

## **“The Sin That Refuses Pardon”**

(This is a grouping of 8 articles written by Ellet J. Waggoner on the Unpardonable Sin. Their dates are in order from April 14, 1887 through January 1, 1903.)

### **The Unpardonable Sin (part 1 of 2) - April 14, 1887**

**Ellet J. Waggoner : The Signs of the Times**

“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. 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.” Matthew 12.31, 32

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.

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 spoke and saw.” The people were amazed, but the Pharisees contemptuously and blasphemously said: “This fellow does not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.” Matthew 12.24. Instead of glorifying God, whose Spirit did this wonderful thing; 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 Savior’s words concerning the unpardonable nature of the sin against the Holy Spirit, and adds, “Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.” Mark 3.30. Thus we find, without any further investigation, that this sin consists in attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil.

But it is not by words alone that men may commit this, any more than any other sin. Paul speaks of some who “profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.” Titus 1.16. 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: "And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." "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." Genesis 6.3,5. 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 stifling 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.

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: —

"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. 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; 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." 2 Chronicles 36.14-16

"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.

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: —

"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, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, 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." Hebrews 6.4-6

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: "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." 1 John 5.16. 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.

## **The Unpardonable Sin (part 2 of 2) - April 21, 1887**

### **Ellet J. Waggoner : The Signs of the Times**

The same thing is brought to view in Hebrews 10.26-29: "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought 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 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 hath 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 will not 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.

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 . . . to the Jews: "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walks in darkness knows not whither he goes." John 12.35. And in like manner Paul says that Satan will, just before the coming of the Lord, work "with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thessalonians 2.9-12. 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; and "even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and God gave them over to a mind void of judgment." See Romans 1.27-28, margin

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 Hebrews 12.15-17, which reads thus: "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; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye 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: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." 2 Timothy 4.10. 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. 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.

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

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

"To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; 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."

## **The Unpardonable Sin - January 31, 1895**

### **Ellet J. Waggoner : The Present Truth**

The Unpardonable Sin: This may be defined in few words. It is simply the sin of unbelief. Faith that appropriates the life and power of God is the only means of salvation. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven the one who believes, for "with the heart man believeth unto

righteousness;" but he who refuses to believe, shuts himself off from the fountain of life and righteousness. In short, the unpardonable sin is the sin that rejects pardon.

## **The Unpardonable Sin - March 12, 1896**

### **Ellet J. Waggoner : The Present Truth**

The Unpardonable Sin: Faith is the only means of salvation. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven the one who believes, for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." But he who refuses to believe shuts himself off from life and righteousness. *In short, the unpardonable sin is the sin that rejects pardon.*

## **Sinning Willfully - August 16, 1900**

### **Ellet J. Waggoner : The Present Truth**

"If we sin willfully after that we have I received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Hebrews 10.26, 27

How much trouble many sincere souls have unnecessarily made themselves over these words. By what perverseness of humanity so many are determined to make out the worst case possible for themselves, and not to hope in the Lord until hope is forced upon them, we cannot understand; for it seems as though a perishing soul would always seize eagerly upon even the slightest thing that offered support. It is said that a drowning man will catch at a straw, and therefore it must be that many who mournfully bewail their sins do not have a real sense of sinking into the bottomless pit, or else they would not pass by the abundance of "exceeding great and precious promises," by which they may become partakers of the Divine nature, to dwell upon some text which can be made to sound as though it told that God had wearied of mercy.

The very common idea of this text is that if anybody commits sin, knowing that it is sin, he can have no hope of pardon. If that were true it would cut off all men from salvation; for there is no person in the world, who has come to years of understanding, who has not at some time done that which he knew was not right. How many there are who have long fought with conviction, resisting the moving of the Holy Spirit, until at last they have yielded, and have found peace by believing. It must not be thought that it is a light matter to resist the strivings of the Spirit of God, or that one can go on in sin at pleasure, trusting to some future time to find a more convenient season for repentance; but we must set before every soul the exceeding great goodness and long-suffering of our God, even though some take advantage of it to their ruin. Only the goodness of God can lead men to repentance.

The Bible is full of instances of God's mercy to the very worst offenders. Take the history of the children of Israel. "Their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath. For He remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passes away, and cometh not again." Psalm 78.37-39. A thousand cases could not make any more plain the fact that God forgives people again and again for the same sin.

Did not Peter know that it was wrong to curse and swear? Moreover, did he not know that it was wrong to lie, and above all to deny his Lord? Yet he found forgiveness.

The third chapter of Jeremiah recounts the repeated transgressions of Israel in the face of God's manifested presence, yet in the same connection we read: "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." Verse 12.

