Christ as an excuse to escape the justice I am due." The man didn't and he was put to death to enter the eternal world of God's glory and everlasting peace.

Had this man used his testimony in Christ as an excuse to escape the sentence of justice the remaining victims of the one he had brutally murdered would not have sensed the healing balm of justice calming the overwhelming suffering and pain of the loss in their hearts.

**THUS:** in this context John's expression, "I do not say, he shall pray for it", may perhaps mean no more than, "I have no promise for the guilty; no foundation for the prayer of faith if a man has committed a sin worthy of the death penalty." This is because the laws of punishing justice must be executed, for the common safety and benefit of mankind: and even an offending brother in such a case must be resigned to God's eternal mercy and to public justice (which in the foundation of it is divine).

## **3 THE UNPARDONABLE SIN.**

Most have supposed that the "Sin leading to Death" refers to the sin against the Holy Spirit the unpardonable sin which is never forgiven in this world nor in the eternal world to come, and therefore must be unto death. Sinning against the Holy Spirit means sinning wilfully, not in a practical manner, but a doctrinal way after having received the knowledge of the Gospel that leads to eternal life. It is a wilful denial of Christ and of the Good News of the Gospel that offers pardon of sin, righteousness, and eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The unpardonable sin is that mental and heartfelt aggression toward the grace of God in Christ so that in their own malice and obstinacy toward the Lord they are unforgiveable because they are denying the only sacrifice for their sin and the only one who has the power to pardon their sin and save them to eternal life. The Scribes and Pharisees (the chief religious leaders of Israel) are a perfect example of this type of sin. They accused Jesus of having an unclean spirit and being of the spirit of Beelzebul, the prince of demons,

Jesus said to them: -

- Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven and whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come because they are guilty of an eternal sin (Matt. 12:31-32).

The Scribes and Pharisees were the builders of God's Kingdom they had the authority, the covenant, the law, the prophets, the Scriptures the promises, the Temple and the priesthood and all the evidence any could ever wish for that Jesus was their Messiah, the Christ, and the Son of God and yet they still opposed him and plotted his murder.

Jesus finished this conversation with the Scribes and Pharisees by saying: -

- Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister (Matt. 12:50) (See also Mark 3:22-29).

Added to this the author of Hebrews states: -

- It is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt (Heb. 6:4-6).

John in the second chapter wrote: -

- They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us (1 John 2:19)

Demonstrating they were not truly a brother or sister. So how can we presume to pray God would withhold His righteous judgments? Especially when Jesus himself intercedes, not for the world which hardens itself in unbelief, but for those given to him out of the world.

### **Hypocrisy and Wickedness in the Kingdom of God.**

Some may find it difficult to comprehend that such hypocrisy and wickedness would exist in the Kingdom of God, but the Bible teaches that within the global Kingdom of God there are: -

- Good and faithful servants (Mat 25:21).
- Wicked and slothful servants (Matt 25:26).
- Evil and the righteous servants that at the close of this age angels will come and separate (Matt 13:47-50).

Added to these Jesus says: -

- Many will say, 'Lord, Lord, did we not do many mighty works in your name?' And he will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness (Matt 7:21-23).

### **NOTE.**

The unpardonable sin does not apply to a brother or sister in Christ who like the Prodigal Son left his father's household to experience the world, since his heart was obviously still toward his father, evidenced by the fact he later returned. Those John had in mind who wilfully commits this gross sin that leads to death not only have no love in their heart at all toward Christ, but are also aggressively opposed in their hearts toward him.

THUS: in this context John's statement, "I do not say, he shall pray for it", means do not pray for those who after being fully enlightened to the Good News of the Gospel and the love and grace of God and then not only consciously and wilfully deny Christ, but turn aggressively against him. Throughout this letter John talks of antichrists, false prophets and false teachers being amongst those in the Kingdom of Christ, and begins this chapter with the words: -

- Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God (v1).



John then proceeds verse by verse proving Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world. Added to this he says: -

- Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son (v10).

And in verse eleven he writes: -

- Whoever has the Son has life (eternal) whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life and tells us he is writing these things so that we can know that we have eternal life (v13).

Based on these verses it would seem that the most likely groups that John had in mind when he was speaking about "Not praying for those committing sin leading to death" would be those who fit the description of the unpardonable sin.

### **Praying for Brothers and Sisters who are Not Sinning unto Death.**

John tells us, "When we see a brother or sister committing a sin that does not lead to death, we should ask God in prayer and that God will give them life" (v16). In chapter three John said to the disciples "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18).

John's entire focus in chapter three is about loving brothers and sisters in Christ and even being prepared to lay our lives down for them. In John's mind the concept of praying for a sinning brother or sister was not only about kneeling with bended knees in prayer, but also involved doing whatever action we are able to deliver the sinning brother or sister from their wrong behaviour (i.e., rebuking, correcting in love, encouraging, comforting and such like things).

John's understanding of prayer is more than  
words it involves actions.

John is saying, "If someone sees a brother or sister committing a sin (providing it is not a sin that fits the description of the unpardonable sin) a brother or sister in Christ should pray for them and God will forgive the sinning offender upon their repentance since the idea of praying for a person also suppose we do what we can to help in whatever way we are able.

In this context it refers to praying a prayer of repentance with an offending brother and sister. John is reassuring those who pray this prayer with the knowledge that God will forgive since there is no sin that cannot be forgiven when an offending brother or sister comes to God in honest repentance and by faith and surrenders their life, heart and mind into the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They are words of comfort to those who see a brother or sister in Christ acting in the same manner as the Prodigal Son and are wondering if God can forgive them. John is saying that any brother or sister can be confident that God will hear their prayer and forgive the brother or sister they are praying for if they are repentant. No Christian who truly loves the Lord would deny that there are sins that war against spiritual life not only in the heart and mind, but also outwardly, but these do not lead to death. Paul in his letter to the Galatians wrote: -

- Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness, but keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted" (meaning to join with them in their transgression) (Gal 6:1).

Since even the best of God's children are not free in thought, word, or deed of sin and there are multitude of sins which people commit that do not come under the title of being unpardonable. Those who enter the throne of God's grace and have boldness and freedom there should while dwelling in such majestic grace intercede for their erring brothers and sisters that they maybe may be pardoned and saved.

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End.