

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

by

Perry B. Cotham
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Matt. 12:31-32
Mark 3:28-30
Luke 12:10

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Perry B. Cotham

A perplexing subject in the study of the Holy Scriptures is the one often called “the unpardonable sin.” Although this expression is not in the Bible, many ask for an explanation of it. Nearly every preacher has, at some time, talked with some one who was afraid of having committed “the unpardonable sin” or “the sin against the Holy Spirit.” Since the statements of God’s Word on this subject have caused grave concern to many honest people, one needs to study them carefully. Of course, all Scripture harmonizes, and *there can be no conflict between* any two statements in the Bible. The question is: “Does the Bible teach that it is possible for one to be out of reach of God’s mercy?” “Is any sin unpardonable?”

Note first that the Bible clearly teaches that ample provision has been made for all men to be forgiven. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come ... And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). The Lord does not want anyone to be lost (Ezek. 33:11); He wills to “have all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4).

But the question rises, “Did not Christ say there is a sin which cannot be pardoned? If so, what is that sin?” Jesus said that “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.” What does this statement mean? Study the statement in its context. Jesus had cast a demon out of a man who was blind and dumb. “And all the people were amazed, and said. Is not this the Son of David” [i.e., the Messiah]? Christ’s enemies could not deny that a great miracle had been performed. But how could they remove the deep impression it had made on the minds of the amazed spectators? Angry and hardened by the miracle, they said, “This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the

prince of the devils.” *They accused Jesus of performing his miracles by the power of Satan.*

When the Pharisees spoke against the work of Christ, attributing it to the spirit of Beelzebub, Jesus answered their slander by saying that a kingdom divided against itself could not stand; if he were casting out Satan by the power of Satan, then Satan would be working against himself. This the devil certainly would not have done. Then Jesus said: “Therefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost [*Holy Spirit* in the American Standard Version] shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt. 12:31-32). According to Mark’s record Jesus said: “Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: because they said, He hath an unclean spirit” (Mark 3:28-30; cf. Luke 12:10). Hence, an understanding of “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” is vital to all who desire to know and obey God’s will.

I. What Jesus Did Not Mean by Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps it will help to understand what blasphemy against the Holy Spirit actually is by proving that it does not mean certain things. The sin is not several things.

1. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not murder.* Those who killed Christ were forgiven when they complied with the Spirit’s terms of pardon (Acts 2:36-41). While he was on the cross, Christ prayed for his murderers (Luke 23:34). He did not mean, however, that they would or could be forgiven without obedience to the law of pardon. The apostle Paul, before his conversion, aided in the killing of Christians; but he was forgiven (Acts 7:58–8:3; 9:1-18; 26:10; 22:16). He wrote that he once was a blasphemer, a

persecutor, and a destroyer of the church; yet he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly and in unbelief (I Tim. 1:13-15). So, forgiveness is possible for the “chief of sinners.”

2. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not suicide.* Some think that self-murder is the sin which Jesus had in mind. They assert that since murder is wrong and that a person who dies by his own hands has no chance of repentance after this act, the individual must go into eternity guilty of this sin. Whether one is in his right mind and, therefore, accountable when he takes his own life is debatable; but if he is accountable and is lost, this fact does not necessarily prove that suicide is “the unpardonable sin.” Although the Bible teaches that any sin unrepented of and unforgiven at the time of death will keep a person out of heaven, any or every sin unrepented of at the time of death is not necessarily the sin referred to by Christ in the passage under this study. Of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit the Savior implied, as shall be shown plainly in this writing, that one could continue to live in this world *after* having committed it.

3. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not profanity.* If profanity were the sin Jesus had in mind, the apostle Peter could not have been forgiven. Although he cursed and swore, Peter was forgiven (Matt. 26:69-75; John 21).

4. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not immorality.* Jesus said to the woman taken in the act of adultery, “go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). Many of the saints at Corinth had been guilty of licentiousness before their conversion, but they were forgiven (I Cor. 6:9-11; cf. Acts 18:8; Mark 16:15-16).

5. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not backsliding.* Some have thought that only Christians can commit this sin, inasmuch as Christians are the only persons who possess the Spirit; they have concluded, therefore, that “the unpardonable sin” is backsliding. Christ was not talking to his disciples when he spoke of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but he was speaking to wicked scribes and Pharisees. The Bible teaches that a child of God can backslide, that he can sin and be eternally lost (Ezek. 18:24,26; John 15:1-6; I Tim. 4:1; II Peter 1:5-11). But the Lord has a law of

restoration for his erring child. Any backslider who commits pardonable sins may return and be forgiven.

6. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not delay in obeying the gospel until death.* Although obedience to the gospel is impossible after death, any one who has not committed “the unpardonable sin” may obey the gospel and be saved at any time prior to his death. The person whom Christ had in mind, however, is the one who, after blaspheming the Spirit, has no hope of forgiveness. Hence, “the unpardonable sin” is not mere neglect of duty.

