

The Unpardonable Sin

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Matthew 12

³¹ Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

³² And whosoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaks against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Probably no other text in the Bible has been the subject of more speculation, or has been more misunderstood, than this one. Many honest, conscientious people have gone well-nigh into despair over the thought that they were guilty of the sin here mentioned, and that simply because they had received erroneous ideas as to what that sin is.

Although there is so much misunderstanding in regard to it, we think that an understanding of it may be gained quite readily by a consideration of the connection and of parallel texts. Every word which our Saviour uttered was timely, and applied to the circumstances then present; it is this feature which makes them practical in all ages. Therefore if we would get a full understanding of any of his words, we must consider the occasion which called them out.

The Context

If we notice the context, we shall find that the words which we have quoted were called out by the position which the Pharisees took concerning a notable miracle which Jesus had performed. He had healed a demoniac who was both blind and dumb, so that the man was not only in his right mind, but “both spake and saw.” The people were amazed, but the Pharisees contemptuously and blasphemously said:

Matthew 12

²⁴ This fellow does not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

Instead of glorifying God, by whose Spirit this wonderful thing was done, they accused Christ of having a devil, by whose aid he performed miracles.

That this accusation constituted, in that instance, the unpardonable sin, is evident from the parallel text in *Mark*. This evangelist gives our Saviour’s words concerning the unpardonable nature of the sin against the Holy Spirit, and adds:

Mark 3

³⁰ Because they said, He has an unclean spirit.

Thus we find, without any further investigation, that this sin consists in attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil.

By Word or Thought

But it is not by words alone that men may commit this, any more than any other sin. Paul speaks of some who...

Titus 1

¹⁶ ...profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

A reprobate is one who is rejected, who has sinned beyond recovery; one who has rejected the Spirit of God by sinning until he is so corrupt that there is no good thing in him for

the Spirit to work upon. This is indicated in the preceding verse, which says of those who are “unto every good work reprobate,” that “even their mind and conscience is defiled.” So Paul writes to Timothy concerning men in the last days, who are “men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.” 2 *Timothy* 3:8.

This was the condition of the antediluvian world. The record says:

Genesis 6

³ And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.

5 And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

There was a time when the antediluvians were not wholly bad; there was some trace of the law in their hearts (*Romans* 2:15), and therefore there was something in them upon which the Spirit could work to convince them of sin; for the Spirit’s sword is the word of God, and it can produce an impression upon men only when they possess some knowledge of truth and right.

But the antediluvians resisted the strivings of the Spirit. The tendency of sin is to multiply itself and to choke out any sense of good; and so by repeated stiflings of every good impulse, those people become so corrupt that they had not a single good thought. They were cumberers of the ground; there was no possibility of their reformation, and so they were cut off.

Judgments Follow

In every case where the judgments of God have been brought upon people, it was because there was no possibility of their reformation; they had, in short, committed the unpardonable sin. This was the case with the antediluvians, the

Sodomites, the wicked inhabitants of Canaan (see *Genesis* 15:16), who were destroyed to make room for the Israelites, and finally with many of the people of Israel. Says the sacred historian:

2 Chronicles 36

¹⁴ Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place;

¹⁶ But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

“There was no remedy;” that is, their sin was unpardonable. Now since God’s object in giving men this existence is solely that they may prepare for a better, and an eternal existence, it follows that when they utterly refuse to accept of God’s plan for them, and devote themselves wholly to evil, there is no use to continue their existence longer.

They are of no use to themselves or to anybody else. Like trees that bear only thorns instead of fruit, they are cut off as cumberers of the ground. Their continued existence would be only detrimental to the soil which might be yielding something useful. Here then is another way in which men may commit the unpardonable sin.

Falling Away from Faith

Still another way is brought to view by Paul to the Hebrews. This pertains especially to those who have once made a profession. Says the apostle:

Hebrews 6

⁴ For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

⁵ And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

⁶ If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

We have not space to enter into details, and to specify just how men crucify Christ afresh; but it is sufficient to know that the unpardonable sin is here brought to view, for it is a sin which cannot be repented of. We say “the unpardonable sin,” for we understand that there is but one such although there may be many different ways of committing it. John says:

1 John 5

¹⁶ If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and God shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it.

All sin, if not repented of, brings death; but there is one sin which cannot be repented of, and therefore there is no necessity to pray about it as about other sins.

Now we may understand what the apostle means when he says to the Hebrews that it is impossible if certain ones fall away, to renew them unto repentance. What does he mean by, “If they fall away”? Does he mean that if a Christian shall fall into sin he cannot be forgiven? No; for the verse just quoted from John teaches us that if a brother sins a sin not unto death we must pray for him.

1 John 2:1-2; Galatians 6:1; Revelation 2:5, and scores of other texts show that men are not necessarily beyond hope, even though they be overtaken in faults after they have accepted Christ and have been pardoned.

We must understand, then, that the “falling away” here brought to view means not simply the commission of a wrong act, or even a backslidden state, but a turning away from the gospel of Christ,—a rejection of Christ. Since the name of

Christ is the only one under Heaven whereby men may be saved, it follows that if a man deliberately rejects that there is no hope for him. It was this fact which led Paul to use such vehement language in his epistle to the Galatians. See *Galatians* 1:8-9.

Any man who should preach a gospel which led the hearers to trust in something else besides Christ, would be deliberately leading them to eternal ruin, and so would be worthy of a curse. There is but one way of salvation; if a man deliberately rejects that, he cannot by any possibility be saved.

