Introduction: A Serious Warning

Among the many warnings in Scripture, few are as sobering as the one found in 1 John 5:16–17. These verses suggest that not all sins are equal in consequence, and that some sins may bring irreversible judgment — even for believers.

> *1 John 5:16–17 (NIV)*
> *“If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.”*

This passage distinguishes between two types of sin:

- Sins that do not lead to death
- Sin that leads to death

What is this “sin leading to death”? How should we respond to it

as believers?

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1. Sins That Do Not Lead to Death

These are sins that, although serious, fall under the covering of God’s grace and mercy. They are forgivable upon genuine repentance and confession.

Examples include:

- Unintentional sins (Numbers 15:27–29)
- Sins committed in weakness (Galatians 6:1)
- Sins of ignorance (1 Timothy 1:13)
- Moral failings due to spiritual immaturity (Hebrews 5:12–14)

> *1 John 1:9 (NIV)*
> *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

These sins do not sever the believer’s relationship with God, though they may grieve the Holy Spirit and hinder spiritual

growth (Ephesians 4:30).

Believers are encouraged to pray for those who fall into such sins, and God promises to restore them.

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2. The Sin That Leads to Death

This sin is not explicitly named in 1 John, which has led to various interpretations. However, Scripture and context point to a few possible understandings — all of which involve a willful, deliberate rejection of God’s grace or authority after receiving full knowledge of the truth.

A. For Believers: Willful Disobedience and Apostasy

Some sins are so grievous that, even though the person may still be a believer, the consequences cannot be reversed. These sins may not lead to damnation but can bring about physical death, loss of ministry, or disqualification from God’s purposes.

 Example: Moses (Numbers 20:7–12)

Moses disobeyed God’s direct command by striking the rock instead of speaking to it. He also took credit for God’s miracle,

saying, *“Must we bring you water out of this rock?”* (v. 10).

Though Moses was forgiven, he was still denied entry into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 32:51–52). This is a vivid illustration of a sin that leads to death in terms of divine calling and destiny.

 Example: Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11)

They lied to the Holy Spirit and were struck dead immediately — despite being members of the early church. Their sin was premeditated hypocrisy within the body of Christ, and God responded with judgment.

B. For Unbelievers: Persistent Rejection of God’s Grace

For those who are repeatedly confronted with the gospel, experience God’s blessings, and yet deliberately reject Him, they are in danger of what theologians call apostasy — a complete and final falling away.

> *Hebrews 6:4–6 (NIV)*
> *“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened...*

> *if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."*

> *Hebrews 10:26–27 (NIV)*
> *"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment..."*

This isn't about struggling with sin — it's about hardened, willful, and final rejection of the truth after full knowledge and experience of it.

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3. Israel's Rebellion: A Corporate Sin Leading to Death

The generation of Israelites who left Egypt is a classic case. Despite experiencing God's miracles, they rebelled repeatedly.

> *1 Corinthians 10:1–5 (NIV)*

> *“...Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.”*

Paul explains that their story is a warning to us today. Their sins included:

- Idolatry (v.7)
- Sexual immorality (v.8)
- Testing the Lord (v.9)
- Grumbling (v.10)

> *1 Corinthians 10:11–12 (NIV)*
> *“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us... So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”*

Though they repented with tears (Numbers 14:39–45), the judgment had already been declared. They would not enter the Promised Land — an earthly example of judgment following the sin that leads to death.

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4. The Modern Church: Living on the Edge

Many today walk in the same danger. They know the truth. They've seen the power of God. They attend church, have been baptized, and confess Jesus as Lord. But their lifestyle denies Him:

- Sexual sin
- Drunkenness
- Gossip
- Pornography
- Profanity
- Disrespect of God's Word
- Misusing spiritual authority

> *2 Timothy 3:5 (NIV)*
> *"...having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people."*

Such people are treading on thin ice. If they continue in rebellion while knowing the truth, they may cross a line that leads to

irreversible consequences.

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5. Grace Is Not a License to Sin

Some say, *“I’ll enjoy life now and repent later.”*
But what if “later” never comes? What if judgment strikes — through sickness, loss, or premature death?

> *Galatians 6:7 (NIV)*
> *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”*

God’s mercy is real, but it is not to be abused. If we keep rejecting His voice, we may find ourselves outside the boundaries of grace — just like Esau:

> *Hebrews 12:17 (NIV)*
> *“Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.”*

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6. The Ultimate Cost: Lost Purpose and Reward

The sin that leads to death can cost you:

- Your ministry
- Your calling
- Your eternal reward

> *Revelation 3:11 (NIV)*
> *“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”*

Even if you’re saved, you can lose your reward (1 Corinthians 3:15). Like Judas, your place may be taken by another. When others receive their crowns and hear, *“Well done, good and faithful servant,”* you may have nothing to show.

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7. Our Call to Action

> *2 Peter 1:10 (NIV)*
> *“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble…”*

> *Philippians 2:12–13 (NIV)*
> *“…continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”*

Today, the Holy Spirit may be convicting you. Don’t delay. Don’t assume there’s time to repent later. The door may close unexpectedly.

Conclusion: Respond While There’s Still Grace

God is gracious, but He is also just. The “sin leading to death” is real, and Scripture doesn’t take it lightly.

Don’t ignore His voice. Don’t play games with grace. Repent while

there is still time, and pursue a life that honors God — not just with your words, but with your whole life.

Amen.

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