II. What Jesus Did Mean by Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit?

A. BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT IS INJURIOUS AND MALICIOUS SPEECH AGAINST HIM.

According to all standard Greek lexicons, to blaspheme is to “speak evil of” or “rail upon,” or “to offer intentional indignity to God or sacred things.” The Holy Spirit is a *person* of the Godhead, and not merely an influence (Matt. 28:19; Acts 17:29). Therefore, to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to speak evil of, or rail upon, or insult the Spirit intentionally. Blasphemy is a definite, positive *act*. The idea of *evil speaking* is always inherent in the word blasphemy. Under Moses’ law, *blasphemy* was punishable by death (Lev. 24:16).

The real sin lies in the condition of the heart of the one who speaks blasphemous words against God’s Spirit. Similarly, men think of murder as a heinous sin; yet the Lord went behind the overt act and said that murder originates in the heart. The root is in what is thought of as lesser sins, such as envy, hatred, and malice. These sins can lead to the act of murder. With hatred in the heart, it is murder in the heart (I John 3:15). So, in regard to those Pharisees “Jesus knew their thoughts” (Matt. 12:25), and the words revealed the true nature of the heart within. On a former occasion, it is said that Jesus was “grieved at the hardening of their heart” (Mark 3:5 ASV). The language of the blasphemers against the Holy Spirit, as described above,

springs from wicked hearts and indicates a corrupt condition. Although *blasphemy* and *hardness of heart* are not synonymous, the blasphemy that Jesus had in mind results from *complete hardness of heart*. This explains why Christ said there could be no forgiveness. So, in Matthew 12:32, Jesus was speaking of a particular kind of blasphemy. He issued a *fearful* warning to the Pharisees *because* they had said of him: “He hath an unclean spirit.” They, because their hearts were in such a state of wilful, determined opposition to the teaching of God, were in imminent danger. Their hearts could become hopelessly hardened, and utterly impervious to repentance; fenced about with an impenetrable barrier of malicious prejudice.

B. THE HOLY SPIRIT GAVE THE GOSPEL FOR MAN’S SALVATION

Perhaps some further study about the work of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of man’s sins will help to better understand the question under discussion.

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles to guide them into all truth. The Spirit was to testify of Christ and declare the conditions of pardon (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-13; Luke 24:46-49). The Holy Spirit came to the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). On that occasion, the Spirit offered full pardon to all who had rejected Christ, even to those who had murdered Him (Acts 2:36-38). But that offer conditioned on their acceptance of Christ as the Son of God was their only hope of pardon. Prior to this time, however, John the Baptist had been sent from Jehovah to make ready a people for the Lord (John 1:6; Luke 1:17). “And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him” (Luke 7:29-30). Following the ministry of John, came the personal ministry of Christ. But many also rejected Jesus – even those same Pharisees! Then after the personal ministry of Christ came the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, working through inspired men. Those who lived during Christ’s short ministry could

have sinned against him and later have been saved under the dispensation of the Spirit (many of them were). But if the Pharisees rejected this final offer of mercy by blaspheming the Holy Spirit, there was no other way for them to be saved; they could never obtain forgiveness. So, during his personal ministry Jesus said to the Pharisees that men may speak “a word against the Son of man” and “it shall be forgiven him: *but* whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.” Christ’ words surely meant: “you may reject the counsel of God, and yet upon repentance be forgiven; you may reject me and speak evil of my present works, and be pardoned; but if you blaspheme and reject the message of the Holy Spirit when He comes and speaks through my apostles, there can be no forgiveness, either in this world, nor in the world to come. The Spirit’s message will be heaven’s *last offer* of pardon to you. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven.”

The following illustration makes clear why rejection of John’s preaching and blasphemy against Christ could be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could not. Suppose that a man is floating down a river in a boat. Down stream, dangerous rapids which will destroy him if he gets into them. Some distance up the stream, there is a man, whom we shall call “A,” who sees this man headed for certain danger. “A” shouts a warning and offers assistance, but the warning is refused. The man drifts farther down the river. Later a second man, designated “B,” calls out. His warning is also rejected. The man continues down stream, offended by those who tried to help him. Just before reaching the brink of the falls, a third man, “C,” shouts to the man to turn back before it is forever too late. But this *final offer* is also refused, and the man plunges to his death. Three offers of assistance were made; acceptance of any of them would have saved the man from his fate. The doomed man might have rejected the warning of both “A” and “B,” then heeded “C’s” warning and have been saved. But refusal of the final offer sealed his fate. In a similar manner, *the Spirit’s message was the final offer of pardon.*

When the Holy Spirit performed His work to teach and save men, God’s means of providing mercy were consummated. Hence, for those Pharisees, to reject the last chance of pardon would be fatal – there would never be forgiveness. (Jesus did not mean, however, that certain sins may be forgiven in the next world. No sin unforgiven at death will be forgiven in the hereafter; there is no forgiveness after death. The Bible does not teach a “second chance.”)

