

The Unpardonable Sin

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Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. (John 16:7, 8)

Our entire system of jurisprudence is undergoing a revolution of great proportions. The legal apparatus of our nation is being remodeled and revised. There is emerging an entirely different approach to the arrest and conviction of alleged criminals. The former purpose of the law was to punish the guilty and to protect the innocent. The new concept of justice is weighed on the side of the guilty and of the criminal. Now it appears that the guilty are to be protected and the innocent are to be punished. A known mass killer is given every protection to the extent that it seems almost impossible to bring him to justice. Meanwhile, helpless and innocent women are exposed to the fiendish designs of any other murderer who might be loose in that area, feeling that he too could get by with it. It is difficult today to obtain a conviction – yet a conviction against the guilty is the sole objective of the prosecution, while the defense seeks to avoid conviction by every means that is possible.

In the spiritual realm, the Holy Spirit seeks to bring conviction to the guilty heart of man. And the natural man attempts to avoid accepting the verdict of guilty. He tries every method to discount it; he uses every device that is known to dismiss the charge of guilty; he uses every expedient, all the way from blatant denial to miserable excuses. But, in spite of man's vaunted boasting, the charge of God still stands: Man is guilty before God.

Now we know that whatever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (Romans 3:19)

The Spirit of God prosecutes this case even further and says:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

Today God is not about to dismiss the charges in order to conform to some new interpretation by the Supreme Court. God says man is guilty before Him and that He will not clear him:

Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:7)

That is God's verdict. You must remember that He is not in the position of the prosecuting attorney here, but He is the *Judge* of all mankind.

The Holy Spirit is in the world to press the charges of God, to bring conviction to man of his condition and his position before God. Speaking of the Holy Spirit's ministry, the Lord Jesus said:

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. (John 16:8)

“Reprove” is a very weak translation. The word in the Greek is *elegcho*. I have counted it twenty-three times in the trial of Socrates, and it actually means “to convict.” The Holy Spirit’s role is that of a prosecuting attorney bringing in evidence – “He will *convict* the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

That, my friend, explains the tenacious and persistent and omnipresent guilt complex that the human race has today. Wherever man is located you will find him with a sense of right and wrong, and he has deep within himself a guilt complex. The very thing the psychologists and psychiatrists try to remove, the Spirit of God is there to *brand* upon the conscience of man.

It was Seneca, the pagan philosopher of Rome, who wrote this, and he sounds like an enlightened man:

We must say to ourselves that we are evil, have been evil, and – unhappily, I must add – shall be also in the future. Nobody can deliver himself; someone must stretch out a hand to him to lift him up.

Coming up to date in this day when we have a new viewpoint of immorality, we find a surprising statement from Dr. C. E. Joad, a University of London philosopher. He, a rank unbeliever until World War II, made this statement:

When war came, the existence of evil hit me in the face....I see now that evil is endemic in man, and that the Christian doctrine of original sin expresses a deep and essential insight into human nature.

He calls the Christian faith “a light to live by in an ever-darkening world.” This is a remarkable statement coming from a man like that. Also, I know of a psychiatrist here in Southern California who feels that getting rid of religion would be a wonderful thing and a boost for mankind. But even he has to admit the Bible concept of the depravity of man, and you can see in that the wistful, deep-in-the-background guilt complex. He says that there are certain things that are disquieting today in this world. Atom bombs and mass murders of people tempt him to give in to the thought that man is “irretrievably the product of instincts that are inherently vicious and base.” This is an interesting conclusion coming from a modern psychiatrist. It was Disraeli, a diplomat *par excellence*, who said, “One of the hardest things in this world to do is to admit you are wrong. And nothing is more helpful in resolving a situation than its frank admission.”

