

The Sin Unto Death

What is it? Can it still be committed?

It is with great sadness that I have to report that I have known many people apostatise from the faith over several decades. Some of these were close friends, or even relatives; more than once the apostasy included a personal betrayal or a wrong separation from me. A recent case of this has led me to consider again the sin unto death; not least because I have been very convicted recently about the sheer number of superficial Christians present in the church today.

The doctrine of sin

Most Christians just simply fail to appreciate the vital importance and the scope of the doctrine of sin. That sin is enormously important to God is demonstrated by the simple fact that the sin of Satan led to the continuing war in the cosmos between the armies of God and the forces of the devil. Then the sin of Adam led to the outworking of all the decrees of God regarding salvation. Nothing that happens today would be happening were it not for sin.

Sin opposes God's attributes

Now God hates sin with a great passion. Sin is the antithesis of holiness. Because God is perfectly holy and without blemish he hates sin and all his being reacts against it. His justice demands punishment. The affront to his eternal perfection demands an everlasting punishment. The betrayal of his goodness in creation results in God's hatred of those who sin. The spurning of an infinite God results in an infinite condemnation in hell. The act of rebellion against God as king results in the terminal wrath of the king in judgment. The rejection of God as the Judge and Lawgiver results in the sentence of a guilty verdict. The rejection of man's responsibility to God as his bountiful Creator results in the creation of a place of doom, darkness, pain and suffering in hell for all sinners. The rejection of loving fellowship with God results in everlasting separation from all goodness, hope, beauty, love, loveliness, grace and mercy in hell.

Sin betrays and opposes all God's attributes; thus all God's attributes are focused together in the destruction (not annihilation)¹ of the sinner.

God's mercy does not diminish his hatred of sin

However, because God is also merciful and full of grace to the elect (alone), Christians tend to focus upon God's mercy to the diminution of understanding sin. But God hates sin. In an age of antinomianism it is saddening that so many believers just do not understand the importance and dangers of sin. Sin needs to be understood Biblically and perceived as a threat to one's well being and to growth in grace.

Dancing with sin is extremely dangerous. Because the true Christian can know forgiveness of sins committed as a believer, through confession and repentance by the cleansing of the blood of Jesus, there is the danger of developing a casual attitude to sin. However, those

¹ Biblical destruction really means to separate. The destruction in hell is eternal separation from God. Nothing is ever really destroyed in the sense of eradicated, it is just changed.

who sin without repentance are merely evidencing the fact that they are not true Christians. Now it is my experience that professing believers in the church today frequently sin without seeing any need to repent. Indeed, I have often confronted such. This is the basis of the sin unto death.

The text

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death. 1 Jn 5:16-17

Now these verses have caused confusion and worry to many over the years so we need to tread carefully.

Key words

In John's letter the word 'life' always means eternal life and the word 'death' always means spiritual death not physical death (1 Jn 3:14).

Background

John was facing a situation where people in the church, people who considered themselves to be Christians, were condoning sin, separating from brethren, hating brethren openly, denying that Jesus had come in the flesh (denying his human nature) and doing all this deliberately while remaining in the church. It was a period, late in the first century, where errors and heresies were becoming rampant.

Sins not unto death

The only sins that do not result in death are those for which forgiveness has been found in Christ. This, then, refers to a sinning brother who is known to have grace and who repents for his sin ordinarily. The righteous believer, seeing his brother commit sin, counsels him and prays for his forgiveness.

Note the similarity with James:

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. Jm 5:19-20

Note the importance of John's thrust, which is on this aspect; it is normal for believers to see a brother sinning and to confront them, to admonish them, to exhort them to repentance and to pray for their recovery. Though this is often rejected today, it is the proper thing to do. There is far too little confessing of sins to one another today; something that was common in the early church:

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. Jm 5:16

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Gal 6:1

Traditional interpretations of the sin unto death to be discarded

We will deal with these concisely as follows:

- Sins not unto death were those committed before a person was baptised. Sins unto death are those committed after baptism. This was held by some church fathers.
- It refers to the Jewish punishments, some of which were punishable by death under the law, others that were not.
- It refers to the civil law of a certain place where a sin may be punished by death by the magistrate or ruler.

Sin results in death

All sins result in death; death is the result of sin. Despite this many sinners receive grace and mercy and find forgiveness for these very sins. However, there are certain sins, which certainly and inevitably result in death in all that commit it, without exception. There are sins for which there is no mercy, under any circumstances.

In the OT deliberate sin carried the death penalty while inadvertent sin did not (Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27, 5:15, 17-18; Num 15:27-31).