Read the entire book of Hosea. It is simply one record of apostasy and departure from God. No language is too strong to describe the abominable idolatries of the people who had seen the glory of God in the sanctuary, yet the book closes with the most tender appeals to them to return and be saved. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto Him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously;" and the promise is, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him." What more could the Lord say than that?

On one occasion Peter came to the Lord, and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." Matthew 18.21, 22. Still more: "Take heed to yourselves; if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." Luke 17.3, 4. Mind, it does not say if the brother is deeply repentant; with that we have nothing to do; we may not inquire into motives; but if he merely says, "I repent," no matter how lightly the words may be spoken, we must forgive him. And do you think that the Master expects mortals to be better than their Lord? Nay, for it is only by the grace and mercy of the Lord bestowed upon us, that we are able to forgive anybody who trespasses against us. Therefore we know that no matter how often we have sinned against God, He will freely forgive us; and even if we have committed the same sin seven times in a day, we may turn to Him the seventh time, sure of finding His loving arms open to receive us. What a merciful Father is our God! "The longsuffering of our God is salvation."

But what shall we say of the verse with which we started? It stands just the same as before, in spite of all the things that we have read elsewhere. True enough; but it does not contradict what God has said as to His longsuffering, and His forbearance with sinners. The trouble is that those who read Hebrews 10.26, 27 do not read farther. Read the verses first quoted, and then continue: "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought 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?" Hebrews 10.28, 29. *Here we have an explanation of what is meant by sinning willfully. It is not the commission of an ordinary sin, —it is, indeed, not the commission of any particular act of sin, —but it is the deliberate and willful rejection of the means of salvation from sin.* It is this act by one who knows what he is doing. It is the turning away from God, by one who has been sanctified through the truth, and who has therefore known it thoroughly; it is the deliberate rejection of the Saviour by one who has had communion with Him, and who has tasted the blessedness of the fellowship of the Spirit. After all this, he turns from it all, tramples the Son of God under foot, counts the precious blood of Christ an unholy thing, and denies its power to save, and boldly chooses sin instead of righteousness. How can there be for him any more sacrifice for sin? God has no other Son to

offer for sinners, for He has given His only begotten Son, and in Him has given Himself. All heaven was emptied in that gift, and he who deliberately and with set purpose rejects it, especially after having known all about it, has nothing to look forward to but everlasting destruction. It is a fearful thing to contemplate.

It is not for any mortal to say when that fatal step has been taken. We are never justified in saying that any person has committed the unpardonable sin. We can never say that a person has had all the light that God is willing to give him. We may have presented the truth to him as faithfully as we knew how, and yet we may not be the instruments through whom the clear knowledge of the truth can come to that one. Our words may have been to him empty sounds, and may have fallen upon dazed ears; afterwards some other person may come with a very simple tale, and the light may flash upon him. Or it may be that the words that we have spoken may come to him later on with force that they did not have when we uttered them. Therefore we are never to despair of anybody nor to give them up as hopelessly lost. If we had lived in the days of Saul of Tarsus we should doubtless have said that he was incorrigible, since he had heard Stephen's dying testimony when full of the Spirit; but God had not given Saul up, although he was fighting against Him.

But there is more for us in the text we are studying. There is infinite comfort in it. What does it teach us? —Simply this: that there is no sin that cannot be pardoned if we are willing to be pardoned. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Romans 10.13. There is no exception. No matter what sin one has committed, nor how often it has been repeated, if he but calls upon the name of the Lord, salvation is his. The only condition of forgiveness is to accept it; what more could anybody ask; forgiveness is impossible only for him who deliberately refuses it. What more could God say to sinners of every class and degree than He has said?

We are not afraid that this teaching will lead men to continue in their sins. Its natural effect is exactly the opposite. When one sees Christ crucified for him, and knows that the gracious sacrifice was for him alone, the deeps of his sinful nature are broken up, and he can but love the One who has so loved him, and, loving Him, he will henceforth dread above all things to grieve Him. If he falls into sin, he knows that "He abides faithful; He cannot deny Himself," and the everlasting love of the Redeemer draws him back. Only in deliberately turning away, and refusing to be drawn back to Him who is lifted up, is there no more sacrifice for sin. That is, there is no more sacrifice only when the one sacrifice is despised and rejected.

"Though I forget Him, and wander away,  
Still He doth love me wherever I stray;  
Back to His dear, loving arms would I flee,  
When I remember that Jesus loves me."

"I am so glad that Jesus loves me, even me!" are not you?

## **The Editor's Private Corner - God's Long-suffering and Justice**

**January 10, 1901**

**Ellet J. Waggoner : The Present Truth**

Now you will say, "What then becomes of the statement that while there's life there's hope, and that life itself is hope? Can we indeed take the fact that we are alive as evidence that God accepts us?"

