

What Is The Sin Against The Holy Spirit?

by Joe S. Warlick*

"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 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).

I am aware, as you are, that the prevailing sentiment among the people is, that our Savior did not intend for any man to know what he meant in this passage. Upon such a thought I wish simply to say that I am sure the loving Savior would never have mentioned it, and said that the one who commits the sin, hath not forgiveness here nor hereafter, if he had not intended and fully expected that all would understand what he meant. I regard him as worthy of a better name and one more considerate than to think such a thing of him.

A Consideration of Various Views

The usual answer given to the query, when answered at all, is that the sin against the Holy Ghost is to attribute the works of Christ to that of Satan, and that the Pharisees did this when they accused him of casting out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. I have always wondered why anyone could not see the weakness, if not the foolishness, of such a position. Such a thing might be called a sin against Christ, who did the work, but it would in no sense be a sin against the Holy Spirit, for not one word is said about the Spirit by the Pharisees. In fact, it would be hard for anyone to prove that these Pharisees knew anything about the Holy Spirit. Some disciples whom Paul found over in Ephesus had not even heard of him (Acts 19), and I think they certainly would have known as much about him as did the wicked Pharisees. It is certain that what the Pharisees did and said upon the occasion which gave rise to the passage, was not in any sense the sin against the Holy Spirit.

If someone should imagine that the sin is blasphemy, and that this makes it a very peculiar kind of sin, I would answer that blasphemy can be no more than ungodliness, or unrighteousness, and Paul says, all unrighteousness is sin. Paul was a blasphemer, and yet he was forgiven of the sin, and became not only a Christian, but an apostle.

There is nothing in the name blasphemy which makes the sin unusually hard to cancel; nor is it sensible to even think that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

would, in and of itself, be worse than blasphemy against God or Christ. If to sin against the Holy Spirit means more than to sin against the Father or the Son, it must be for other reasons than that blasphemy is the sin in each case.

Again, if to attribute the works of Christ to Satan be the sin, how does it happen that these Pharisees committed the sin without saying one word about the Holy Spirit, and why does the Savior not say something about it? The truth is that the use of the disjunctive conjunction, when he said, "But he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost," etc., shows clearly that the sin had not as yet been committed. This is of itself enough to explode the old idea formerly taught by some who should have long since learned better.

It is perhaps best to say more about what the sin is not before we try to learn just what it is. It is always necessary to clear away the rubbish, in order to see clearly what we wanted all the time to discover.

I have heard that self-murder must be the unpardonable sin. It is thought that since John says that no murderer has eternal life dwelling in him, a man dying by his own hand, not having time for repentance, must go into eternity guilty of a sin unpardoned, and that he will, therefore, be everlastingly lost, and that this would certainly be the unpardonable sin. Upon this position I would remark that, while it is true that a man in his right mind, if such a thing were possible, who takes his own life, is a murderer, and will, on account of it, be lost, he may also be lost for any other sin unrepented of at the time of his death, and this would make any sin of which a man might be guilty, and for which he had not obtained pardon at the time of his death, the unpardonable sin just the same as self-murder, so it will not do to single this one sin out and call it the sin against the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Savior seems to intimate that it is possible for a man to live after he has sinned against the Holy Spirit. "He shall not have forgiveness in this world," thus showing that he might still remain in the world after committing the sin. It matters not how you translate the word from which we have "world" in the passage, the same would be true in either case.

Another position on this subject is that no one could commit the sin against the Holy Spirit except a Christian, a child of God. It is claimed that before one could sin against the Holy Spirit he must be in possession of the Spirit, and that since this cannot be claimed for any but God's children, then none but Christians could sin against the Spirit. But this would be just as true of sinning against God or Christ. If no one could sin against the Spirit except he were in possession of the Spirit, then no one could sin against God who did not possess him in a like sense; or, the same would be true also of sinning against Christ. This would make all sins of whatever kind, sins of the child of God, and leave the unsaved man clear of guilt, not being able to sin at all. Of course, we do not want to

accept such a position as that, so we shall have to look elsewhere for an answer to the question.

Is It Apostasy?

I have heard that this sin is apostasy. Surely when the child of God turns away from the salvation offered by the gospel, and refuses to walk uprightly before the Lord, denying the Lord that bought him, and despising the blood of Christ that saved him, he has committed an unpardonable sin, and that such a sin can be nothing else than the sin against the Holy Spirit. This claim deserves some notice, and so we shall spend just a little time on it.

I know that if the Bible teaches any- thing; if the Bible teaches that there is a God, or a Christ, a heaven or a hell, it teaches that a child of God may so apostatize as to be finally lost. When Ezekiel, that prophet of meekness, said in the 18th chapter that, "A righteous man who turns away from his righteousness, and does according to the abominations which the wicked man does, in his sin he shall die, and not live," he certainly taught very plainly the doctrine of apostasy. When the Savior, in John 15, talking to his disciples, said, "I am the vine, and ye are the branches," and then said, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit is to be broken off and then burned," he emphasized very strongly not only the possibility, but also the probability of apostasy.