It is not the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come. Matt 12: 31-32

Now this sin is generally explained as a rejection and criticism of a clear manifestation of the Spirit, such as by a miracle of Jesus in his days on earth. It was spoken by Jesus immediately after his enemies had done exactly this:

Now when the Pharisees heard *it* they said, 'This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons'. Matt 12:24

When the Pharisees attributed a miracle by Jesus to the devil, they committed this terrible sin.

Now some commentators say that this sin could only be committed while Jesus was on earth, when a person could attribute his miracles to Satan. Others affirm that it could be committed today if a work of the Lord, through the church by the Spirit, is averred to be of the devil. This is less clear but it may still be possible if the work was obvious, miraculous, godly and genuine. Those who claim this for Charismatic churches are asking too much.

However, the sin unto death is not the blasphemy against the Spirit. They are two different things.

It can be committed by brethren in the church

The blasphemy against the Spirit is obviously committed by enemies of Christ; but the sin unto death under consideration in John's letter is committed by a 'brother'. We can pray for a brother who sins a sin which is not unto death and God will give life. In other words God will intervene, convict of sin, which then leads to confession and repentance. There is no other forgiveness for sins committed than the blood of Christ and this involves confession (1 Jn 1:8-9).

All unrighteousness is sin because it is not doing right, it is disobeying God's law. But there is a form of unrighteousness that leads to death; a disobedience which leads to death. We are told that there is a sin leading to death and we should not pray about that type of sin.

Now John's words appear to show that the sin unto death is committed by supposed Christians and non-Christians, but he is concerned here with brethren who sin. His letter had begun by talking about the problem of sin in Christians and the need for confession, while his letter later mentions the danger of brethren being false. In fact, several times he explains that some brethren in the church are not really of God.²

Thus there are those in the church who claim to be brethren, who appear to be brethren, but are not brethren. These have committed the sin unto death.

So what is it?

There is only one sin that will certainly kill you; it is the sin of rejecting Christ. There is no hope for the person who rejects Christ as Lord and Saviour; none!

If there is only one salvation and you reject that salvation, then there is no hope for you, only death.

Therefore, the sin unto death is a rejection of Christ and the Gospel.

Why non-specific?

It is interesting that John does not amplify his explanation here and leaves the sin unto death as a non-specific thing. He does not define it.

Now many commentators have left this as it is and the result is that many people in church see this sin as only committed by those outside church. It is committed by those who reject Christ. This has left people complacent about this sin. But John wrote this as a warning to the brethren in the context of brethren who were false. There is no place for complacency about this sin in church people.

The worriers

Again, commentators often say that Christian people who worry that they may have committed this sin are proving that they haven't by the sheer fact that they are worried about getting it wrong. They want to obey God.

There is some truth in this but it is too general a statement.

Many believers have a lack of assurance about their salvation, especially in some Reformed Baptist situations. Such folk tend to be worried about this sin due to their lack of experience of the Holy Spirit, whose sealing leads to assurance being felt as well as known. Christians that do not understand or experience the sealing of the Spirit³ will lack assurance. However, such have not committed the sin unto death. They just lack assurance. Their love for God and his word, plus fear of sin, is proof enough of their safety.

The real problem

The real problem regards those in church who do not worry about their sin. The toleration of sin will kill you, plain and simple. Having no fear of God or sin will kill you because it is rejecting Christ and his law.

Genuine Christians will mourn for their sin. Grief over sin is an attribute of godliness.

² Such as 1 Jn 2:4, 3:17, 4:1, 8, 20.

³ All Christians have been sealed; there is no second blessing, mystical experience to seek. However, many believers fail to enjoy the good of this experience or just do not know about it.

All of us sin. All of us sin often. All of us sin grievously. However, true believers will grieve for their sin and will not cease until they have put the matter straight.

This first includes conviction of sin (knowing that I have sinned), followed by confession of that sin to God (and also to someone else if they have been offended), followed by true repentance (which means a change of mind and direction to not do it again). In some cases of offence then restitution may be necessary.

When a Christian goes through this process, it is evidence that they are genuine believers. However, we are seeing today a generation of churchgoers that do not do this and do not even care about their sin. This is dangerous.

Such people demonstrate the reverse of the attitude of the true believer regarding sin. Thus they show no conviction of sin (they do not even see it as sin). They do not confess their sin (even if exhorted to). They do not apologise to someone offended by their sin. They do not repent for their sin and change their attitude; neither do they make any necessary restitution.

Many in this position are in trouble because they have believed the lies of antinomian preachers who have told them that they can never be guilty. This is a lie and completely unbiblical. Such a lie would have done Ananias and Sapphira no good – they were killed for their sin; indeed their sin was even in the process of doing a very good work of love; yet they were still killed for sin.