Yes, we can; the fact that there are living men who have committed the unpardonable sin, —have fully rejected God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, and done despite to the Spirit of grace, counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, —does not warrant anybody in supposing that he himself is one of the number. Quite the contrary, for the fact that a person is troubled over sin is proof that he has not committed the unpardonable sin, which is refusal to be forgiven. So long as a person lives, there is hope for him, provided he will. "Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." Understand, and never forget, that God never makes it impossible for anybody to repent and find mercy. Men are lost, not because they cannot be saved, but because they will not. It is true that men do become so set in their rebellious ways that they cannot turn, but it is not God who has fixed them in that way. They themselves have forged their own chains of darkness.

## **The Editor's Private Corner – The Unpardonable Sin**

**March 13, 1902**

**Ellet J. Waggoner : The Present Truth**

### **The Sin Against the Holy Ghost**

"A friend of mine wants to know what is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and would like to have some Scripture references on the subject, for his own benefit."

Certainly I will give your friend some Scripture references, for I could not answer the question otherwise. The Word of God is our only guide, and nobody is authorized to speak anything but that Word.

In order to get a clearer idea of the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is the one unpardonable sin, you should read Matthew 12.24-32. I will quote a part of it. "Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of devils."

Jesus knowing their thoughts, told them that a house or a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, and showed them that His work could not possibly be of the devil; and then He added: —

"He that is not with Me is against Me; and He that gathers not with Me, scatters abroad. 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. 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'."

We see a marked contrast between "all the people" and the Pharisees. The people accepted Jesus as the Anointed Son of David; but the Pharisees rejected Him. Whether Jesus meant to indicate that the Pharisees had already sinned against the Holy Ghost, or whether He spoke to warn them of their danger, we have no means of knowing; and it is not important that we should know. The important thing is to know that the unpardonable sin is the conscious, willful rejection of Christ "who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God." This is plainly indicated in the text, and others corroborate it.

The same thing is stated in Hebrews 6.4-6: —

"It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God; and the powers of the world to come, 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."

This text is very simple, and no one need have any trouble over it. It does not say that no backslider can be reclaimed; but it does say those who reject Christ cannot be renewed unto repentance; and this is so because "neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4.12

Note that those spoken of in this verse have been almost the same as in heaven. They have had the richest Christian experience, knowing the Word of God, and tasting the powers of the world to come. They have been fully enlightened; they have experienced all the God has for them; yet they have turned their backs upon it all. It is impossible to reduce such to repentance. Why? Because "they crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame."

Do not fail to notice that the text goes back of forgiveness. It doesn't say that these cannot be forgiven, but that they cannot repent. That is the worst possible case. Of course they cannot be forgiven if they cannot repent. And they cannot repent, because they continued deliberately to reject Christ, whom God hath "exalted with His own right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour; for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin." Acts 5.31

Lastly we have Hebrews 10.26-29: —

"If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done desperate to the Spirit of grace?"

Here there is willful rejection of Christ, and treading Him under foot. So "there remains no more sacrifice for sins" for them. The reason of this is plain. It is because Christ is the only sacrifice; whoever rejects Him has nothing to hope in or for.

But with this text we must not fail to place John 6.37: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." There is sacrifice and atonement for the sins of every one who comes to the Lord

Jesus, and abides in Him. There remains no sacrifice for sin, only when the One provided by the Eternal Spirit is despised and trampled under foot. And, mind, this trampling under foot must be done willfully, with full knowledge of who He is. "The princes of this world," who sued the Lord of glory, did not know what they were doing (1 Corinthians 2.8; Luke 23.34), and therefore there was forgiveness for them. Judas basely and willfully betrayed innocent blood, and even his prayer became sin. Psalm 59.6-18

How much more than what has here been set forth may be involved in the sin against the Holy Ghost, I do not know; but one thing is sure, and that is, that no one who is mourning over his sins, and is fearful that he has committed the unpardonable sin, has been guilty of it. The one who has committed that sin is not penitent. Nobody has a right to say of another, that he has committed the unpardonable sin; and nobody who has committed it ever accuses himself of it.

## **The Editor's Private Corner – The Unpardonable Sin**

**January 1, 1903**

**Ellet J. Waggoner : The Present Truth**

"As a constant reader of your splendid paper, *PRESENT TRUTH*, I find in the issue of Nov. 20, reference made to sin against the Holy Spirit. You have thrown light through your columns on many different passages in the Word of God; and as this question of sin against the Holy Spirit has caused me great anxiety, as I am sure it has thousands of others, I shall feel most grateful if, as soon as your space will permit, you will give this subject a careful explanation, as far as the Spirit has shown you the truth. This subject seems wrapped in mystery. I have heard people swear by the Holy Ghost; would this be the sin to which are attached such awful consequences? An early reply through your 'Private Corner' will bring light and comfort to thousands of hearts."