Down deep in the human heart is that guilt complex. Though man may stifle it, somehow or another it follows him. I continue to receive letters from former students confessing wrongdoing. One was a confession of dishonesty on an examination. It read in part, “I write this because it is my great desire to have a keen sensitivity to sin and the sin of lying stands in the way.” He waited ten years to confess that! Although sin may be buried deeply in the human heart, the Spirit of God is in the world to convict of “sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

A very learned professor in Europe years ago was arrested for a terrible murder. He was imprisoned in one of France’s miserable dungeons. After being there for several days he called to the jailer, “I wish you would remove that man next to me. All during the night he keeps saying, ‘Professor Webster is a murderer. Professor Webster is a murderer.’” The jailer answered, “I am sorry, Professor Webster, but there is no one in the cell next to you.” The Holy Spirit brings conviction – a conviction, of course, that is resisted.

The Holy Spirit is, therefore, in the world to press these charges of God, to bring conviction to the human heart. He appeals to the judgment of man. That judgment is above the emotional and mental part of man; it is in that area of the judgment hall of every individual. The Holy Spirit carries it into the Supreme Court, into the place where man exercises free will, and He asks man to accept the verdict of God, to plead guilty and cast himself upon the mercy of the court. When the accused does this, the strangest thing happens – something that cannot be justified even in our court system today – God comes over on the side of the criminal, and He says to man:

Come now, and let us reason together...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)

The Spirit of God not only brings conviction, but reveals the One who paid the penalty for man's sin.

Then our Lord went on to explain in John 16:9 what He meant by sin – “Of sin, because they believe not on me.” Notice it is not plural, it is not *sins*. Man today is not guilty and condemned because he is committing certain sins, but because he is in the *state* of sin, which is a permanent and an eternal condition unless it is changed by accepting the Savior who is the remedy. Listen to our Lord speaking to the man Nicodemus:

He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)

Man is not on trial today; man is already condemned! God is not waiting to see if you are going to be a good boy or a nice, sweet little girl. You are already guilty before Almighty God.

Unbelief is a *state* of sin, not an act. When a man says that he rejects Christ, he is not committing an act of sin, he is merely expressing a condition of his heart. And, my friend, that is the unpardonable sin today. Let me define it: The unpardonable sin is the voluntary and willful refusal to accept the pardon God offers by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. And that is as far as He will go.

Years ago in Pennsylvania there was a man charged with a very serious crime. (Dr. Harry Rimmer investigated this case and told me about it.) He was brought into court and convicted, the judge handed down the sentence, and he was put into prison for life. But through the machination of friends and his father, a wealthy man, they secured a pardon from the governor. It was brought to him, but he refused to accept it. The warden wanted to know what to do when a man has a pardon but will not accept it. This was brought into court and the judge handed down this decision: “When a pardon is offered and refused, then the status of the prisoner remains as it was before.” That man stayed in the prison until his death.

God today offers a pardon, and to refuse to accept that pardon is the sin against the Holy Spirit. That, we believe, is the one sin that He calls unpardonable.

Listen to the Lord Jesus speaking now to the religious rulers:

Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies with which they shall blaspheme; but he that shall blaspheme

against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation; because they said, He hath an unclean spirit. (Mark 3:28-30)

Let's look at that for just a moment. The religious rulers were not in danger of committing the unpardonable sin because they said that Jesus performed miracles by the power of the devil. That is not the condemnation. He says that all blasphemies shall be forgiven men. There is not a sin that you committed yesterday but what if you come to Christ today He would forgive you and accept you. What then was their problem? They were expressing an attitude of unbelief that was permanent rejection of Christ. They were resisting the Holy Spirit. That, my friend, was unpardonable.

Notice that later on Stephen was brought before this same group, and he said to them the same thing the Lord Jesus said:

Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do ye. (Acts 7:51)

They were doing the same thing their fathers had done. In Christ's day they were resisting the Holy Spirit, and the same condition exists today – people are still resisting the Holy Spirit. That is the one thing He says is unpardonable. This is a verse of Scripture that every professing Christian and church member should ponder. The *attitude* and *state* of the unbeliever were unpardonable – not the *act*. You see, our Lord said in Matthew 12:34, "...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." When a man blasphemes with his mouth, that is not the thing that condemns him; it is the attitude of his heart, my beloved, and this is a permanent condition – unless he stops resisting. This is the sin against the Holy Spirit – to resist the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and life.

