

The Sin Unto Death and Its Terrifying Consequences

The year is 1100 BC in Bethlehem, Israel and two men walk into a bar.

The old man says to the young man, "I haven't seen you here before. Are you new in town?"

The young man says, "This is my first time at this bar but I've been in almost every bar in Israel from Dan to Beersheba. You name it, I've been there: Bethel, Lachish, Jericho. I've been all around."

The old man says, "Where are you from?"

The young man says, "I live over in Shiloh near the Tabernacle of Moses."

The old man says, "What do you do in Shiloh?"

The young man says, "I've got the best job in the world! I'm a priest. My dad is Eli the high priest."

The old man says, "Why is this job so great?"

The young man says, "I can go to any bar in Israel. I can go to any alehouse—and other kinds of houses—and I can paint the town red. I can do anything I want and then when I wake up the next morning, I go over to the tabernacle where I work and I simply grab a lamb, lay my hands on its head, transfer my sins to the lamb, sacrifice the lamb and my sins are gone!"

The old man says, "Wow that really sounds like a great job you got there. Any chance that they're hiring over there at the tabernacle?"

The young man replies, "You can't just apply to be a priest;

you've got to be born into the priesthood."

The old man says, "What am I, chopped liver? I'm a Jew!"

The young man says, "You're a Jew but you're not a Levite and you're certainly not a son of Aaron!"

The old man says, "Well pardon me for breathing in the air! I should have the right to be a priest and commit any sins I want and then go and transfer my sins to a lamb and burn it on an altar!!!"

[The above is loosely based on the life of Hophni, son of Eli, in I Samuel chapters 2-4.]

The little vignette above shows how some people in ancient times and, I will show later in this article, even in recent times have abused the sacrificial system. They used the sacrifices presumptuously. They defiantly and deliberately sinned against God with a high hand and then thought they could just simply fall back on the substitutionary atonement provided by the sacrificial system and get away with it.

The sacrificial system was a means of atonement; it was a means of God's forgiveness of sins. It was never meant to be abused in the way described above. Later in this article, I will show that to sin deliberately against God is a sin unto death. I will define the sin unto death and describe its consequences.

God established the beginnings of the animal blood sacrifice system in Genesis 3:21 just after man's fall into sin. The ancient patriarchs from Adam to Abraham offered animal sacrifices. There are three major lessons taught to us by the very fact that God provided the sacrifices. These three lessons are as followed:

1) We need forgiveness. The very fact that God provided the sacrificial system is proof that our good works don't balance

out our sins or qualify us for entry into heaven.

2) Sins can be transferred from one being to another. Sins were transferred to animals and the animals were put to death and burned on altars. Centuries later, all sins of all people were transferred to Christ who died for our sins.

3) The sacrificial system is “Plan B.” “Plan A” is to not sin in the first place. The Old and New Testaments command people not to sin, yet all people sin and therefore all people need “Plan B.”

Abraham and his descendants offered sacrifices. The sacrificial system was codified under God’s law when it was enlarged upon through the revelations given to Moses, recorded in the book of Leviticus.

There is a stern warning given in Numbers 15:26-31 that warns people against abusing the sacrificial system by sinning presumptuously, as discussed in the vignette above. We see a very in-depth, personal example of this in the lives of Eli and his sons. This is especially pointed out in First Samuel 2:25, 29-30 and 3:14.

Jesus of Nazareth came in fulfillment of hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. Christ fulfilled the sacrificial system through His death and resurrection on our behalf. No more animals need to be sacrificed. Nevertheless, the abuse of the sacrificial system occurred even in New Testament times and we see this described in the books of Romans and Galatians.

In Romans, Paul admonishes the people: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!” (Rom. 6:1-2, NKJV). In Galatians 5:13 (MEV), we read: “You, brothers, have been called to liberty. Only do not use liberty to give an opportunity to the flesh.” In these verses, Paul is making reference to the fact that some people thought they could deliberately continue sinning with impunity.

They thought they could get away with deliberate sin because of God's grace; this would be using grace as an opportunity to sin. This is serious error! We see some of this error today in the "hyper-grace message" that is popular in some circles.

"Be not deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that will he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Deliberate sin is very serious, and it brings immediate chastisement and discipline from God. Deliberate sin can be forgiven. Deliberate sin brings temporal chastisement. Temporal chastisement is chastisement from God in this life, not necessarily extending into eternity.

Deliberate sin is called the sin unto death because the chastisement of God can be so severe as to cause the early death of the Christian. Once a deliberate sin is committed, there is chastisement; it can't be avoided. Repentance and prayer can lessen the chastisement but can't eliminate the chastisement. King David was forgiven of his sin with Bathsheba but was still chastened severely through Absalom's rebellion.

Chastisement is described in First Corinthians 11:30: "For this reason many are weak and unhealthy among you, and many die." This resulted from the fact that the Corinthians were abusing the communion service in a serious way and the chastisement of God came upon them, and some became sick and some died.

The sin unto death is mentioned in First John 5:16: "If anyone sees his brother commit a sin which does not lead to death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life. This is for those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death I do not say that he should pray for it." A presumptive, high-handed sin is a very serious sin and the chastisement of God comes on the sinner. There is essentially no escaping chastisement, not even through prayer. That's not to say that

the Christian who commits a sin unto death ends up in hell.

“If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss. But he himself will be saved, still going through the fire” (I Cor. 3:15). This refers to a Christian who lived his life in a flamboyant and presumptive way and has not produced good works but lived for himself and built up a life made of straw. When he stands before God, his works will be destroyed by fire. He will enter heaven because God’s gifts and calling are without repentance and he had received Christ as Savior and, to some small extent, followed Christ as Lord. However, he enters paradise under a cloud of regret and disgrace. Don’t be like that!!!

If we turn to Christ by faith and sincerely repent of our sins, we receive forgiveness of sins by benefit of Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection on our behalf.

The Scriptures teach that good works are not to be minimized. We mustn’t say: “I’ve got my fire insurance. I received Christ. Now I can commit any sin I want.” That makes a mockery of Christ’s death on our behalf. Doing good deeds is important for our walk as Christians in this temporal life and also determines our future rewards and our stations in life in paradise for eternity. {eo}

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