It is not at all to be wondered at that the question, "What is the sin against the Holy Spirit?" This has caused many people much anxiety; for Jesus said: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. 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." Matthew 12.31,32. I well remember how I trembled when I read this passage as a boy and young man, fearing lest I had unconsciously committed the sin that never could be pardoned; and during my ministry of the Gospel I have met very many people who were firmly convinced that they had sinned beyond the hope of pardon, and who could scarcely be persuaded to the contrary. One of my most precious treasures is the knowledge, conveyed to me some time after the event, that a man who was in despair over the thought that he had committed the unpardonable sin, and was about to commit suicide, was turned from his fearful purpose, and restored to a joyful faith in Christ, through what the world would call a "chance" reading of an article that I had written on the subject. So I know that it is a most practical question for consideration.

People often get the idea that the unpardonable sin is simply an exceedingly great sin, that is, that it differs from ordinary sins only in degree, or that it is a vast accumulation of sins. It is no uncommon thing to a hear person say, "I am so great a sinner that the Lord can never pardon me." Now that this is not so, is made very plain in the same text that tells us about the unpardonable

sin. "All manner, of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." And it matters not that the sin is great; for "the law entered that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Romans 5.20. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isaiah 1.18. There is no such thing as great and small, difficult and easy, with the infinite God. He creates by His Word, and it is just as easy for Him to speak a universe into existence as to create a single blade of grass, or a single grain of sand. It is by the same Word of life that He forgives; and it is just as easy for Him, since He is love itself, to speak pardon to the hardened sinner of fourscore as to forgive the child who has taken his first step in the broad way.

Since the sin against the Holy Spirit is the only one that has no pardon, wherever we find mention of any sin from which there is no salvation, we shall know that it is the same one. Now there are a few other texts besides the one already quoted, which speak of such a thing, and they help to a better understanding of the subject. These texts are all in Hebrews, and we will read them together. The first is this: —

"It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, 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." Hebrews 6.4-6

This should be compared with some verses in chapter 10. After speaking of the "new and living way" which Christ has consecrated for us through the veil as a reason why we should "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith," the Apostle continues: —

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; . . . for if we sin willfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall ye be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Spirit 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?" Verses 23-29

If you lay all these texts side by side, and consider them carefully, you will see that the one thing which they all mention in common, —the sum, indeed, of them all, —is the willful, deliberate rejection of the means of salvation. Turn back to Matthew, and read the verses in the twelfth chapter, which immediately precede the statement concerning the sin against the Holy Spirit. We see that they contain an account of the attitude of the Pharisees toward the work of Jesus. They said that His miracles were wrought by the aid of the prince of the devils; but we know that they were by the power of the Spirit, as He Himself said. Luke 4.18. This leads to the thought that the unpardonable sin is the utter rejection of Christ's work, and the placing of the Holy Spirit on the same plane as the devil. That is to say, 'All manner of sin may be pardoned, except the sin of rejecting and treating with contempt the only means of pardon and salvation'.

This is corroborated by the statement in Hebrews 9.14, that Christ "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God" to "purge your conscience from dead works to serve the

living God.” The eternal Spirit is that which fills the universe, upholding all things, and filling all with life. Now if this universal Spirit is treated contemptuously, there can be no hope of pardon, seeing that the source of all power is rejected. Thus we are exhorted, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” Ephesians 4.30

In short, all sin may be pardoned, except the rejection of pardon. And this rejection must be with purpose. Nobody does it unconsciously. It is impossible for a man to commit the sin against the Holy Spirit, and still to be in doubt about it. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean that the one who has committed the unpardonable sin will necessarily know that he has done so; on the contrary, he will most likely be utterly indifferent, hardened, and having no conscience of sin. He will have lost the power to distinguish between good and evil; for he has virtually said, with Satan,

“Evil, be thou my good,” and will very often not fear hell any more than he longs for heaven. But it may be set down as a certainty that whoever is in doubt whether he has committed the unpardonable sin or not, and is troubled over his sins, has not sinned beyond the hope of pardon. There is hope as long as one is willing to be saved.

What a wonderful salvation! How long-suffering and patient and kind and forgiving God is! Though one sin against Him seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again, saying, “I repent,” He freely forgives. Though our sins are more in number than the hairs of our head, He will forgive them all. “Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” Micah 7.18, 19