

The Lord's Supper



1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34 TEXT, EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL HELPS

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THE QUESTIONS CONCERNING PUBLIC WORSHIP, [1 Corinthians 11:2-34](#)

The Lord's Supper, [1 Corinthians 11:17-34](#)

[\(1 Corinthians 11:17-34\)](#) **Introduction:** the Lord's Supper is one of the ordinances of the church. It is crucial for believers to understand how it is and is not to be observed. This passage is a thorough study on the subject.

1. [Paul rebuked the way the Corinthians were celebrating the Lord's Supper \(v.17\).](#)
2. [The corruption of the Lord's Supper \(v.18-22\).](#)
3. [The real meaning of the Lord's Supper \(v.23-26\).](#)
4. [The severe consequences of partaking unworthily of the Lord's Supper \(v.27-30\).](#)
5. [The right approach to the Lord's Supper \(v.31-34\).](#)

1. [\(1 Corinthians 11:17\) Lord's Supper: Paul rebuked the way the Corinthians were celebrating the Lord's Supper.](#)

He had praised them for their diligence in keeping the traditions or customs of the church ([1 Cor. 11:2](#)), but in dealing with the Lord's Supper, he declared in no uncertain terms: "**I praise you not.**" The word "declare" (*paraggellōn*) means command. Note how forceful Paul is: "**Now in this [the Lord's Supper] I command you, I praise you not.**" His forcefulness stresses the awesome importance of the Lord's Supper and the absolute necessity to celebrate it as it should be celebrated.

Paul abruptly states: "**You come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper not for the better, not to edify yourselves by remembering the Lord's death; but you come together for the worse, to tear yourselves down.**"

2. [\(1 Corinthians 11:18-22\) Lord's Supper: the corruption of the Lord's Supper.](#)

The Corinthians were tragically abusing the Lord's Supper. The abuses may seem strange to some churches today because they simply partake of a bread crumb and a small glass of wine or grape juice to celebrate the Lord's Supper. However, as stated in the introductory note, the Corinthians observed the Lord's Supper with a full-fledged meal or *Love Feast*. There were *four abuses*, some of which are very applicable and speak very directly to the churches of every generation.

1. There were divisions and cliques within the church which corrupted the Lord's Supper ([1 Cor. 11:18-19](#)). When divisions, cliques, factions, and parties exist, the spirit of a church is in disorder. Minds and hearts are not upon the Lord nor at peace with the

Lord or with the Lord's people. **Disturbance, pain, anger, rumor, gossip, pride, selfishness, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation always prevail** when there are divisions and cliques within a church.

Note: Paul said he only believed part of what he had heard. He knew full well how matters begin to grow and become surrounded with rumors, innuendos, and exaggeration. However there was truth to what he had heard, and he knew it, and the church must correct it.

Note another matter that is of crucial importance for genuine believers within the church. Divisions and cliques within the church do not catch God off-guard nor by surprise. On the contrary, God allows the divisions and cliques for a very special reason: the division causes the genuine believer to stand out ever so much more. People who are divisive and cliquish cause the love and truth of genuine believers to shine ever so brightly.

In the words of Scripture:

"There must be heresies [factions] among you, that they which are approved [the tested, the genuine] may be made manifest [revealed, shown, demonstrated] among you."

Thought 1. This point is a great encouragement to the minister of God and to genuine believers as they face division, cliques, and opposition from the carnal and unsaved in the church.

Note the warning in this point as well. Any person who finds himself in a group that is divisive or cliquish stands in terrible danger. Divisiveness and cliquishness are proofs that a person is not genuine. He must repent and commit his life to the love and mission of the Lord (**cp. [1 Cor. 15:33](#)**).

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" ([1 Cor. 1:10](#)).

"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" ([1 Cor. 3:3](#)).

"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" ([Ephes. 4:3](#)).

"Only let your conversation [behavior] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" ([Phil. 1:27](#)).

"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" ([1 Peter 3:8](#)).

2. There was self-deception which corrupted the Lord's Supper ([1 Cor. 11:20](#)). Very simply, the Corinthians were only deceiving themselves in coming together and partaking of the cup and the bread. They may have thought they were celebrating the Lord's Supper, but they were not; they were utterly deceived. What they were doing was *not remembering and honoring* the Lord. It was utterly impossible to have a divisive and cliquish spirit and honor the Lord. Their meeting together was utterly meaningless and useless to the Lord.

