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Life Study of 1 John Message 37, 38

ASKING AND GIVING LIFE

In verse 16 John comes to his point in this section: "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and he will give life to him, to those sinning not unto death. There is sin unto death; I do not say that he should make request concerning that." Literally, the Greek word rendered "unto" in this verse means toward. Here John is saying that if anyone sees his brother, someone close to him in the Lord, sinning a sin not unto death, he should ask concerning that one. The word "ask" here must refer to a prayer made when we are abiding in fellowship with God.

No doubt, "he shall ask" refers to the one who sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death. But to whom does "he will give life" refer? There is a problem with the second "he" in this verse. Some translations capitalize the second "he" and thereby make it refer to the Lord. Actually, in both cases "he" refers to the same person, that is, to the one who sees his brother sinning and who asks concerning him.

The subject of "will give life" is still he, the subject of the first predicate "shall ask." This indicates that the asker will give life to the one asked for. This does not mean that the asker has life of himself and can give life by himself to others. It means such an asker, who is abiding in the Lord, who is one with the Lord, and who is asking in one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17), becomes the means through which God's life-giving Spirit can give life to the one he asks for. This is a matter of life-imparting in the fellowship of the divine life. To be one who can give life to others, we must abide in the divine life and walk, live, and have our being in the divine life. In James 5:14-16 the prayer is for healing; here the prayer is for life-imparting.

The vital point here is that if we would pray for a brother according to what is described in verse 16, we need to be one with the Lord. We must abide in the Lord and ask in one spirit with Him. Because we are so one with the Lord, we can become the means, the channel, through which God's life-giving Spirit can impart life to the one for whom we ask. This imparting of life takes place in the fellowship of the divine life.

Undoubtedly, "life" in verse 16 refers to spiritual life imparted into the one asked for through the prayer of the asker. However, according to the context, this spiritual life will also rescue the physical body of the one asked

for from the danger of suffering death because of his sinning (see James 5:15).

SIN UNTO DEATH

Concerning "sin unto death," Bible teachers have different interpretations. Some say that it refers to the sin of the antichrists in denying that Jesus is the Christ (2:22), a sin which keeps them in death forever. But, according to the context of this verse, sin unto death is related to a sinning brother, not to an antichrist or any other unbeliever. Since this section, 5:14-17, is related to prayer in the fellowship of eternal life covered in 1:3—2:11, whatever it deals with must be related to the matter of the fellowship of the divine life. In the fellowship of the divine life there is the governmental dealing of God according to the spiritual condition of each of His children. In God's governmental dealing, some of His children may be destined to physical death in this age due to a certain sin, and others may also be destined to physical death due to other sins. The situation is like that of Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who were dealt with by physical death because of their lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). The situation also is like that of the Corinthian believers, who were dealt with by a similar judgment because of their not discerning the body (1 Cor. 11:29-30). This was typified by God's dealing with the children of Israel in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:5-11). All of them, except Caleb and Joshua, were judged by God with physical death due to certain sins. God's governmental dealing is severe. Miriam, Aaron, and even Moses were not spared from this kind of dealing due to certain failures of theirs (Num. 12:1-15; 20:1, 12, 22-29; Deut. 1:37; 3:26-27; 32:48-52). The punishment of God's governmental dealing with His children is not at all related to eternal perdition. Rather, it is a dispensational dealing according to the divine government, which is related to our fellowship with God and with one another. Whether a sin is unto death or not depends on God's judgment according to each one's position and condition in the house of God. In any case, for the children of God to sin is a serious matter. Sin may be judged by God with physical death in this age! Concerning such a sin unto death, the apostle does not say that we should make request.

In verse 17 John goes on to say, "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not unto death." Every wrongdoing, everything that is not just or righteous, is sin.