We can refer to Hebrews 6 here.

For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame. Heb 6:4-6

One interpretation of this is as follows:⁴ these are spurious Christians. They were enlightened about the Gospel (that is they understood the message) and tasted (but did not eat) the heavenly gift, they shared something in the work of the Spirit in church life and tasted something of God's word and power in the church but were merely professing believers. If they fall away from the church it is impossible to renew their repentance; if they reject Christ there is no other answer to sin.

John is teaching something similar. If a churchgoer tolerates sin and does not repent, his sin will lead to death because he is rejecting the only salvation there is, in Christ.

True Christians are known by their hatred of sin, mourning for it when committed and leading a life of repentance.

The sin unto death is non-specific because it is inclusive

So, tolerating your sin is the real problem. Now this is why John is not specific in explaining what the sin unto death is. There are many sins that can lead to death because they are all symptoms of rejecting Christ. We know this is true because Paul tells us:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you

⁴ In fact I favour the view that this is a hypothetical argument to make a point.

beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Gal 5:19-21

So, a serious sin like adultery, sorcery, idolatry or murder will kill you. You cannot enter heaven with these sins. But note that outbursts of wrath (anger), partying (revelries), or envy will also kill you.

These are all sins unto death because people who commit them cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

But did not saints do such things?

Yes indeed; and this is what we must understand.

David was an adulterer and a murderer, yet he inherited the kingdom. Paul persecuted Christ yet he inherited the kingdom. Peter denied the Lord yet he inherited the kingdom.

Why?

These people grieved for their sins and were forgiven. The sins were retained in their old natures and that nature will not enter the kingdom but will be dissolved when Christ returns. Those who put on the new nature do not put on those sins but put on Christ; they abide in Christ.

The Gospel

The effect of the Gospel is to separate the sinful nature from the Christ nature given in regeneration. Only believers have two natures and sin arises in the believer when he fails to put on his new nature and instead puts on his old nature. The problems we have in life are the result of the warfare between those two natures.

The old nature is always guilty, always dead, always condemned. A Christian that puts on his old nature and sins is guilty and needs forgiveness to be applied again through confession and repentance.

The Spirit in the new man of the believer is grieved when the believer sins (Eph 4:30). As the Spirit within us grieves, so do we if we are in the new man. The result of that grief for sin leads us to do something about it to stop the grieving. We confess our sins and are cleansed again by the blood of Christ and the grieving stops.

This is normal Christian behaviour.

The condemnation

Now the people that do not grieve for their sins cannot have the Spirit indwelling them who grieves within them.

The people who tolerate sin cannot be sons of the heavenly Father that hates sin and never tolerates it.

The people that do not confess their sins cannot be Christians because the basis of the Gospel is confession of sin.

So when a Christian sins, he mourns for his sins, confesses them immediately and gets rid of them. A person that does not even see their sins cannot get rid of them and they will kill him. 'If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth' (1 Jn 1:6). 'If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us', (1 Jn 1:10).

The sin unto death is any sin that is the result of rejecting Christ or the body of Christ.

Adultery will kill you if you do not find Christ and repent. Envy will kill you if you do not find Christ and repent. Anger will kill you if you do not find Christ and repent. Jealousy will kill you if you do not find Christ and repent.

Application

The root of the sin unto death

So, the root cause of the sin unto death is the rejection of Christ and the Gospel. This is most clearly seen in those outside the church who reject God.

However, that root can underlie a number of other sins. The expression of a certain sin can be the outworking of a deeper rejection of Christ. This is most clearly evidenced when a person openly tolerates sin and does not see the need to repent of sin. Since God demands that sin is repented, any refusal to repent is a rejection of God. Since Christ died to provide a fountain to cleanse sin, any churchgoer that refuses to deal with sin and repent is a rejecter of Christ.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1 Jn 1:8

Refusing to acknowledge our sin is a proof that we are not saved; there is no truth in us. Rejection of repentance is a rejection of Christ. Rejection of Christ is the sin unto death.

The rejection of the body of Christ

One of the most common forms of the rejection of Christ is the rejection expressed against his body. When a person sins against the body of Christ they sin against the Lord himself.⁵ If this sin is not repented of it will constitute a sin unto death. The worst case of this is when the sin is continued into the Lord's Supper. Judgment will certainly follow and some will die (1 Cor 11:17-34).