In Matthew 12:32, “in this world” means the age which will terminate at the judgment, and “the world to come” is eternity, the period following the judgment. The Christian age will extend to the day of judgment; beyond that, there is no forgiveness, neither for sin that was pardonable, but not pardoned, nor for sin that was unpardonable. Cf. Mark 10:29-30; Matt. 25:46; I Tim. 4:8; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 9:26)

C. THE TEACHING OF THE SPIRIT MUST BE OBEYED

If a person rejects the Spirit in this dispensation (Christian Age), there is no means for his salvation, for the Holy Spirit was the last member of the Godhead sent to convict men of sin. There will never be another plan of salvation offered to the world. That was the last.

For the alien sinner to be saved, he must obey the Spirit’s law of pardon – the law that was preached by the apostles and obeyed by those whose conversions are recorded in the Book of Acts of the Apostles. That is, he must **Hear** the Gospel, **Believe**, **Repent**, **Confess** his faith in Christ, and be **Baptized** (immersed in water unto the remission of sins) (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:36-38; 22:16; 8:35-39; Rom. 10:10). Therefore, all sins may, upon Gospel obedience, be forgiven through the blood of Christ (I John 1:7; 2:2; Heb. 2:9; 5:8,9; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). If a child of God *backslides*, he must **Repent**, **Confess** his sins, and **Pray** (Acts 8:13-24; James 5:16; I John 1:9). *All sins, without exception, will be forgiven when people repent and obey the Lord.* Jehovah is “ready to pardon” (Neh. 9:17). However, the Holy Spirit has made known the only conditions on which He will pardon. God has always been willing to

forgive any one of his sins, *if he will repent and do His will*; but God will not forgive those who do not repent. He “commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). He is “not willing that any perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). Yet, all who do not obey the Gospel will be lost (II Thess. 1:7-10).

So, when Jesus said that “all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men,” except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, *He did not mean that such sins would be forgiven without man’s complying with certain conditions that are stipulated*. One so depraved, of course, as to blaspheme the Holy Spirit can never meet the conditions upon which the blood cleanses from sin. Since God cannot forgive an unrepented sin, if a person is so hardened in sin that he cannot repent, there can be no forgiveness. Definitely, repentance is one of the conditions of salvation (Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19).

What then, is “the sin against the Holy Ghost?” *It is a disposition of heart which leads one to blaspheme, or slander, the Holy Spirit. The “one who is so desperately wicked as to be guilty of this sin, is already beyond the reach of redemption”* (J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Matthew and Mark*, p.110). Such an individual is unable to repent. His pardon is an impossibility. Jesus meant that when a person *completely repudiates the Spirit, and blasphemes Him*, he has committed “the unpardonable sin.”

The sin is eternal because it can never be forgiven, and it can never be forgiven because the person can never repent; where there is no possibility of repentance, there is no possibility of forgiveness.

III. Can People Commit “The Unpardonable Sin” Today?

Now, with these thoughts in mind, consider the answer to the important question, “can people commit ‘the unpardonable sin’ today?” or, “can people today sin to such an extent that they will become unpardonable?” This is a grim subject, but facts must be faced.

A. ONE MAY RESIST THE SPIRIT TODAY

The Holy Spirit speaks to people today through the Bible, the inspired word. Every person who rejects the truth resists the Spirit. Stephen charged his persecutors with resisting the Spirit in their refusal to hear (Acts 7:51; cf. Neh. 9:30). In resisting the words spoken by inspired men, the people to whom they were preaching were resisting the Spirit, for the Spirit was speaking to them through these teachers. So, today, when a sinner refuses to obey the Gospel, or when an erring child of God refuses to return from his wanderings, he is resisting the Spirit of God in rejecting the Spirit’s message to him. Man is free; he can resist. Furthermore, every time a person refuses to obey the Lord, he hardens his heart, and obedience becomes more difficult. Such continual rejections may finally render one incapable of obedience. This incapacity is caused by deliberately and wilfully rejecting the Spirit’s teaching. The Bible clearly teaches that one may so harden his heart as to become immune to any possibility of obeying the Lord and being saved. Although this immunity to the Gospel is not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the results are the same – namely, no forgiveness. This state of heart is the same as that condition of heart Jesus had in mind when He spoke the words of Matthew 12:31-32, and for that kind of blasphemy Christ said there could be no forgiveness. That one may persistently resist the teaching of the Holy Spirit and become so hardened that he cannot be reached, and thereby become unpardonable, proof is cited from the Scriptures:

1. Jesus said that some people of his day “could not believe” (John 12:37-40). Christ did not say they *would not*; He said they *could not*. Some of the Jews at first *would not* believe; later, because of the hardened condition of their hearts, they *could not* believe (cf. Matt. 13:14-15). Those who could not believe had refused so long to believe the teaching of God’s word and the evidences of Christ’s divinity that their ability to do so had been destroyed. “This is a *moral* impotency, like that of one that is accustomed to do evil, Jer. 13:23” (Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Bible*,

vol.5, p.1084). So, those who have repeatedly refused, may finally reach the condition that they cannot. Their power to believe and repent is gone. Stephen's murderers had surely reached that point.

