

## Question and Answer

Please explain 1 John 5. 16.

This difficult verse may not appear so hard to understand if it be taken simply as it stands. It is in a context dealing with prayer (verses 14 and 15). Here the word "ask" is "to make petition," as also in the verse before us, while in verse 15, the words, "we desire" are literally, "we have petitioned."

Here in verse 16, we have a case of two brethren in Christ, one of whom sees the other sinning, that is, continuing in a sin which is described as "not toward death." "Sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1. 15). And again, "If ye live after the flesh, ye are about to die." (Rom. 8. 13. Lit.). Also some Corinthians actually "fell asleep", through failure (1 Cor. 11. 30), and we remember Ananias and Sapphira. All sin tends towards death, but the continued intercession of the Lord Jesus prevents.

Apparently, the brother in 1 John 5. 16, is either unconscious of his sin or in a low spiritual condition, or perhaps, even ignorant. A concerned brother "asks" (see above) and in answer to his prayer, God gives life. That assumes perhaps that a continuance in sin might lead to death if the brother is not prayed for, that he might repent.

Solemnly, though, there is sin unto death, that is, definitely **toward** death. But no one can actually know, in any particular case. The words, "pray for it," are more exactly, "ask (questions) concerning it," that is, "be inquisitive about it."

The general teaching is, be concerned about a brother's sin, but be careful not to assume that his sin will not be repented of. "Judge not."

The words of James 5. 14-16 are important in this connection.

"What is a sin not unto death (1 John 5. 16)?"

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6. 23), and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death (Jas. 1. 15). This is ever its goal. But there are different aspects of death in Scripture, (judicial, physical, etc.). The Holy Spirit is, I think, speaking here of sins as those of 1 Corinthians 11. 30, where God chastened with physical death. James 5. 19, 20 may help us to understand. How important is our privilege of praying "one for another" that there may be healing (Jas. 5. 16): this attitude is the opposite of that which is reproved in Romans 14. 15. Observe, too, the words rendered "ask," "pray," in 1 John 5. 16. The **latter** is not, when used of **believers**, the term for prayer, but for questioning (e.g. John 1. 19, 9. 2, 16. 5, 19, 23): "I do not say that he should question (or request) concerning that." We are not bidden to enquire whether any have thus sinned. Scripture warns against inquisitiveness (John 21. 23). **Pray** till God stops you (Jer. 7. 16, see 2 Cor. 12. 8). We are not to be analysts in prayer, but childlike believers. Often we "know"(?) too much.