"For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" ([Galatians 6:3](#)).

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" ([Galatians 6:7](#)).

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" ([James 1:22](#)).

"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" ([James 1:26](#)).

"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" ([1 John 3:7](#)).

"So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" ([Rev. 3:16-17](#)).

"For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful" ([Psalm 36:2](#)).

3. There was selfishness and neglect of others which corrupted the Lord's Supper ([1 Cor. 11:21](#)). When the early church came together for the *Love Feast*, everyone brought all the food they could. This provided plenty for everyone, including the poor and the slaves who would not be able to bring much.

The whole idea was to have a common meal where everyone shared:

- a. the rich and poor
- b. the Jew and Gentile
- c. the upper and lower class
- d. the free and enslaved
- e. the educated and uneducated
- f. the male and female
- g. the adult and child

However, the Corinthian church had begun to abuse the Supper. Instead of sharing, everyone sat off in their own little group of friends and shared their food only among themselves.

The result was tragic:

- a. Some were neglected, having little if anything to eat. This would be true in particular with the slaves
- b. Some were indulging, acting as gluttons.
- c. Some were treating the affair as a social gathering, drinking off to the side and becoming drunk.

There was no real Christian fellowship or love whatsoever being experienced. And although the church was partaking of the bread and the cup, it was not celebrating the Lord's Supper. What they were doing was totally meaningless and useless. What they were celebrating was a feast to the evil spirit of selfishness and indulgence, not to the Lord.

4. There was the abuse of the sanctity of the church and the shaming of the poor which corrupted the Lord's Supper. Note that this verse is a series of questions that answer themselves and should stir conviction within the heart of the guilty.
 - a. Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? The church is not the place where we are to eat and drink. It is the place of worship.
 - b. Are you not abusing the church and shaming the poor through your division, cliques, selfishness, indulgence, and hoarding? Of course you are!
 - c. "What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not!"

3. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) Lord's Supper: the real meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Paul clearly said that Christ discussed the Lord's Supper with him in a special revelation. What he received from the Lord is what he now shares. (Cp. [Acts 18:9](#); [Acts 22:18](#); [Acts 23:11](#); [Acts 27:23-25](#); [Galatians 1:12](#); [Galatians 2:2](#); [2 Cor. 12:7](#) for references to the special revelations Paul received of the Lord.)

Note that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the very night that He was betrayed.

1. The meaning of the bread: note the exact words of Christ.

- a. **"Take, eat: this is my body."** There are, of course, various interpretations of this statement. Some say that the bread actually becomes the substance of the Lord's body when a person eats the bread and drinks the cup. Others hold beliefs ranging from the elements being the actual substance to being merely a remembrance of the Lord.

But note the word **"is."** The word has the meaning of representing or identifying as well as of substance.

For example.....

1. "He is [represents] the image and glory of God" ([1 Cor. 11:7](#)).
2. "That rock was [represents] Christ" ([1 Cor. 10:4](#)). (Other references would be [John 8:12](#); [John 10:9](#).)

Note another point. When Jesus instructed the disciples to "take, eat," He was standing there. He even partook of the bread Himself. Certainly in that instance the bread was only representing or symbolizing His body.

Note another point as well. In passing the cup, Jesus did not say, "This is my blood." He said, "This cup is the new testament [covenant] in my blood." Of course, the cup was not literally the new covenant; it was only a symbol of the new covenant. Neither was it literally the blood of Christ; it was only representing the blood of Christ.

- b. **Note the words, "which is broken for you."** This refers to the death, the bruising, and the suffering of Christ. Note the words "for you" (*huper humōn*). The word "for" (*huper*) points to the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death. He died for us, as our substitute.

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" ([Galatians 3:13](#)).

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" ([Hebrews 2:9](#)).

"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" ([Hebrews 9:28](#)).

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" ([1 Peter 2:24](#)).

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" ([1 Peter 3:18](#)).

- c. "This do in remembrance of me." This means much more than just recalling the death of Christ. It means to actively stir up one's mind and to meditate upon the person of Jesus Christ. Christ says to remember me, not just one aspect of His Person and work. The believer is to *actively meditate* upon Christ.
2. **The meaning of the cup:** again, note the exact words of the Lord.
 - a. "This cup is the new testament [*diathēkē*, covenant] in my blood." The idea is that the old covenant of the Old Testament is being set aside and God is establishing a new covenant with His people. The *basis* of the new covenant is *the blood of Jesus Christ*, not the blood of bulls and goats.

