



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
www.anchoredminot.com



The Epistle of First John

Responding to Threats Against The Church's One Foundation

1 John 5:13-21

The good news of the Gospel should lead to our assurance. Not arrogance but assurance and confidence.

The Christian's assurance is not just some sort of theoretical philosophy – empty words. And it is not an inner strength. Assurance is not being a theological Rambo or a faith giant. Assurance is a reality that is given to Christians of all sorts of shapes, sizes, and experiences. Assurance comes about when one knows that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. So, assurance is not acquired, earned, or created by the Christian – but something that is given as a fruit of the Gospel.

This assurance and confidence are such that the Christian can ask anything before God. Indeed, because of the blood of Christ, the Lord hears our prayers. And, as it has been said before, "When the Lord says 'yes' to our prayers, it is because He loves us; when the Lord says 'no' to our prayers, it is because He loves us."

John then shifts his comments to sin, repentance, and sin unto death. So, what are we to make of all of this?

Quite often, parishioners will fear that they have committed a sin unto death – "Have I committed the Unpardonable Sin?"

The old Catholics used this verse to come up with the seven deadly sins of pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth. These are called mortal sins. However, they contrasted these 'mortal' sins with what is called 'venial' sins. While it is important to understand that some sins lead to forgiveness and other sins can lead to damnation, we Lutherans, though, do not necessarily attach the titles of "mortal and venial" to specific sins.

To explain this a bit more, let us hear what Luther has to say on this subject from several theological statements that he made in the 1500s.

Luther states, *“The works of the righteous would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God.”* And, *“In the sight of God, sins are then truly venial when they are feared by men to be mortal.”* Did you get that? What Luther is simply saying is that sins are truly venial (forgivable) when they are feared to be mortal (damnable). And so, we Lutherans fear all sins – knowing that even the smallest of sins is serious business. All sin is bad; all sin needs to be repented of.

But what about this idea of the unpardonable sin?

Scripture talks about this in several places.

- 1) In the Gospels, the Pharisees and other religious people consistently and deliberately refuse to believe in Christ. They are opposing the work of the Holy Spirit. They were so opposed to Jesus; they attributed Jesus’ work to the devil. And so, in this example, it is an outright and blatant rejection of Jesus.
- 2) In Hebrews, we hear about this as well, in the sixth chapter. When individuals reject the gift of repentance and faith (Christ’s mercy and forgiveness), they are acting like the crowd that called for Jesus’ crucifixion. In other words, when we speak, act, and function like the work of Christ has no power or relevance, we are going down a slippery slope of trampling on the Son of God.
- 3) And here in our passage from 1 John, John is showing that can commit the unpardonable sin when we claim to know it all (denying God’s truth); shamelessly live by our own rules, denying needed repentance, and so forth.

As a general rule, if one is worried about breaking the unpardonable sin (rejecting/abandoning Jesus), they have not broken it. But those who have? They generally are very aware that they are trampling on Jesus, or they simply don’t care. They have left the light and blind in the darkness, not giving a second thought to Christ.

As Christians, we see the need here to constantly repent of our sins. Being born of God, we do not make sin our hobby but confession our hobby. Because we sin much, we confess much. And the Lord? He forgives much.