Presumptuous Sin

The same thing is brought to view in:

Hebrews 10

²⁶ For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins,

²⁷ But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

²⁸ He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses;

²⁹ Of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

Here we have presumptuous sin. The case recorded in *Numbers* 15 is in point. The Lord had said that the soul which should do aught presumptuously, should be cut off, because he had "despised the word of the Lord, and has broken his commandment." Verse 30-31.

Then follows an instance of such a sin. A man went out to gather sticks on the Sabbath-day. He was not driven to do this by want, but he did it in willful violation of the commandment of the Lord, that everyone should abide in his place. He

presumed on the mercy of the Lord. He knew the commandment, yet he deliberately tried the Lord, to see if he meant what he said. He found out to his cost that the Lord meant just what he said. He found out that the Lord cannot be trifled with.

That was a case of willful sin, after having received the knowledge of the truth. It was not simply the fact that the man violated a commandment, for every error is a violation of some commandment, but the man violated the commandment deliberately and intentionally, knowing that his act was a violation of the commandment. In other words, he “despised the word of the Lord.”

Now, says Paul, if a man who deliberately violated a commandment had to die without mercy, and could have no atonement made for his sin, how much worse off must the man be who not only violates the commandments (for all have sinned), but who deliberately rejects the only means by which an atonement for sins can be made. Certainly his case is doubly hopeless.

Turning from the Light

Sinning against light always brings darkness. This is a self-evident truth. If a man rejects light, nothing but darkness remains. So our Saviour says to us, as he said to the Jews:

John 12

³⁵ Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walks in darkness knows not where he goes.

And in like manner Paul says that Satan will, just before the coming of the Lord, work...

2 Thessalonians 2

⁹ ...with all power and signs and lying wonders,

¹⁰ And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

¹¹ And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie;

¹² That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

It will be just as it was with the heathen. Because when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, therefore God gave them up to uncleanness:

Romans 1 [margin]

²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and God gave them over to a mind void of judgment.

Thus when one knows what is right, and deliberately chooses error, he soon loses the knowledge of what is right; it soon becomes impossible for sacred things to make any impression upon him; and if he does not know the right way, of course he cannot follow it.

The same idea that we have found in the two passages quoted from the book of *Hebrews*, is carried out in the following:

Hebrews 12

¹⁵ Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

¹⁶ Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

¹⁷ For you know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

In *Genesis 25:29-34* we find an account of the transaction to which the apostle refers. Esau bartered away his birthright for a mess of pottage. It was a deliberate transaction, and when the bargain was concluded it could not be altered. If a man makes a deliberate bargain, and sells a piece of property, he cannot back out. Esau sold his birthright for a paltry meal of victuals, thus showing that he despised, or did not appreciate, his birthright. Afterward he would have inherited a blessing,

but he had sold it, and could not.

Thousands of men have repeated Esau's course. Paul says of one of his co-laborers:

2 Timothy 4

¹⁰ Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.

Here we have the case of Esau repeated. Esau sold his birthright, to satisfy a present need; Demas sold his interest in the cause of God and in eternal life, for this present world.

God's Claim in the Sabbath

Thousands of people acknowledge their duty to keep the Sabbath of the Lord, yet say, "If I should keep the Sabbath I couldn't make a living," and so for a mess of pottage,—a few meals of victuals,—they sell their heavenly inheritance.

We have known people who felt that they couldn't make a living if they kept the Sabbath, and who made up their minds that when they had secured a competency they would obey; but they never obeyed; they never afterwards could find a convenient time, and although they gained a competency, they never again could feel any special interest in the Sabbath. They had disbelieved God, and showed that they thought more of present enjoyment than of the enduring riches, and God gave them that which they prized most.

A Summary

It is not necessary to pursue this subject further. Let the reader note that we have found at least four ways in which men may commit the unpardonable sin:

1. By deliberately attributing the work of the Spirit of God to the devil.
2. By refusing to yield to the strivings of the Spirit, until by continual sinning the heart becomes so hard that the Spirit can make no impression upon it, and a sense of sin is lost. Then it is said, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let

him alone.”

3. By falling from the grace of God, and deliberately rejecting Christ’s sacrifice.
4. By presuming upon God’s mercy, and deliberately transgressing his commandments, with our eyes open to the consequences, and a determination to see if God will bring them upon us.

Many people who have thought themselves guilty of the unpardonable sin, were not. For the encouragement of such we write. The man whose heart is broken at the thought of his sin against God, and who is tender and repentant, may find pardon, for “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;” a broken and a contrite heart the Lord will not despise. *Psalm* 51:17.

Although a man’s sense of his sins may be so great that they seem to him unpardonable, he may rest assured that where sin abounds (that is, a sense of sin), grace does much more abound. *Romans* 5:20.

The Danger of Carnal Security

But it is also true that thousands are in danger of the unpardonable sin, who think themselves secure, and for the warning of such we also write. The man who thinks that he may indulge just once more in some known sin which is very dear to him, may find that that was just once too often for pardon. No one can tell how weary the Spirit may be of striving with him, or how near he may be to the close of probation. Many men who were “going to reform,” never did reform, because death came before they had gotten ready to reform.

So there will doubtless be many well-intentioned persons lost, because they will weary the Spirit with their lukewarm dilatoriness, and probation will close before they have made up their minds to be wholly on the Lord’s side. When it is too

late, they will arouse, and will seek for the word of the Lord, but will not be able to find it. *Amos 8:11-12.*

It is dangerous to sin at all. Our only hope of safety from falling into the unpardonable sin is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to...

Colossians 1

¹⁰ ...walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Hebrews 4

⁷ Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Isaiah 55

⁶ Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;

⁷ 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.