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? and for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death...they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" ([Hebrews 9:13-15](#)).

- b. **"This do ye, as oft as ye drink it."** Christ, very simply, told His followers to do as He was doing in celebrating His supper: set a time aside, take the cup, bless it, and drink of it.

- c. **"In remembrance of me."** This is repeated to stress the point that the Lord's Supper has one purpose and only one purpose: to focus attention upon the Lord. The Lord's people are to center their minds upon Him and Him alone. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is not to be a time for fellowshiping and feasting.

3. The reason for observing the Lord's Supper: note the word **"show"** (*kataggellō*). It means to proclaim, preach, declare, announce.

The Lord's Supper is both a picture and sermon **which proclaims.....**

- a. the Lord's death
- b. the Lord's return

The point is this: Christ died for us that we might live eternally with Him. Therefore, His death pictures both what He has done for us and what He is going to do for us when He returns. His death is a picture of both our past and present redemption, and of our future redemption when we shall be conformed to His image of perfection.

"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" ([Romans 5:9](#)).

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation [behavior] received by tradition from your fathers" ([1 Peter 1:18](#)).

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" ([1 John 1:7](#)).

"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" ([Rev. 1:5](#)).

"For our conversation [behavior] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" ([Phil. 3:20-21](#)).

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" ([1 Thes. 4:16-18](#)).

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" ([Titus 2:13](#)).

4. (1 Corinthians 11:27-30) Judgment— Lord's Supper: the severe consequences or chastisement for partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily.

What does it mean to partake of the supper unworthily? Paul is speaking directly to the Corinthians, so whatever their sins were is bound to be what Paul means by unworthily.

The Corinthians were guilty of partaking of the Lord's Supper with.....

- a.** a spirit of division ([1 Cor. 11:18](#)).
- b.** a spirit of heresy (factions, parties, cliques, [1 Cor. 11:19](#)).
- c.** a spirit of self-deception ([1 Cor. 11:20](#)).
- d.** a spirit of selfishness and indulgence ([1 Cor. 11:21](#)).
- e.** a spirit of drunkenness ([1 Cor. 11:21](#)).
- f.** a spirit of neglecting the poor ([1 Cor. 11:21](#)).
- g.** a spirit of irreverence and carelessness in protecting the sanctity of the church ([1 Cor. 11:22](#)).
- h.** a spirit of unthoughtfulness and carelessness in approaching the Lord's Supper.

Very frankly, the above list seems to indicate that having sin within one's heart and life is what is meant by partaking unworthily. Certainly, if we eat the bread and drink the cup with *unconfessed sin* in our hearts and lives, how can we be counted worthy?

Our only worthiness is Jesus Christ, and the only time we are counted worthy by Him **is when we are walking.....**

- a.** in constant confession.
- b.** in constant repentance to Him.
- c.** in constant praise of His mercy, grace, Person, and work.

We have no righteousness of our own, so the only conceivable time we could be counted worthy would be when we are walking in constant fellowship with Him. And constant fellowship means actively thinking upon and talking with Him through confession, repentance, praise, and request.

There are three consequences for partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily, that is, with unconfessed sin in one's heart and life.

1. A person becomes guilty of the Lord's death ([1 Cor. 11:27](#)). The idea is that the person shall be held accountable, for he is guilty of sin against the Lord Himself.

He.....

- a. insults Christ
- b. offends Christ
- c. tramples Christ underfoot
- d. counts the death of Christ as meaningless
- e. does despite to Christ

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace" ([Hebrews 10:29](#)).

2. A person condemns himself if he does not examine his heart for unconfessed sin ([1 Cor. 11:28-29](#)). The severity of the consequence is so serious that a person must examine himself before partaking of the Lord's Supper. He needs to make sure he has a clean heart by confessing and repenting of any known sin ([1 Cor. 11:28](#)).

The word "**damnation**" (*krima*) means "to judge, to condemn." It does not mean to damn or to doom to eternal hell and punishment. The person is assumed to be a real believer who is guilty of sin, not an unbeliever who is to be damned to hell. The actual judgment upon the believer who lives in sin is covered in the next point.

The word "**discern**" (*diakrinō*) means "to discriminate, to distinguish." The person who eats the bread and drinks the cup unworthily just fails to think about what he is doing. He fails to discriminate and discern the seriousness of his act. If he thought about the matter, he would not partake of the Lord's Supper with unconfessed sin in his life, for such irreverence of the body and blood of the Lord stirs the judgment of God.

"Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD" ([Lament. 3:40](#)).

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" ([2 Cor. 13:5](#)).

"But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another" ([Galatians 6:4](#)).

3. A person is disciplined and chastened by the Lord ([1 Cor. 11:30](#)). The Corinthians were so rank in their abuse of the Lord's Supper that God had to act in severe discipline. His discipline included both sickness and death. This fact is stated so simply and

straightforwardly that it has to be taken for what it says unless the Scripture is to be twisted. There is nothing in the context that even suggests that weak and sickly death are symbolic.

When dealing with God's discipline or chastisement of His people, three things need to be kept in mind.

- a. God does discipline His child. He disciplines His child because He loves him ([Hebrews 12:5-13](#)).
- b. God disciplines His child to prevent the child from destroying himself and hurting and damaging others through serious sin ([1 Cor. 11:29, 31](#)).
- c. God knows exactly what kind of discipline will most likely awaken his child to repentance and confession.
- d. God knows when a believer should be taken on home to heaven. God alone knows when a *sinning believer has gone so far in sin* that he is never going to repent. At that point, the believer's task upon earth is done; he will never again have a testimony for Christ upon earth, nor be of any real value to anyone else. As stated, only God knows when a believer who is living in sin reaches such a point. When he does, he is ready to be taken home. His damage to Christ and to loved ones and to the world have gone far enough.

Apparently, some of the Corinthian believers had reached the point of no return, so God took them on home to be with Him. (See [Deeper Study #1, Judgment—1 John 5:16](#), see [page # 12 for more discussion](#)).

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" ([John 15:2](#)).

"But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" ([1 Cor. 11:32](#)).

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" ([Hebrews 12:5-8](#)).

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" ([Rev. 3:19](#)).

"Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee" ([Deut. 8:5](#)).

"He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain" ([Job 33:19](#)).

"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law" ([Psalm 94:12](#)).

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction" ([Proverbs 3:11](#)).

"O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing" ([Jeremiah 10:24](#)).

5. (1 Corinthians 11:31-34) Lord's Supper: the right approach to the Lord's Supper.

Note four points.

1. Approach the Lord's Supper by judging yourself, that is, by examining yourself. We are to examine and make sure we are not living in sin or carrying some known and unconfessed sin in our hearts. We are certainly not to partake of the Lord's Supper if we are living in known sin.

2. Accept the chastening of the Lord. Confess and repent, turn from your life of sin, knowing that God is chastening you out of love. He is chastening you to keep you from being condemned with the world. This apparently refers to the final judgment. The person who continuously lives in known sin is apparently running the risk of being judged with the unbelievers of the world.

3. Serve one another. Stop acting selfishly and stop indulging yourselves. Share and demonstrate love by putting others first.

4. Do not bring condemnation upon yourself. Straighten your life out; sin no more. Change what you have been doing. Eat at home, and come together for the Lord's Supper. Do everything decently and in order.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" ([2 Cor. 4:17](#)).

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" ([Hebrews 12:11](#)).

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" ([Job 5:17](#)).

"But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" ([Job 23:10](#)).

"Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more" ([Job 34:31](#)).

"Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word" ([Psalm 119:67](#)).

"And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice" ([Jonah 2:2](#)).

Deeper Study #1, Judgment—1 John 5:16

[\(1 John 5:16\)](#) **Sin— Believer's Judgment**: this is a difficult passage. It is one of those passages where there are almost as many different interpretations as there are words in the passage. **The one thing that is clear is this: this passage is a severe warning.** It is a warning so severe that one must walk ever so righteously; one must trust the Lord Jesus Christ to grant the power to overcome sin.

There are several passages of Scripture that issue a severe warning and **speak of the sinful behavior of believers**.....

- a. sinful behavior that causes loss of all reward by fire—a loss so great one is stripped as much as a burned-out building. It is the loss of all except the bare salvation of oneself ([1 Cor. 3:11-15](#), esp. [1 Cor. 3:15](#)).
- b. sinful behavior that destroys the flesh so that the spirit may be saved ([1 Cor. 5:5](#)).
- c. sinful behavior that can cause a person to become a castaway ([1 Cor. 9:27](#)).
- d. sinful behavior that causes death for a believer ([1 Cor. 11:29-30](#), esp. [1 John 5:30](#); [1 John 5:16](#)).
- e. sinful behavior that merits no escape ([Hebrews 2:1-3](#); [Hebrews 12:25](#)).
- f. sinful behavior that prohibits a person from ever repenting again ([Hebrews 6:4](#)).
- g. sinful behavior that causes a person to miss God's rest ([Hebrews 4:1](#)).
- h. sinful behavior that prohibits any future sacrifice for sins and merits terrible punishment ([Hebrews 10:26](#)).
- i. sinful behavior that entangles a person in the pollutions of the world after he has come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ ([2 Peter 2:20](#)).
- j. sinful behavior that leads to death ([1 John 5:16](#)).

