



Daily Devotionals

[click here to go to website – stmatthewsrichmond.org](http://stmatthewsrichmond.org)

1 JOHN 5:16-17 PRAY FOR ME, A SINNER

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him 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 he should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

There is only one sin that automatically leads to spiritual and eternal death. That sin is final and irreversible denial of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the only way to the Father. Throughout St. John's writing he emphasizes the centrality of the truth about Jesus to the Christian life and Church. Earlier in this letter, he said that denial of Jesus as God in the flesh comes from the "spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 4:3), and the person who denies Jesus is the Christ is the antichrist (1 John 2:22). All sin is rebellion, and all un-forgiven sin separates us from God, but it is only that sin which remains un-confessed because of our refusal to acknowledge it as sin that places us in spiritual danger. Yet as dangerous as abiding sin is, there is a difference between such unacknowledged sin and refusing to acknowledge the only way of forgiveness.

In his letter to his beloved disciples in the churches of Asia Minor, St. John is instructing his children to love one another by interceding on behalf of their brothers and sisters. If they love their fellow members of the church then they will constantly be concerned for their well-being - especially their spiritual well-being. If they believe that Jesus is truly the Son of God and the Savior of the world, then taking their erring sibling to Jesus in prayer is a required act of love.

While praying for the brother or sister who is ensnared by sin is not optional, St. John also instructs his followers that praying for the antichrists in that manner is not mandatory, and indeed might be a wasted effort. From the tone of the entire letter, the Apostle does not appear to be speaking about nonbelievers outside the Church, but rather those who are in the church and promoting either the heresy that Jesus is not the Christ, or that belief in him is not necessary or sufficient for salvation.

The churches of our day, just as those of St. John's time, are populated by fallen and sinful human beings. If you need proof, then look in the mirror. So going on a spiritual witch-hunt in order to find the antichrists among us is not what he is calling us to do. Rather, St. John is writing to instruct us that such people do exist, so that we will not be taken by surprise or allow them to lead us astray. If we love God and our neighbors, then we will not focus our thoughts and prayers on those in the churches who refuse to acknowledge Jesus, but on Jesus and our brothers and sisters who are drifting away. Our prayers should be concentrated on building up the Church and its witness to the surrounding world. We do that by seeking to grow as a community in our faith in Jesus Christ. Since Jesus is both Lord and Savior, experiencing his forgiveness among the members of our communities is the greatest encouragement to our corporate faith.

Lord Jesus, you have built your Church on forgiveness and not purity, because we can only be as pure as we are forgiven. Keep me ever mindful of my need to pray for my brothers and sisters and desire them to be praying for me, so that your Church will be a strong witness, not to itself, but to the One who died to reconcile it to God. May our love for one another be our testimony to the truth of your Word. Amen.

Chuck+