2. Jehovah has always given people up who have repeatedly spurned His offer of mercy. To the antediluvians God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen. 6:3). After the days of grace were over, Jehovah sent the flood upon those whose hearts were continually thinking evil. Three times God instructed Jeremiah not to pray for certain individuals because there was no hope for them (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). Concerning Ephraim it was said, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hosea 4:17). Paul spoke of some whom God had given up (Rom. 1:26). Those who give up the Lord are finally given up by Him (I Chron. 28:9; II Chron. 15:2; 24:20; Prov. 1:24-30; 29:1; Isa. 45:9).

3. Describing those who would depart from the faith, the apostle Paul used these words: "...having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Tim. 4:2). He also spoke of those who were "past feeling" (Eph. 4:19). When cattle are branded, all feeling is gone from the part that is seared. Likewise, people may "sear" their consciences so that they become immune to the Gospel. Their senses may become so deadened that they cannot be aroused, and the Gospel no longer penetrates their hearts. This is a sad condition – "branded in their conscience as with a hot iron." Appropriate to this thought are the words of Charles H. Spurgeon: "There are some...who are given over to a seared conscience, concerning whom it may be said that repentance and salvation are impossible" *Memorial Library*, vol. 3, p.365).

4. The writer of the Book of Hebrews, speaking of apostate Christians, said: "For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4-6 ASV). These verses describe a condition into which some members of the church had fallen; in such a condition it was *impossible* to renew

them to repentance. They reach the possibility and results of abandoning Christ. Return is then impossible.

The language in this passage should be observed carefully. The wording is not "if they fall away" (future tense), but "and then fell away," or "having fallen away" (past tense).

The word *if* is not in the original Greek text of Hebrew 6:6; the word in our English Bible in the King James Version is in italics and was added by Theodore Beza (1519-1605), a French Protestant theologian and a Calvinist. Compare the reading of the Authorized Version ("*if they fall away*"), with the American Standard Version ("and then fell away"), Weymouth's translation ("and then fell away"), Goodspeed's translation ("and yet have fallen back"), William's translation ("and then have fallen by the wayside"), American Bible Union Version ("and have fallen away"), A Revision of the Challoner-Rheims Version ("and then have fallen away"), Bloomfield in *The Greek New Testament with English Notes*, vol. 2, p.424 ("Literally, 'those who have fallen away'"), Moffatt's translation ("and then fell away – it is impossible to make them repent afresh"). The writer simply said, "*tous . . . parapersontas*" – "those who have fallen away." The instances of apostasy are real, rather than imaginary. *The condition is not hypothetical.*

The people whom the writer described were once in covenant relation with God and enjoyed all the blessings of God's children. Observe: (a) They had been "enlightened" – they had understood the truth concerning Christianity, (b) They had "tasted the heavenly gift" – they had experienced the new life in Christ, (c) They had partaken "of the Holy Spirit" – they had enjoyed the indwelling of the Spirit, which all Christians now enjoy (Acts 5:32; I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16). (d) They had "tasted the good word of God" – they had enjoyed the food for the soul, (e) They had tasted "the powers of the age to come" – they had witnessed demonstrations of the Holy Spirit for revealing and confirming the truth; and, by faith, saw the eternal blessedness and joys of the world to come. (Possibly some of those people had worked miracles, for miracles were

not uncommon during the apostolic age.) After experiencing all of these blessings, those Christians *fell away*, and *repentance* for them was impossible.

There is a difference in *falling* and *falling away*. The word *away* indicates a severed connection. For instance, a person aboard ship may *fall* and not be drowned, but if he *falls away* he is lost. Likewise, one who has fallen *away* from the Lord has *totally severed* himself from Christ. *Apostasy* means “abandonment of what one has voluntarily professed; total desertion of principles or faith.” A person can fall away. One may have been enlightened and later apostatize, or fall away, beyond recovery. Paul said to some who had gone back to Judaism: “ye are *severed* from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are *fallen away* from grace” (Gal. 5:4 ASV). In explaining the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said: “they on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which *for a while believe*, and in time of temptation *fall away*” (Luke 8:13; cf. Psalm 37:23-24). The backslider falls, yet he may continue to have faith in God and be able to return. But this one who has *fallen away*, unlike the backslider, cannot return. For example, when one is ill, there is always the possibility of recovery, but after death, all hope is gone. Likewise, a Christian may fall and be restored, but when he falls away or apostatizes from Christ, all hope of restoration is gone. The hardened apostate no longer has any trust in the Lord; he has cut himself loose and is without hope. Such a sinner is too hardened to be restored. For when a person goes away from the Lord, when his conscience becomes seared, when all sensibility to spiritual things is dead, then God’s divine truth can no longer make any impression upon him. He cannot be renewed to repentance. He has fallen away. He has severed his connection with God. His case is hopeless.