Sins against the body of Christ come in many forms. For instance; anger expressed to a brother is a sin against Christ. If this anger is expressed in the church meeting the effect is even worse. Sadly, I have seen this many times; it never ends well. Jesus warned us about this:

But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' ['empty-headed'] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Matt 5:22

Now there are times when calling someone a fool is a necessary admonishment, a helpful warning to not be stupid; indeed, God called people a fool several times (e.g. Lk 12:20), as did many men of God (Ps 14:1). What is in mind in Jesus' warning is the anger expressed to a brother in the name-calling. It is anger without cause against a brother that will lead to hell. For instance, getting angry with a brother because you do not share his opinion on minor issues is a great sin against the body.

Another example is the slandering of a brother; bearing false witness. Now bearing false witness was alone considered worthy of death in the OT, but slandering a brother in the Lord is much worse. Again, this is commonplace today and I personally have been slandered many times, even by supposed notable church leaders.

⁵ Just as Paul was persecuting Christ when he persecuted the church.

Adultery is another example. This is bad enough on its own (fornication with an unbeliever) but if it includes fornication with a sister in the Lord the sin is greater. This has occurred many times in recent years. Worse than that is the multiple adultery by fornicating with several women in the church. Amazingly, I have known this happen also. Such sin, if not repented will lead to death. It is a rejection of Christ and a sin against his body.

We must bear in mind Paul's list of the works of the flesh. This includes what people consider to be little sins as well as major sins. The little sins will kill you just as much as murder if they are not repented and cleansed.

The issue is the mourning for, grieving over, confession or and repenting of sin. Those that do this will be saved; those that do not will die. It is that simple.

Is this works salvation?

No. We need to be clear here. I am not teaching a Roman Catholic type of works salvation; that your repenting and your confessing is what saves you and that this must be done continually to be saved.

What I am saying is that the genuine Christian always repents; the genuine Christian always confesses his sins. The genuine believer is concerned to put away sin in practice.

When we see church people tolerating sin and failing to repent, we are seeing false brethren; these are merely superficial believers.

It is not your personal confession and repentance that saves you; it is the work of Christ that saves you and you receive this by the gift of faith given by God to the elect. Justification is by faith alone. However, that justification is always accompanied by sanctification. Sanctification is the work of the Spirit in you to practically deal with sin and train you to live a holy life. Part of that training is to mourn over sins committed and repent.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matt 5:4

Your sorrow led to repentance. 2 Cor 7:9

Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 2 Cor 7:10

Wisdom in prayer

There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.

We do not pray for those who have committed the sin unto death. It is not sin to pray, it is just pointless in this case.

Now there is a certain amount of wisdom required in obeying this because it does not mean that we do not pray for any obvious sinner. Paul told us to pray for all sorts of people, even for the kings that persecuted the church (1 Tim 2:1-4). Who would have thought that the great persecutor of the early church would turn out to be the greatest apostle of all?

It is right and proper to pray for those in your ambit who do not know Christ, even for very gross sinners.

However, there is no point praying for those who have totally rejected Christ after being admonished. For those who sin openly and see no need to repent, despite being exhorted,

there is no hope. This includes people once thought to be Christians, people who went to church. If they have been admonished for obvious sins, for public sins, and have rejected that admonishment, and who tolerate their sin, there should be no time wasted on prayer for them.

If this is thought to be too harsh, then I ask you – what else does John mean then?

Test yourself

There are several occasions in Scripture, and especially in Paul, where we are commanded to test ourselves to see whether or not we are in the faith. These exhortations are often ignored today where people have a superficial attitude towards the doctrine of eternal security. This is especially true amongst erroneous New Calvinist circles where the blessings of Calvinism are embraced but none of the responsibilities of it are, such as fearing God. Consequently, it behoves us to look at this in the context of the sin unto death.

Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you are disqualified. 2 Cor 13:5

This is a pretty clear command that cannot be ignored. It was not just a command to the Corinthians since all Scripture is for our training and reproof (2 Tim 3:16). We must all examine ourselves to see if Christ is in us, that we hold the true faith.

‘Examine’ means ‘to put to the test, to examine, to try’. ‘Test’ means ‘to test, examine, prove, scrutinise (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as of proving metals’. ‘Disqualified’ means ‘failing to meet the test, disqualified, worthless corrupt’.

This is an arduous, scrutinising examination of our lives to make certain that we are saved. It is amazing that many popular writers have tried to diminish the meaning of this verse to avoid the sense of being disqualified as a believer. These cannot be trusted; the verse means what it says.

An example of what to look for

If we are examining ourselves, what should we look for to prove our true conversion?

Being saved, being converted to Christ, involves a massive number of changes in our situation.

We have been transferred from one kingdom into another: ‘He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love’, (Col 1:13).