There are basically two positions on the "**sin unto death**" that need to be looked at and studied.

1. The first position sees the *sin unto death* as being spiritual and eternal death. Some who hold this position believe that it can be committed only by a person who makes a *false profession*; others think that it can be committed by *genuine believers*. Note these facts.

- a. **First**, note the word *brother*. The word *brother* means either true believers or professing believers who commit the *sin unto death*. The person who commits the sin unto death is a *church member*.
- b. **Second**, note that the words life and death must correspond. If it is spiritual and eternal life that God gives to a person, then the sin unto death has to be referring to spiritual and eternal death. **(The Greek scholar Marvin Vincent points this out. *Word Studies In The New Testament*, Vol.1, p.371.)**

Note what the verse is saying:

"[God] shall give him life for them that sin not unto death" ([1 John 5:16](#)).

What kind of life is John talking about? Physical or spiritual life? The context points strongly to spiritual and eternal life. This has been the whole discussion of this passage: **for example**.....

"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" ([1 John 5:12](#)).

Again, if the life that God gives is spiritual and eternal life, then the *sin unto death* must correspond; it must mean the opposite, that is, spiritual and eternal death. **Note what the full verse says:**

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him [spiritual] life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death [spiritual death]: I do not say that he shall pray for it" ([1 John 5:16](#)).

- c. **Third**, does this mean that a believer can commit sin to the point that he is doomed to spiritual and eternal death? If so, what do we do with passages of Scripture where *God assures Christ* that He will never lose a single brother who genuinely believes in Him?

Passages and promises such as these.....

1. God will allow no genuine believer to be plucked out of His hand.

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man [no one, Greek (includes Satan)] pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" ([John 10:28-29](#)).

2. God has predestinated believers to the image of Christ so that Christ will have many brothers.

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" ([Romans 8:29](#)).

3. God will perform the work of salvation and growth until the day of Jesus Christ.

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" ([Phil. 1:6](#)).

4. God keeps the believer by His power.

"Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" ([1 Peter 1:5](#)).

"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" ([2 Tim. 1:12](#)).

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever" ([Jude 24-25](#)).

To repeat the question above, does the *sin unto death* mean that a believer can commit sin to the point that he is doomed to spiritual and eternal death?

1. Once a person is *born again* by the Spirit of God, can he be *unborn*?
2. Once a person receives the divine nature of God, once the divine nature has been incorporated into the fiber of his being, can the divine nature be taken away and unincorporated? (Cp. [2 Peter 1:4](#).)
3. Once a person has been given the incorruptible seed and nature, can he again become corruptible? (Cp. [1 Peter 1:23](#); [1 Peter 1:3-4](#).)
4. Once a person has been created into a *new creature* in Christ, can he become the *old creature* again? (Cp. [2 Cor. 5:17](#).)
5. Once a person is transformed from the *old man* into the *new man*, can he be re-transformed and changed back into the *old man*? (Cp. [Ephes. 4:22-24](#).)
6. Once the Spirit of God enters a person's life and turns the person's body into a *holy temple*, does the Spirit ever leave a person? (Cp. [John 14:16-17](#); [1 Cor. 3:16-17](#); [1 Cor. 6:19-20](#).)

7. Once our Lord Jesus Christ Himself has entered the life of a person, does God ever lose the life to such a point that His Son has to leave the life? (Cp. [John 14:16-18](#); [John 14:20](#); [John 17:23](#); [Galatians 2:20](#); [Col. 1:27](#); [Rev. 3:20](#).)

Now note: all this would have to be possible and would have to happen if the *sin unto death* refers to a genuine believer. Does the *sin unto death* refer.....

1. to a genuine believer or to a professing believer?
2. to a person who looks like a brother but is a false believer?