We have pointed out that in God's governmental dealing, for some saints a particular sin may be unto death. But

for other saints the same sin may not be unto death. In verse 16 John says, "There is sin unto death," and in verse 17 he says, "There is sin not unto death." Furthermore, John seems to imply in verse 16 that the praying one may know whether or not a brother is sinning a sin unto death, for we are to ask only concerning a sin that is not unto death. This raises the very important question of how we can know whether or not a certain sin is unto death. This is a deep matter, and we shall consider it in some detail in the next message.

LIFE-IMPARTING IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE DIVINE LIFE

What is described in 5:14-17 concerning the life-giving petition can be experienced only by those who are deep in the Lord. In verse 14 John speaks of prayer that is according to God's will. In order to pray this kind of prayer, we must be one with the Lord. If we are deeply one with Him, we shall know His will, and we shall also know the situation of the one who is sinning. Because this one is our brother, someone very close to us in the Lord, we shall know his real situation before the Lord. This matter is deep.

If you are one with the Lord and know a sinning brother's condition and situation before the Lord, you will then know the Lord's will and be able to pray according to His will. Because you know the Lord's will, you will also know whether or not this brother will die because of his sin.

These verses indicate that we who have eternal life can pass this life on to others. This means that we can be a channel through which eternal life is supplied to others. We can be a channel for eternal life to flow out of us and into others. Verse 16 refers to this. In this verse the one who asks is also the one who gives life to the sinning brother. This indicates that the one who asks will give life to the one concerning whom he asks. The asker, who is abiding in the Lord, who is one with the Lord, and who is asking in one spirit with the Lord, becomes the means through which God's life-giving Spirit can give life to the one for whom he asks. This is a matter of life-imparting in the fellowship of the divine life.

Notice that in verse 16 John speaks of someone seeing "his brother" sinning. The words "his brother" point to a brother who is close to him, someone who is so close to him that he is a part of him. If you have a brother close to you in this way and do not know whether this brother will die because of his sin, then you are not deep in the Lord. If you are truly deep in the Lord and are one with Him, as you consider the brother's situation, you will enter into the Lord's heart and know His will. You will know whether this brother, who is so intimate to you, will die because of his sin. Then you will know how to

pray for him. You will know whether or not to pray for him to be forgiven and healed. If this brother's sin is unto death, you will realize that you should not pray to impart life into him. Instead, you may be burdened to pray for him from another angle.

My burden in this message is to show you that the eternal life within us is real and practical. On the one hand, we can enjoy this eternal life within us. On the other hand, we can pass on this eternal life to others. We can be a channel for eternal life to flow out from us, or through us, to others. However, the experience of being a channel for eternal life to flow out to others is a deep matter. This cannot be done in a superficial way. If we would be a channel for eternal life to flow out to others, we must be deep in the Lord, and we must know the Lord's heart by being in His heart. If we have entered into the Lord to such a degree, spontaneously we shall know the Lord's will concerning a brother close to us who has sinned. Because we know the Lord's will concerning the brother's situation, we shall know how to pray for him.

Burdens for Church Prayers

- Pray for the blending and one accord among the saints.
- May the Lord raise up many brothers to bear the testimony together.
- Pray for the burden to raise up next generation for building up of the body of Christ.
- Pray for YP that they will be companions with one another to pursue the Lord together.
- Pray for the English-speaking testimony and gospel preaching on West Valley College campus.
- For GOW training: Vital groups be raised up, attending prayer meeting, prophesying on Lord's day by daily enjoying His word and pursue the truth.

Announcement

- Morning Revival: ITERO Message 3.
- Prayer meeting (5/22) at meeting hall.
- GOW 6th term 4-day intensified training, 6/1~4, at Pleasanton meeting hall, register with the brothers in small group to be trained by His grace and practice steadfastly unto Zion/overcomers. Deadline 5/22.
- 2012 International Memorial Day Conference to be held in Bellevue, WA on May 25-28.
- Bible Camp 6/18~22, SST for YP 7/22~27, please sanctify these times.
- Chinese scholar training in NJ, 7/27-8/3. Continuing training in Fremont 8/2-8/5.
- Sister Liu gave birth to a baby boy last night, both mother and baby are fine.