Various attempts have been made to get around the obvious meaning of Hebrews 6:4-6. Some say that it refers to those who were never truly converted. But if the apostates here referred to were people who had never been converted, then how could the writer say, “it is impossible to renew them?” If they had never believed or had not been

made new, why did he say, “*Renew again?*” Would he give this solemn warning about an event which never occurred nor ever could occur? The inspired writer plainly says they were “once enlightened . . . and then fell away,” and “it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.” Since the passage clearly states that repentance by one who has fallen away is impossible, pardon is therefore also impossible. Forgiveness depends upon repentance. Hence, there is no pardon for the one who sins to the degree that he is unable to abandon evil and do right. It is not that God does not desire his pardon nor is unwilling to forgive, but he has gone so far he cannot be brought to repentance. Thus the impossible act is not God’s forgiveness, but the individual’s repentance. The important question to keep in mind as one studies this subject is not whether God will always forgive, but whether man can always repent. As long as repentance is possible, pardon is also possible. But *is repentance always possible?* No! “It is *impossible* to renew unto repentance . . . those who were once enlightened . . . and then fell away!” So Hebrews 6:4-6 teaches there were some who had actually done what many say cannot be done; that is, *they had sinned to such a degree that they were beyond God’s forgiveness*. It could be said of them that their sin was *unpardonable*. Since here is an example of some who had already completely fallen away from the Lord and were lost beyond redemption, “the unpardonable sin” is not limited to alien sinners. Erring children of God can sin to that degree that repentance is impossible because of the hardness of their hearts, and forgiveness, therefore, is also impossible. The hardened apostate cannot be reclaimed for Christ.

5. In another place, the author of the Book of Hebrews declares: “for if we sin wilfully (or, “if we deliberately persist in sinning” – *Authentic New Testament*) after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26-27 ASV). In this passage the word *wilfully* does not mean mere knowledge of one’s sin. To “sin wilfully” is to sin deliberately. (The word sin is in the present participle.) It is to persistently spurn God’s law with

open contempt. Such deliberate sinning will finally lead one to apostatize from Christ; and, as already observed, there is no pardon to them who wilfully apostatize from the Gospel, since there can be no repentance. According to the context, deliberately absenting oneself from the assembly is wilful sin (v.25).

There is a distinction in the guilt and heinousness of sins (John 19:11). In the Old Testament, Moses mentioned *two* types of sin: (1) sins of ignorance, and (2) sins of presumption. Note: "...If any soul sin through ignorance...it shall be forgiven him...But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously...that soul shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him" (Num. 15:27- 36). On the one hand the sin was ignorance, and on the other hand it was contempt for divine authority. For sins of weakness, or ignorance, a way for pardon was provided; but under the law of Moses there was no expiation for the apostate, the person who sinned with a high hand; his punishment was physical death (Deut. 17:2-7). This distinction of sins is carried over into the New Testament with greater emphasis. Under the Gospel of Christ the punishment for the apostate is eternal death (Rev. 20:14-15; 21:8; Luke 12:47-48). Note further the writers language: "man that hath set at nought Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: of how much sorer [graver] punishment, think ye, shall he be judged 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* to the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:28-29 ASV)? Certainly then, the Bible teaches that there is a vast difference in wilful sins and sins committed through ignorance or weakness of the flesh. Paul says, "brethren if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1 ASV). When one sins through weakness of the flesh, or in ignorance, and thus unintentionally disobeys God, he may repent and obtain pardon. Not so with the brother who pursues sin and hardens his heart by deliberately continuing therein. The door of mercy is closed to the apostate; he has before him

only the prospect of damnation, from which there is no escape. A man forfeits his last chance of pardon when he does despite to the Spirit of grace, or wilfully insults, or contemns the Spirit of God. "To insult this Spirit, then, as does the apostate, is manifestly the height of all wickedness, maliciousness, and impiety. And hence...for those who do so there is no forgiveness" (Robert Milligan, *Commentary on Hebrews*, p.287). What a solemn warning against the consequences of sinning to the extent that one becomes unpardonable!

Therefore, one should take all caution that he sin not in direct rebellion against God, despising His commands with full knowledge, lest he, in time, should come to that unpardonable state. Such sins, which indicate a more hardened heart than sins of ignorance or weakness, will, if persisted in, soon result in a disposition of mind which makes repentance impossible. Wilful sins harden one's heart to the extent that he will no longer have any desire to repent. David feared this peril, and prayed: "Keep back thy servant also from *presumptuous sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from *the great transgression*" (Psalm 19:13). The same conditions prevail today. Wilful sins are presumptuous and if persisted in will result in apostasy. Christ is God's *final sacrifice*. If, after having accepted the only sacrifice that can atone for his sins, one later repudiates that sacrifice, for him there will be no further Savior nor further forgiveness, but only everlasting torment . . . the utter destruction in the lake of fire that awaits all obstinate apostates at the judgment.