Now listen to the solemn words of the Lord Jesus as He speaks to these same rulers:

While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the sons of light. These things spoke Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them. (John 12:36)

His very act of withdrawing from them was an act of rejection.

But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him; that the saying of Isaiah, the prophet, might be fulfilled, which he spoke, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore, they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spoke of him. (John 12:37-41)

The Gospel of John makes it very clear that the ones God hardened were those who previously had hardened their own hearts. God never hardened Pharaoh's heart until Pharaoh had already hardened his own heart. God, you see, has the last word, and He does move in. You will find this same thing today in those who are professing Christians. This is, I believe, a warning today to those who glibly make a confession of Christ and treat sin lightly:

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth 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, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:26-31)

I cannot imagine language more solemn than that! This is a warning to those who glibly say they believe in Jesus. In that day they just kept going to the temple, bringing their sacrifices and living as if Christ had never died for them. Today there are those in the church who are living as though Christ did not die for them. They have so resisted the Spirit of God that there is nothing ahead of them but judgment. I say these are solemn words!

In one of the audience-participation television programs where extroverts get a chance to talk, there was a man who presented the gospel, but he did it very poorly. Someone ran up and began to yell, "Will God send me to hell because I do not believe in Jesus?" I would like to answer that. God does not send anyone to hell. Hell is a place prepared for the devil and his angels; it was not even made for man. Men who resist the Holy Spirit go there because they *choose* to go there. They refuse God and His offer of pardon, and He must say, as He said to these religious rulers when He turned and left them, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:23). But God is offering to men a pardon, He is extending mercy, and I say to you again, He is on the side of the criminal today.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:17)

Listen to our Lord as He continues to speak of the work of the Holy Spirit:

And when he is come, he will reprove the world... of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more. (John 16:8, 10)

Not only does He subtract sin from us by His death on the cross, but by His resurrection and ascension into heaven, He makes over to us His righteousness. Actually, you have as much right in heaven (I say this reverently) as He has – or you have no right there at all. The Holy Spirit today wants you to know you are guilty so that you will accept the pardon God offers. But He is clear – to reject His verdict is unpardonable. Either you stand complete in Him or totally rejected out of Him.

The absence of conviction is the identifying characteristic of this age both outside the church and inside the church. The lack of conviction among professing Christians actually raises a question regarding their salvation. That is an extreme statement, but I want you to read the words of a prophet who spoke to a people whom God was sending into captivity. The man who gave this message did not want to give it; he gave it with a broken heart and tears in his eyes.

O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return. (Jeremiah 5:3)

God had been warning them for years; He did not want to send them into captivity. And there stood His prophet, Jeremiah, weeping, even as our Lord wept over Jerusalem centuries later.

Thus saith the Lord, Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk in it, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk in it. Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. (Jeremiah 6:16, 17)

The blowing of the trumpet was a signal of danger that men should obey. But here they said, “We don’t pay any attention to it.” That is what a lot of professing Christians do with God’s Word today. Listen to this language:

And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spoke unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not....And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim....Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places [“You may exhibit grief all you want to” is the meaning here]; ***for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath.*** (Jeremiah 7:13, 15, 29)

Why, then, is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit; they refuse to return. (Jeremiah 8:5)

Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:6)

That is God’s condemnation of His people. You will find that the Lord Jesus gave the same kind of condemnation in His day:

And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing, ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see and shall not perceive; for this people’s heart is become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. (Matthew 13:14, 15)

The first time that I went to Siloam Springs, Arkansas, I drove down from Kansas City, Missouri. It was a most delightful and interesting trip. On the way, right at the border of Missouri and Arkansas, we saw a little unpainted church on the side of a hill. Do you know the name of that church? It was the Halfway Gospel Church! The name has been changed now, but that name could be put on many today, my beloved. They are halfway – they have heard, yes, but the

Word falls on dull ears. They see, but they really have not come through. As I have gone through the Word of God, I have been amazed, in fact I have been shocked, at the number of people who were halfway. They had a conviction, but they did not come through for God.