When Paul, in I Timothy 4:1, says, "The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith," he declares that some will apostatize. When in Hebrews 6, he says, "After one has been enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, if he shall fall away," or as the correct translation has it, "having fallen away, it is impossible to renew him again to repentance," he very clearly affirms that a man may apostatize and be lost. Again, in the 10th chapter, where he declares that while those who sinned under Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses, the man who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant where- with he has been sanctified an unholy thing, and done despite to the spirit of grace, shall be punished even sorer than death without mercy. Such a punishment could be nothing short of punishment after death, and therefore, apostasy as a possibility is positively declared by him in the passage.

But Christ was not talking to his people when he warned the wicked Jews about committing this sin against the Holy Spirit, and so it is certain that he did not have the idea of the apostasy of the child of God in mind when he gave the lesson, and so we shall have to turn from this explanation of the passage.

An Illustration

Before giving the illustration which I have in mind, I wish first to insist that there must be a good, valid reason for the sin against the Holy Spirit being more grievous than to sin against God or Christ. Now, there is forgiveness for any sin committed against either the Father or the Son, but not for the sin against the Holy Spirit. I ask, why is this? Is it because the Holy Spirit is more divine than either Christ or God? It surely cannot be that, for such is not the case. I find but one solution to the matter, and that is, that the law of the Holy Spirit was given subsequent to the law of God, as found in the Old Testament scriptures, and also after Christ had finished his work on earth as a teacher, John was God's last prophet before Christ, and he was the greatest of all the prophets up to his time. Christ began his work after John's ministry was over, and continued to the day of this death. It was after this that the Holy Spirit came to do what God and Christ had planned for him, and hence his message was of most importance since it was the last one. But to the illustration.

Three men, A, B, and C have invented and patented a machine for sowing grain. After they have the machine about ready for sale to the public, A takes the field as advance agent and offers certain inducements to all advance purchasers. Some accept his offer, while others refuse, like the Jews did with John and his message. A, like John, tells those who refuse his terms that B will come after him, and he insists that they accept whatever B may offer them. But when B makes his appearance and begins with his propositions, just as the Jews did with Christ, the people, many of them charge him with grafting, and they say he is a meaner man than A, the first one. B assures them of their mistake, but tells them that there is to be one more chance for them, that there are three in the firm, and that while they turn down the first and second chances, they have one more opportunity to obtain what he first proposes; that C will make the same rounds after B has completed his work, and that if they do with C as they did with A and B, there will be no more chances offered them. Anyone would at once understand that the reason for the offer of C, being as it appears of most importance, is because it was to be the last one. And now with this thought in mind, let us return and take our bearings again and see if we may not be able to see the only point and lesson in the passage which we are studying.

We might ask first, What is sin, anyway? I fear that many people have no well defined idea of what sin really is. Those persons who have studied "Pilgrim's Progress" seem to think that sin is a kind of substance which dwells inside of a person, and that when God removes it there is a complete change in the physical man. Out of such an idea of what sin is has come the thought that the sin against the Holy Spirit is some special thought or act of one's life that might be considered more heinous than any other act or thought could be. I ask, why would a sin committed against the Holy Spirit be more grievous than to sin against God or Christ the Lord? Can anyone imagine a reasonable reason for

such a thing? The answer to this question is found in the solution of the problem.

Explanation of the Passage

First, sin is the transgression of law (I John 3:4). Where there is no law there is no transgression, and of course no sin. If this be true, and it is true, then no one could sin against the Holy Spirit until he gave his law. That the Holy Spirit has a law is declared by Paul in Romans 8:1-4, to be true. The law of the Spirit could not have been given until after the Spirit himself was given, and this was not until after Christ was glorified (John 7:39). Again, in John 16:7, Christ told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would not come until after he went away. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came, and began to legislate through the apostles his law, and to announce that law to the people. Until after the day of Pentecost, therefore, when the law went forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, no one could commit the sin against the Holy Spirit.

The Jews whom Christ warned in regard to this matter, had rejected the counsel of God against themselves, refusing to be baptized of John, who was the last prophet under the law before Christ; in doing this they sinned against God the Father. They were offered another chance by the Savior himself, but they refused that, and charged him with casting out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils; and yet Christ, in the graciousness of his soul, gave them to understand that they would have one more chance for salvation, that after he went away, the Holy Spirit would come, and if they would refuse him as they had his Father and himself, they would lose their last opportunity to be saved.

The Holy Spirit is God's last attorney, and his law is heaven's last message to men, and, of course, when we reject it, and refuse the salvation offered by it, we simply have no hope at all. This is the point in the passage under consideration.

The fact that after the Pharisees had sinned against Christ, and God as well, Jesus still tried to get them to receive his teaching, shows that the thought of rejecting the Holy Spirit's message for the first time would not seal forever the destiny of the one so acting, but the fact that the Holy Spirit delivers to the world heaven's last offer of salvation, makes it impossible for the man who dies without accepting this offer, to ever be saved. Mistaken is the soul who hopes for another chance after death. The gospel offers the last one, and he who dies without its promises, will have no hope here nor hereafter. Let no one fail to get the point in the lesson, and let no one be deceived by any future chance theory. Those who know not God, and obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, will be punished with an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. The salvation which the Spirit was to offer, and did

offer, was heaven's last appeal to man, and so he who loses it is guilty of sinning beyond hope of redemption.

Note: This article consist of a sermon preached by Joe S. Warlick (1866-1941). It has been out of print for many years. I am glad to be able to reproduce it here for the benefit of a new generation. Brother Warlick was recognized as an outstanding preacher and debater of his time.

– Danny Brown