6. The apostle Peter, in writing about apostates, spoke of those who "cannot cease from sin" (II Peter 2:14). If one *cannot cease from sin* and has not the will-power to repent, how can he be forgiven? God requires all people to repent and cease from sin in order to be forgiven. (cf. II Peter 2:9,17,20-22)

7. John wrote: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he 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

unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death” (I John 5:16-17). Thus, there is “sin unto death,” and another “not unto death.” The *life* and *death* referred to in this passage are spiritual, not bodily. While physical death is the result of sin (I Cor. 15:21-22), it is not necessarily the result of the sins of the particular individual. The sin of Hebrews 6:4-6 is a “sin unto death,” while the sin of Galatians 6:1 is a “sin not unto death.”

When the apostle said, “if any man see his brother sin a sin...,” he was referring to children of God only, not alien sinners. Earlier in the Epistle the writer set forth the conditions whereby erring children might obtain forgiveness: “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. ... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:7,9). The Lord will forgive all sins that a brother will confess. There is a sin the Lord will not forgive. It follows, therefore, that the sin for which a brother will not be forgiven is the sin, any sin, of which a brother cannot repent and confess. John expressly says, “here is a sin unto death,” and advises Christians not to pray for one who has committed such a sin; that is, not to pray for him insofar as pardon is concerned, for to ask God to forgive such a one would be to pray for Him to pardon an impenitent sinner. When a brother cannot repent because he has seared his conscience and has become impervious to the gospel (a disposition which can be seen), there is no need to pray for his forgiveness. A soul hardened, like steel, by sin, is a soul that has “sinned unto death.”

From the passages studied, therefore, it can be seen that a person may sin to such a *degree that he will be beyond the reach of Divine mercy*. “The unpardonable sin” is not so much any particular act or sin, such as lying or stealing, but a condition of heart, a state of bitter rejection of the Holy Spirit. Most people who have been troubled about “the unpardonable sin” have thought of it as one particular transgression. But there is no sin which is beyond the cleansing power of the blood of Christ if the Lord’s law of

pardon is obeyed. Recently the writer read the following statement of another preacher: “Thank God, no one is ever too far gone, too hardened in his transgression to repent.” The verses read are meaningless if this be true. The author agrees, on the other hand, with the preacher who said, “no man ever goes so far away from God, no man ever lives in sin so long but that if he will return to God, God will receive him and will give him abundant pardon.” For one to say that a person cannot possibly reach the state that he cannot repent, or return to God, is not taught in the Bible. The Bible clearly teaches that this state can be reached; one can commit the “eternal sin” or else Jesus would not have warned against it.

There are three kinds of sinners spoken of in the Scriptures: (1) sinners that are pardoned or forgiven; (2) sinners that are pardonable but unforgiven because the conditions of forgiveness have not yet been met; (3) sinners that are unpardonable. All sins are unpardoned as long as the sinner refuses to repent. Any sin, unrepented of and, therefore, unforgiven, will cause the sinner to be lost in the judgment (John 8:21; Rev. 21:27). Any *unpardonable sin is an unforgiven sin, but not all unforgiven sins are unpardonable*. There is a difference between sin unpardoned and sin unpardonable. There is a difference between a state or condition of heart in which one has not repented but can repent, and in which one cannot repent. So there are those who have not been pardoned because they have not repented, for continuance in any sin precludes forgiveness. Others are unpardonable because they have hardened their hearts so much through persistent rejection that they cannot repent.

Fundamentally, therefore, “the unpardonable sin” is the deliberate and final rejection of Christ, whether by a Christian or by one outside the body of Christ. One’s *final and complete rejection* of the teaching of the Holy Spirit, or God’s Word, means doom. Both saint and sinner are capable of sinning today in such a way that they may be beyond the reach of pardon because of hardened hearts. Any person, whether alien or erring child of God, who allows himself to drift beyond the power of the Gospel, the Spirit’s message to

the world, sins unpardonably. When anyone has so hardened his heart against the only power God has to save him, that person is beyond redemption. Thus, the man who persists in sin, hardens his own heart and seals his own doom. If the rejection is *final*, the case is *fatal*.

B. ILLUSTRATIONS MAKE THIS LESSON PLAIN

Some illustrations are listed. Suppose that a man is tied in a chair by a small string. He can break the string and arise easily. But suppose the string is wrapped many times around the man and the chair. When he is tied in that manner the man cannot break the strings, and arise. The effects of sin are similar. Sin is a cord that binds one more and more each time he sins, until finally he is completely bound. Solomon says: "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be *holden* with the cords of his sins" (Prov. 5:22). One may ask, "cannot Christ set one free" (cf. John 8:31-36)? No, not *if* he is so wicked and degenerate that he *cannot* repent. Therefore, one may be held fast by the cords of his sins, unable to repent and return to God.

Suppose, again, that one should daily place in each eye a drop of acid. Gradually his sight would fail. He may be warned by his physician that if he continues to put acid in his eyes he will eventually become totally blind. But he fails to heed the warning, and finally loses his eyesight. Then long as he may live he shall never see again. Committing an irremedial injury against one's eye sight is similar to committing unpardonable sin against one's soul. In each case the sin is a deliberate one and irreparable damage is done.