John himself refers to some *professing believers* who had committed the terrible sin of denying Christ. He calls them **antichrists (plural)**, persons who had been in the church and who had professed Christ, but who had turned away from Christ and stood opposed to Him.

Note that these persons had been in the church, but they had forsaken Christ and had left the church. Picture the scene: there would still be friends and perhaps family members in the church who loved them and cared for them and who wanted them to be led back to Christ and His church. Therefore, they would be praying for them to return. But note: their sin is so great that John does not encourage people to pray for them. He does not forbid it, but he does not encourage it. He simply says: "**I do not say that he [the true believer, the loved one] shall pray for it [the sin unto death].**"

Note what John says about these whom he calls antichrists:

"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. *They went out from us, but they were not of us*; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" ([1 John 2:18-19](#)).

- d. Now what is the *sin unto death*? Marvin Vincent (the Greek scholar) says that it is "**the tendency...to cut the bond of fellowship with Christ....[it is] whatever breaks the fellowship with the soul and Christ, and, by consequence, with the individual and the body of believers...for there is no life apart from Christ.**" He says that the sin arises from the character of a person who is "**alien from God.**"

That is, the person never knew God, not really. His profession was false to begin with ([Word Studies In The New Testament, Vol.1, p.371](#)). Kenneth Wuest, who is also a Greek scholar, says,

" 'The sin unto death' refers in the context in which John is writing, to the denial of the Incarnation...it would be committed by those whom John designates as antichrists, who did not belong to the true Christian body of believers, but were unsaved" (In These Last Days. "Word Studies in the Greek New Testament," Vol.4. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1946, p.181).

Kenneth Wuest also quotes the Greek scholar Henry Alford of the Alford Greek Testament as saying:

"There are those who have gone out from us, not being of us ([1 John 2:19](#)), who are called antichrists, who not only 'have not' Christ, but are Christ's enemies, denying the Father and the Son ([1 John 2:22](#)), whom we are not even to receive into our houses nor to greet ([2 John 10, 11](#)). These seem to be the persons pointed out here, and this is the sin, namely, the denial that Jesus is the Christ, the incarnate Son of God. This alone of all sins bears upon it the stamp of severance from Him who is the Life itself. As the confession of Christ, with the mouth and in the heart, is salvation unto life ([Romans 10:9](#)), so denial of Christ with the mouth and in the heart, is sin unto death" (In These Last Days. "Word Studies in the Greek New Testament," Vol.4, p.181).

A.T. Robertson, another Greek scholar, says:

"John conceives of a sin that is deadly enough to be called 'unto death'....There is a distinction in [Hebrews 10:26](#) between sinning wilfully after full knowledge and sins of ignorance ([Hebrews 5:2](#)). Jesus spoke of the unpardonable sin ([Mark 3:29](#); [Matthew 12:32](#); [Luke 12:10](#)), which was attributing to the devil the manifest work of the Holy Spirit. It is possible that John has this idea in mind when he applies it to those who reject Jesus Christ as God's Son and set themselves up as antichrists" ([Word Pictures In The New Testament, Vol.6, p.243](#)).

William Barclay says that the Greek for "sin unto death" (*harmatia pros thanaton*) means "the sin which is going towards death, the sin whose end is death, the sin which, if continued in, must finish in death" (*The Letters of John and Jude*, p.142).

He says that the sin is.....

1. persistent sin
2. obstinate sin
3. deliberate sin
4. cold-blooded sin
5. wide open sin
6. purposeful sin

He says that the *sin unto death* is committed by a man.....

1. who persists in sin
2. who rejoices in sin
3. who never thinks of temptation as a sin
4. who has no regret for sinning
5. who glories in his sin
6. who boasts in his sin
7. who is proud of his sin
8. who is proud that he knows how to get away with his sin
9. who delights in sin

In his usual descriptive way, **William Barclay** describes the person who commits the *sin unto death*:

"Now in life it is a fact of experience that there are two kinds of sinners....So long as a man in his heart of hearts hates sin and hates himself for sinning, so long as he knows that he is sinning, he is never beyond repentance, and, therefore, never beyond forgiveness; but once a man begins to revel in sin, and to make sin the deliberate policy of his life, and loses all sense of the terror and the awfulness of sin, and also the feeling of self-disgust, he is on the way to death, for he is on the way to a state where the idea of repentance will not, and cannot enter his head.

"The sin unto death is the state of the man who has listened to sin so often, and refused to listen to God so often, that he has come to a state when he loves his sin, and when he regards sin as the most profitable thing in the world" ([The Letters of John and Jude](#), p.142).