One of these was Lot's wife. We have every reason to believe that Mrs. Lot went to church with her husband and that she made a profession of being one of God's children in the city of Sodom. But she turned back – she loved Sodom. Our Lord Jesus warned, "Remember Lot's wife."

Did you know that Esau was a son of the patriarch Isaac? He was brought up in a godly home. Did you know that he made a profession of being one of God's own? Yet even he sold his birthright, although he later expressed regret.

Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For ye know how afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it with tears. (Hebrews 12:16, 17)

Those tears meant that he had lost out on getting a material inheritance, and that is all they meant.

Balaam was a prophet who gave the great message – probably the first message – concerning the birth of the Messiah from the tribe of Judah. That old rascal went so far as to say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Numbers 23:10). In other words, "I want to be as godly as Jacob!" But read the record and you will find that Balaam joined the enemies of God and fought against God and His people and was killed in battle. Oh, he had a conviction, but he went only halfway.

Did you ever hear of Orpah? That name isn't too familiar. But you have heard of Ruth. Both of them were daughters-in-law of Naomi, and both of them decided to go with Naomi to live with God's people in Bethlehem. As Naomi urged them to remain in their own country, Orpah and Ruth stood weeping. Orpah's tears were as big as Ruth's tears and her handkerchief was as damp as Ruth's handkerchief; but it meant nothing because she turned and went back to her gods. She walked off the pages of Scripture into the silence of judgment. She went to her place.

Judas Iscariot performed miracles. He raised the dead, he healed the sick, he preached the gospel of the kingdom – but he betrayed the Lord.

Then Judas, who had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:3-5)

If you read the record carefully, you will find that when the chief priests went through the temple, they were leading a prisoner in order to get condemnation against Him, in order to crucify Him. Why did not Judas fall down before Jesus and say, "I have sinned"? He did not, and he went on to suicide.

Felix was a ruler who listened to Paul the apostle. It would be dangerous to turn your back on God after having heard Paul. Paul reasoned with this man Felix about righteousness,

self-control, and judgment to come. We are told that Felix trembled – he was convicted! But there is no record of his ever coming to God. You see, he too went only halfway.

Agrippa listened to Paul's testimony and he said to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). But as far as the record is concerned, he never did become a Christian.

Paul, in his swan song, wrote concerning a worker in the early church. His name was Demas. He traveled with Paul and assisted this great apostle in his missionary labors. But in Paul's final letter, he wrote, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). As far as we know, he never returned.

My beloved, with all my heart I want to issue this warning. There are professing Christians who can sit comfortably under the preaching of the great men of this country and of the world and never experience conviction. How tragic!

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians:

Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Know ye not yourselves how Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are discredited? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

This is for us as well. We need to examine ourselves to make sure that we are in the faith. When was the last time you wept over your sins? Can you hurt and harm and hinder the proclamation of the gospel and have no conviction about it whatsoever? Never confess it, never grieve over it? Is it possible that you are putting up a bold front, but down deep in your heart there has been no real conviction? Is the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart today? Are you resisting Him?

In the beginning of the Bible God says, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Genesis 6:3). I believe there comes a moment when a man steps over an invisible line and no longer does the Holy Spirit speak to him. That is the reason he can be so comfortable in a church service and even get up and give a little testimony now and then.

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

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

To cross that limit is to die,
To die, as if by stealth.
It may not pale the beaming eye,
Nor quench the glowing health.

The conscience may be still at ease,
The spirits light and gay;
That which is pleasing still may please,
And care be thrust away.

But on that forehead God hath set
Indelibly a mark,
By man unseen, for man as yet
Is blind and in the dark.

And still the doomed man's path below
May bloom like Eden bloomed.
He did not, does not, will not know,
Nor feel that he is doomed.

He feels, he sees that all is well,
His every fear is calmed.
He lives, he dies, he wakes in hell,
Not only doomed, but damned.

Oh, where is that mysterious bourn,
By which each path is crossed,
Beyond which God himself hath sworn
That he who goes is lost?

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."

– Author Unknown