That members of living bodies atrophy (waste away) through inactivity is a well known fact. For instance, fish in the Mammoth Cave cannot see; they have gone blind because of their living in total darkness. To lose the use of one's arm, a person does not necessarily have to sever the limb from the body. All he has to do is to bind the arm to his body and let it remain there for several months, unused, and it will wither. Likewise with the soul; repeated and persistent rejection of the Gospel eventually will harden one

to such an extent that he cannot obey and obtain pardon. "The unpardonable sin" is a malignant state of heart and disposition of mind which renders a person unwilling and unable to do the Lord's will because his conscience is as senseless as the scars on branded cattle. One asks, "is this total depravity?" perhaps, but one is not born totally depraved (Isa. 59:1-2; Matt. 19:14).

IV. "Have I Committed 'The Unpardonable Sin'?"

As many have before, ask yourself, "have I sinned unpardonably?" Since final repudiation of the Spirit constitutes unpardonable sin, the one who is concerned about this subject has not sinned unpardonably. His fear is evidence that such is not the case. The person who has committed "the unpardonable sin" is not concerned about it. If one has committed this sin, he is not interested in his soul. He is utterly devoid of penitence and the fear of God. No penitent person can be guilty of this sin, neither could he be guilty of it as long as he has a desire to repent. "The unpardonable sin," regardless of the specific acts, is essentially wilful and deliberate sin against the knowledge of God's Word. It emanates from a hardened heart, and makes repentance impossible. As already learned, forgiveness is not bestowed on the impenitent. Any one who will repent and obey the Lord shows by his obedience that he has not committed "the unpardonable sin." There is no hope of pardon, only for those who cannot repent. The mercy of God is great. He never refuses to forgive anyone, whether alien sinner or erring child of God, who will repent and do His will (cf. Psalm 103-8,11-18; Luke 15; I Cor. 5:5; James 5:19-20; Acts 2:38).

A. "THE UNPARDONABLE SIN" IS NOT COMMITTED SUDDENLY

A person, therefore, does not reach the unpardonable state in a single day. Before he reaches that condition, he does, in Bible language, three things: (1) *grieves the Spirit* – "and grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are

sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30); (2) *resists the Spirit* – “...ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51); (3) *quenches the Spirit* – “quench not the Spirit” (I Thess. 5:19). Quench means to suppress or to stifle. When the Spirit has been quenched the eternal sin has been committed, but not until then. Hence, these words describe the effects produced by ones sinful progression toward the unpardonable state. When men grieve the Holy Spirit and resist the Holy Spirit, they are preparing the way for the ultimate tragedy, the quenching of the Holy Spirit.

Any step away from the Lord is dangerous; it is a step toward eternal and irrevocable separation from God. Repeated rejection of the Gospel may eventually result in the state where obedience is impossible. The person, who persistently resists the Spirit and continually refuses to heed the Lord, may finally go too far to “return unto the Lord” (Isa. 55:7). Every invitation rejected hardens the heart. Very few old people, who have repeatedly refused to obey the Gospel, ever repent. Many of them have crossed beyond the extension line of God’s mercy. Of course, man does not definitely know when that point is reached in any person’s life (whether this state has been reached in any individual can be determine by God Himself), yet continued and determined opposition to the Lord will harden one until he cannot be reached with the Gospel, Gods only power to save (Rom. 1:16).

B. CHRISTIANS SHOULD HOPE AND PRAY FOR THE SALVATION OF ALL (ROM. 10:1; 11:23)

No doubt some are hopeless. They have become seared and hardened; but, since one does not positively know, do not conclude that any man has passed beyond the point of salvation. As long as a sinner lives, continue to preach repentance to him. Nor should the sinner despair of his salvation as long as he can repent. Many have not yet become unpardonable sinners. Perhaps only in rare instances is this true. One should exert all power possible to turn to God at once and in genuine repentance obey the

Lord’s commands. The Bible emphasizes that any unforgiven sin will cause one to be lost; it does not have to be “the unpardonable sin.” The result of unpardoned sin at death is the same as the result of “the unpardonable sin.” It makes no difference if a man could have been saved, if he persistently refused to be saved. The great majority of people today are guilty of pardonable sins; they are unforgiven because they have refused to obey the Gospel.

“If I were in a boat on the river in the rapids, it would not be necessary, to insure my destruction, that I should enter into violent controversy with those who would urge me from the shore, to take heed and come to land: all I should have to do would be to shut my ears to their entreaty and leave myself alone; the current would do the rest. Neglect of the Gospel is thus just as perilous as the open rejection of it. Indeed, half the evils of our daily life in temporal things are caused by neglect; and countless are the souls who are lost for this same cause.” (Wm. Taylor, *The Parables of our Saviour*, pp. 159, 160.)