The conclusion of this interpretation would be one of two conclusions:

First, there are some who conclude that the sin unto death refers to a professing believer, a person who makes a profession only, a false profession.

Therefore, he was never really converted.....

1. never born again
2. never indwelt by the Holy Spirit
3. never filled with the divine nature
4. never indwelt by Christ
5. never made into a new man
6. never created into a new creature
7. never filled with the incorruptible nature

Because of this, the person is easily led back into the world and into sin. He leaves the fellowship of believers and of the church and returns to the possessions and pleasures of the world. He stands opposed to Christ, not really believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Second, there are others who conclude that the sin unto death refers to genuine believers. The person who commits the sin unto death was genuinely converted, but he now becomes unconverted.

- a. He loses his *new birth*; he is no longer born again.
- b. He loses his *divine nature*; it is taken from him.
- c. He loses the *Holy Spirit*; the Holy Spirit leaves the body of the believer and turns the body back into a temple for sin and death.
- d. He loses the *new man*; his new man is re-transformed back into the old man.
- e. He loses the creation of the *new creature*; he is recreated back into the old creature.
- f. He loses the indwelling presence of Christ; God loses the sinner to the point that Christ has to leave him.

Now note: as stated in the beginning, if the life that God gives is spiritual and eternal life, then the sin unto death has to be spiritual and eternal death. Therefore, the person who commits the sin is either a genuine believer or only a professing believer, a person making a false profession. John does call the person a *brother*. Therefore, we can say that this means he is definitely a genuine believer.

Or, we can say that every professing believer in the church *looks* like a brother to us, but many are not. They are making a false profession, and very practically, we cannot always tell who is a genuine brother and who is a false brother. We can say that John knew this as well as we do; therefore, he is calling every church member a brother, but making it clear that some are making a false profession. They are committing *sin that leads to death*.

Whatever position we take, we must make sure that we are taking it because we are convinced that it is the teaching of God's Word. We must never hold a position because of such things as denomination, church, friends, teachers, or education. We must study the Word and let the Word interpret and speak for itself. And where there are difficult passages, we must come to the best conclusion we can under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There is no question that the warnings of Scripture given to believers are some of the most difficult passages to interpret in all of Scripture. Perhaps God has deliberately made them this way to warn us how terrible sin is, that we must watch and guard against sin—that sin points to a false profession—that sin can and does lead to severe consequences—that we must be careful to make our profession sure and steadfast—that we can not deliberately and willfully sin and be obstinate and hardened in sin, not without suffering the most severe consequences.

2. The second position sees the sin unto death as referring to physical death. Briefly stated, these commentators say that the person is a genuine believer who falls into sin so deeply that he has to be severely disciplined by God and taken on home to be with Him.

They look at the passage dealing with the sinful behavior of believers and say that a believer can continue in sin and can practice sin, and that there is no question about this. The believer still has freedom of choice.

And despite the tug and the pull of the Holy Spirit within, every honest believer knows what it is to succumb and give in to sin. Most believers even know what it is to practice sin for awhile without repentance. It is only the longsuffering of God that convicts and that leads to repentance.

This position would say this: perhaps it is possible for a believer to continue in sin so long that he reaches a point of no return (see [Acts 5:5-6](#)). He is so rooted and imbedded in sin that God knows he will never repent. Now if such is possible, only God could know it. Only God can know the heart of a man to such a point that He knows the future of the man.

If a man reaches that point of no repentance, his testimony and service on earth is forever ruined and forever useless. In fact, he has brought disrepute and dishonor to the name of Christ. He has harmed the Lord's cause, and so long as he is on earth, he will continue to add to the sin of the world and to heap abuse upon the name of Christ. His very purpose for living upon the earth as a Christian is lost and gone forever.

The desire to return to the Lord and to live for Him, and to witness to His saving grace will never be aroused in his heart again. God knows this. But despite all this, God still loves him. And God has determined, for Christ's sake, that His purpose will be fulfilled in every single believer ([Romans 8:29](#)). Not a single believer shall be plucked out of His hand ([John 10:28](#)). Thus, God takes the believer on to be with Him. God goes ahead and unites the believer with Christ, His dear Son (**cp. [1 Cor. 11:29-30](#)**).

There are several examples in Scripture that seem to be warning and speaking to men about the same sinful behavior.

There is the example.....

