

I JOHN: TRUE SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP
XVII. Praying For The Spiritual Needs Of Fellow Believers
(1 John 5:16-17)

I. Introduction

- A. When John wrote 1 John, he implied in 1 John 1:3 that a number of his readers did not enjoy spiritual fellowship with the Apostles, with God the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ!
- B. This lack of true fellowship occurs with many believers today as Christ predicted in Revelation 3:14-22 for our era. We thus view 1 John 5:16-17 on praying for the spiritual needs of fellow believers (as follows):

II. Praying For The Spiritual Needs Of Fellow Believers, 1 John 5:16-17.

- A. This passage has been greatly "discussed" by commentators with the belief that it is hard to understand, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 902. For example, 1 John 5:16 claims that if we see a "brother" sin a sin that is not unto death, we should pray and thus save his life. One may then ask why we should pray to save the life of a fellow believer if he has not sinned to the point of losing his life anyway, for such a prayer would seem vain!
- B. Accordingly, before even approaching the passage itself to interpret it, we view what other passages in Scripture teach that eliminate any wrong interpretation of 1 John 5:16-17 when we start to study it:
 - 1. John is not addressing the "unpardonable" sin of Matthew 12:24-32 in 1 John 5:16-17. (John G. Mitchell, Fellowship: Three Letters From John, 1974, p. 159) That sin cannot be duplicated today, for it involved attributing the Holy Spirit's work in Christ's performing miracles that authenticated His Messianic credentials to the work of Satan. Christ is not now on earth performing such miracles to cause people to believe in Him, so that sin cannot be committed today. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Matt. 12:31)
 - 2. Also, John is not claiming that some sins that are willfully and rebelliously performed over a long period of time will not end in God's discipline of physical death, for James 5:19-20, Proverbs 10:27; 11:19; 13:14 and 19:16 indicate that given enough time, all sin leads to God's discipline of a premature physical death!
 - 3. On the other hand, not every sin that a believer commits results in God's immediate discipline of taking his physical life, for 1 John 1:10 claims that if we believers say we have not sinned as believers, we make God a liar, meaning that all of us believers have committed acts of sin as believers but that God has obviously mercifully spared us from the punishment of an immediate physical death; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T.
- C. We thus believe that the Apostle John in 1 John 5:16-17 sought to *distinguish* "sins for which death is a **rapid** consequence and sins for which it is **not**" (Ibid.' emphases ours), so we interpret 1 John 5:16-17 as follows:
 - 1. If any believer sees his brother in Christ sin a sin that does not rapidly lead to his immediate physical death, meaning that God is evidently giving him time to repent and confess that sin for cleansing, the observing believer should intercede in prayer for the sinning believer that he might repent, confess and be saved from a premature death in God's discipline, 1 John 5:16a.
 - 2. Yet, there is sin that God punishes with immediate death, 1 John 5:16b. John wrote that if we see a brother commit a sin that we believe deserves immediate death, we are not required of God to intercede in such a case as doing so would counter God's will to discipline that believer with premature death, 1 John 5:16c. (Ibid., p. 903) It is noteworthy that John does not condemn a prayer of intercession in such a case, but that he gives the believer room to decide not to pray simply because he desires to pray in accord with God's will, and he may not have knowledge of God's will in such a serious case! (Ibid.)
 - 3. John added that all unrighteousness is sin, but that there is a sin that does not result in immediate physical death, 1 John 5:17. God is gracious and merciful, full of compassion and slow to anger (Psalm 145:8), so we need to be grateful for His mercy and grace while also revering the Lord so as to depart from sin!

Lesson: *Generally, when we believers see a fellow believer commit an act or acts of sin, we should intercede for him in prayer that he might have a change of heart regarding his sin(s) and confess it for restoration to fellowship with the Lord. However, some sins God punishes with immediate death, and if we see a believer commit a sin or sins that we believe may require immediate death in divine punishment, God does not hold us accountable to intercede for him for the sake of conscience as we seek to pray in accord with God's will. However, even then, because of our limited knowledge of God's will, He does not hold us accountable for sin if we intercede for one who has committed a sin that requires immediate death in God's view! In all such matters, then, we need to appreciate God's mercy while also viewing all sin as an eventual life-threatening problem that must be addressed.*

Application: *In praying for fellow believers who sin, may we humbly proceed with caution in reverence for God!*