C. TODAY IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

A short distance above Niagara Falls there is a sign which says, “past-Redemption Point.” This meaning is obvious. The boatman drifting on the surface of the waters knows that he must not go beyond this sign. A little beyond the sign the river begins raging over the precipice; there the boatman is too far gone to turn back. Likewise, a similar condition prevails with the person who commits “the unpardonable sin,” or with one who delays obedience until death comes; he has reached Past-Redemption Point. This is the point of no return. Since no one has a lease on life or knows what a day may bring, there is only one way for an individual to make sure that his salvation will not become impossible: he should obey the Lord today. “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation”(2 Cor. 6:2). “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb. 3:7-8; 4:7).

The peril of waiting too long to repent is vividly illustrated by the following story: once a man standing by

Niagara saw an eagle sitting on a lamb frozen in a piece of floating ice. The eagle was feasting upon the carcass as it drifted toward the rapids. Now and then the eagle proudly lifted his head to look around, as if to say, "I'm drifting on toward danger, but I know what I am doing; I will fly away and escape before it is too late."

With great interest the man watched the piece of ice and its strange cargo drift near the awful roar of the falls. At last the eagle stopped, spread his powerful wings and leaped for flight. But alas! While he had been feasting on the carcass his feet had frozen to the fleece. He leaped and shrieked in vain. Together the frozen lamb and the eagle went over the falls into the darkness of death.

This incident illustrates the danger of every soul feasting upon sin. Many young men intend, after a little more indulgence, to turn away from sin and be saved. But alas! When they would turn, they find themselves bound by sinful habits, poisoned by sin, paralyzed in will, and frozen in soul by the evil upon which they have been feasting. There is no greater folly than feasting until one is corrupted by it. All should seek the Lord while they are able to escape the clutches of death; tomorrow may be forever too late (Prov. 27:1; James 4:13-17).

The poem, "The Doomed Man," gives pause for solemn reflection:

There is a time, I know not when,
A place, I know not where.
Which marks the destiny of men
To glory or despair.

There is a line by us not seen,
Which crosses every path;
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath.

How long may men go on in sin?
How long will God forbear?
Where does hope end, and where begin
The confines of despair?

One answer from those skies is sent.

Ye who from God depart.

While it is called today, repent

And harden not your heart.

— Dr. Joseph Addison Alexander

V. The Statements of Others Will Help

Finally, to conclude this study and to help to better understand what "the unpardonable sin" is, notice some statements from others.

H. Leo Boles made the following comments on this subject: "Many misunderstood Jesus, his teachings, and his kingdom while he was on earth, and denied him as being the Messiah, who after wards repented and were pardoned, and became Christians. (Acts 2:37-38; Acts 9:1,17.) Many could and did reject Jesus while he was on earth, but when the Holy Spirit came and testified of him, they accepted Christ. But when the Holy Spirit came and gave the complete will of God, men rejected this, there was no other evidence to be furnished, no other divine agency to be given, and if they finally rejected the Holy Spirit, there was no forgiveness for them. (*A Commentary the Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 270.)

Again from Boles: "one who heard Christ could and did blaspheme him; they spoke evil to him and of him; they even attributed the power that he used in casting out demons to Beelzebub; this was speaking evil against the Son of Man ... If one finally rejects the Holy Spirit and the teaching that he gave in the New Testament, there is no hope for that one ... there is no chance for forgiveness because no other agency from heaven will be given." (*A Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, p. 250.)

In one of his famous Tabernacle sermons, N. B. Hardeman said: "Every soul who rejects the Gospel call once, becomes harder to reach the next time. You may hear the Gospel and possibly be convicted of the righteousness of the cause presented; but if you are studying business interests, worldly affairs, things material rather than things that are sacred, holy and high, the result will be that your

hearts will become hardened, and the chances might come to pass that you will reach that point where the Gospel has lost its power upon you and you are doomed to destruction and damnation at the great day.” (“The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” *The Bible Searchlight and the Holy Land*, p. 226.)

In an excellent sermon on “Sins the Lord Will Not Forgive, Guy N. Woods said: “...Any final and irrevocable repudiation of the Spirit would, in principle, constitute such a sin.” (*The Second Coming and Other Sermons*, p. 55.).

In *Paul the Missionary*, Wm. Taylor said: “...if men stubbornly shut their hearts against God’s truth, their consciences will become seared, their spirits will be hardened with insensibility, and the light that is in them will become darkness” (p.103).

Alfred Plummer said: “Constant and consummate opposition to the influence of the Holy Spirit, because of a deliberate preference of darkness to light, renders repentance, and therefore forgiveness, morally impossible. Grace, like bodily food, may be rejected until the power to receive it perishes.” (*International Critical Commentary*, Vol. on Luke, p, 321.)

In giving an answer to the question of study, Isaac Errett said: “The sin against the Holy Spirit, whatever form it may take on, is essentially a willful and deliberate sin against light and knowledge. ... Such rejections of truth leave no space for repentance, for they so wrench and pervert the moral powers as to render one incapable of repentance. That is the reason why this sin hath no forgiveness. ... Salvation is not bestowed on the unbelieving and impenitent. Any one who will believe and repent gives evidence in so doing that he has not committed the sin against the Holy Spirit.” (*The Querists’ Drawer*, pp. 180,181.)