- a. of Moses' death ([Deut. 32:48-52](#)).
- b. of Israel and the golden calf ([Exodus 32:1-35](#)).
- c. of the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath right after the Sabbath was instituted ([Numbers 15:32-36](#)).
- d. of Nadab and Abihu ([Leviticus 10:1-2](#)).
- e. of Korah ([Numbers 16:31-34](#)).
- f. of Achan ([Joshua 7:16-26](#)).
- g. of Uzziah ([2 Samuel 6:1-7](#)).
- h. of Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:1-11](#)).
- i. of the man who had slipped into a shameful immoral sin ([1 Cor. 5:1-5](#)).
- j. of some who had slipped into sin and were mocking God by partaking of the Lord's Supper without repenting ([1 Cor. 11:27-30](#)).

Oliver Greene says:

"What IS 'the sin unto death'? The best place to find the answer is in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth. If you will study [1 Cor. 11](#) in its entirety, you will find that some of the believers were grievously misbehaving at the Lord's table, making gluttons of themselves and drinking until they became intoxicated....' FOR THIS CAUSE many are weak and sickly among you, AND MANY SLEEP (are dead).'

"Paul also warned the Corinthian Christians that if they would judge themselves, repent of their misbehaving in the house of God and straighten up, God would not be forced to judge them; but if they did not judge themselves, God would have no alternative but to judge and chasten them, that they should 'not be condemned with the world' ([1 Cor. 11:32](#)).

"The 'sin unto death' therefore is continually rebelling against light. When a believer knows what he should do, when he is convicted that he should do it, and yet he refuses to obey the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, he is in danger of committing the sin unto death.

"We have another instance of this in [1 Cor. 5:1-5](#), when immorality was found in the church. A young man had taken his father's wife and was guilty of fornication. There are those who will not agree that this young man was saved and had committed the sin unto death, but Paul clearly told the other believers in the church what action they should take in the matter:

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of Lord Jesus Christ, to DELIVER SUCH AN ONE UNTO SATAN, FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FLESH, THAT THE SPIRIT MAY BE SAVED IN THE DAY OF THE LORD JESUS' ([1 Cor. 5:4, 5](#)).

"Beloved, it is clear that the sin unto death has nothing to do with the salvation of the soul; it has to do with the destruction of the body. Such a person will 'suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire' ([1 Cor. 3:12-15](#)). All reward is lost, and such a one will stand before God empty handed. What that will mean, I confess I do not know; but according to the passage from 1 Corinthians, the person who loses his reward will 'suffer loss' - not loss of soul and spirit, but loss of eternal reward" ([The Epistles of John](#), p.211).

Oliver Greene gives an excellent illustration in the life of Abraham:

"But 'there IS a sin unto death,' and when a believer has committed that sin there is no point in praying for him. In the life of Abraham we find an illustration of a time when it was useless to pray. In [Genesis 18:20-30](#) God revealed to Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham knew that his nephew Lot and his family were living in Sodom, so he drew near to God and asked, 'Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?' The Lord replied, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.' But there could not be fifty righteous men found in all of Sodom - and Abraham continued to pray until the number was reduced to ten - just ten righteous people in the great city of Sodom. And the Lord said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.' But God knew that ten righteous ones could not be found in the city, and [Genesis 18:33](#) tells us that 'THE LORD WENT HIS WAY, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham.'

"With God there is a stopping place, a limit; and Abraham had reached that limit in his intercession for Sodom. God ceased communing with him and left him. What God actually said in departing was, 'Abraham, there is no need to pray any longer. There is no need for you to make further request. Pray no more for Sodom, for that city must be destroyed!' When a city or an individual has committed such sin, there is no reason for any Christian to pray for that city or that individual.

*There are times when we should no longer pray for certain people, there are times when we should no longer witness to certain people. Concerning things spiritual Jesus said, 'Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you' ([Matthew 7:6](#))" (*The Epistles of John*, p.210).*

Thought 1. Whatever our position, we must always remember this: the answer to sin is repentance and confession. As long as a person is still alive, he can repent and confess his sin and God will forgive him and restore him into the fellowship of His dear Son. As long as we are living, there is still hope; there is assurance of forgiveness and cleansing if we will only repent and confess.

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" ([Luke 13:3](#)).

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" ([Acts 3:19](#)).

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" ([Acts 8:22](#)).

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" ([Ephes. 1:7](#)).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" ([1 John 1:9](#)).

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" ([Isaiah 55:7](#)).