We now have a different master. Before we were servants of Satan, now we are sons of God. ‘You once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience’, (Eph 2:2). ‘You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus’, (Gal 3:26).

We are now living a completely different type of life. Before we were dead in sins; now we have eternal life. ‘You He made alive, who were dead,’ (Eph 2:1). ‘Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.’ (Jn 3:15).

We used to walk in darkness; we now walk in the light of God. ‘Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life”’, (Jn 8:12). ‘You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness,’ (1 Thess 5:5).

We have been set free from sin. 'You were slaves of sin,' (Rm 6:20). 'But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life,' (Rm 6:22).

We could extend this list but this is enough for our purposes here. There have been massive changes in our lives as a result of conversion and being united to the family of God.

Consequently, we should look for change in our lives. We should be different people from what we were. In my own case, three (of many) noticeable changes were: 1) that I immediately stopped my profuse swearing without even trying. 2) Bible reading became completely different; it was as if a spotlight had been shone on the text. 3) I began to rejoice in fellowship with believers, whose personalities would have previously been objectionable to me.

Thus one aspect of examination is to see if there have been any significant changes in our lives as a result of our conversion. Even very amiable, quiet, humble people before their conversion should still be able to notice significant changes after their conversion. One matter is that they should love the Lord their God more than their own lives as a result of conversion. Another should be that they love the brethren.

Conclusion

How many people examine themselves today? How many people are 'converted' on a superficial, weak, unbiblical Gospel, are then affirmed by some leader that they are saved, and then never consider their spiritual condition again, other than to presume that the world is their oyster by following appalling Charismatic or liberal teaching?

How many of such folk openly tolerate sin in their lives, refuse to repent of it, and are thus committing the sin unto death? How many churchgoers today openly tolerate the 'little sins' that are the work of the flesh and see no need to repent?

God commands us to test ourselves and make certain that we are walking on the correct path. In these days of major deception there has never been a time when this was more important – yet it is everywhere ignored and few teachers ever mention the matter. How many are committing the sin unto death today?

Other Scriptures in this connection

You have tested my heart; You have visited *me* in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. Ps 17:3

Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart. Ps 26:2

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting. Ps 139:23-24

Let us search out and examine our ways. Lam 3:40

Let a man examine himself. 1 Cor 11:28

If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 1 Cor 11:31

But let each one examine his own work. Gal 6:4

Those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. Titus 1:15-16

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. Heb 4:1

Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled. Heb 12:14-15

If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. 1 Jn 3:21

Concluding catechism

What is the sin unto death?

It is a sin that will kill you and lead you to the second death in hell. It is sin that results in spiritual death.

What is spiritual death?

Spiritual death consists of the loss of all hope, the condemnation of all sin, the judgment and wrath of God and eternal separation from God and from all that is good and holy. It is physical, material, everlasting suffering. It is to be greatly feared.

What does this sin consist of?

It consists chiefly in the rejection of Christ and the Gospel. Such a sin is the foundation of all unbelievers.

How is this sin committed?

It is committed in various ways through various sins which are not confessed and repented of.

Can 'Christians' commit this sin?

Mere professing believers can. The context of the Biblical verses on this issue are in connection with false brethren. When a supposed believer refuses to repent of sin, who openly tolerates sin, they demonstrate that they are not true believers at all. This sin will kill them, whether public or private.

In the end it is impossible to know for certain who are true believers in churches. There have been many occasions when very seemingly solid people, who had even been church leaders for decades, suddenly apostatise and commit gross sin, leaving the church forever.

Mourning for sin is one of the few good indicators of genuine faith; lack of this suggests a problem.⁶ The open admission of being a sinner is a good sign. Supposed power, authority, gifts, experience, reputation etc. are not good grounds to establish genuine spirituality.

What is the worst case of this in churchgoers?

The worst application of this is when a supposed 'Christian', churchgoer, commits sin against the body of Christ. That is, they sin openly against a brother, such as by an outburst of wrath or by slandering him, and do not repent.

Is there ever temporal judgment involved in this?

Yes there is. This is when the sin against the body of Christ is taken into the Lord's Supper without repentance (1 Cor 11:27-31). God promises immediate judgment against such, including sickness and even death.

⁶ Another is true love for Christ, but some people can feign this.

What is the comfort of true Christians?

The comfort of true Christians is in the hope of eternal life; life in Christ, sharing in God's glory. This is the opposite of spiritual death.

He was manifested to take away our sins. 1 Jn 3:5

Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. 1 Jn 3:6

When they sin against You (for *there is* no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive. 2 Chron 6:36

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