



The unpardonable sin

In the pastoral ministry I have often observed much confusion in the minds of God's people regarding the "unpardonable sin." Professor R. B. Kuiper, who was President of Westminster Theological Seminary and later President of Calvin Theological Seminary, suggested that a faithful minister of the Word should preach a sermon on this subject at least once a year. On occasion when I have preached on this subject I have been overwhelmed by the many expressions of thanks for my doing so. One church member, a Christian psychiatrist, remarked that every week he counsels Christians who fear that they may have committed this sin. All of this suggests that the subject may interest OUTLOOK readers. In this effort to deal with it I am grateful and indebted to the late Professor Kuiper for his clear and Biblical instruction regarding it. The Bible passages which especially bear on this matter are Matthew 12:31, 32; Mark 3:28; 29; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29; 2 Peter 2:20-22 and 1 John 5:16,17.

Two kinds of people should hear about this subject. And every person sitting in a church pew belongs to one of these two categories.

First, the sincere Christian people who at times fear that they may have committed this sin need to hear what the Bible says about it. That would comfort and encourage them, because it is certain they have not committed it. The fact that they worry about it shows that the Spirit is still working in their hearts.

Second, there are people who are in danger of committing this sin which John calls *"the sin unto death."* They need to be warned against it.

Let's therefore recall what the Bible says about "The Unpardonable Sin."

1. What it is.
2. Who are in danger of committing it.
3. Why it is unpardonable.

What is the unpardonable sin?

In 1 John 5:16-17, the Holy Spirit speaks of it as *"a sin unto death."* Elsewhere the Bible calls it *"the sin against the Holy Spirit."* On one occasion Jesus spoke of it as *"the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."*

In Matthew 12, He said, *"Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, 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."*

But for some people that presents an insurmountable problem because the Bible also says, *"If we confess our sins, God is righteous and just to forgive us our sin, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

God Himself said, *"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."* And Jesus unmistakably said, *"Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." "He that cometh to me shall in no wise be cast off."*

In spite of all this, Jesus plainly says, there is a sin which is unpardonable, a sin unto death, a sin which shall not be forgiven in this world or in the world to come.

What therefore, is the unpardonable sin?

First of all, the Bible tells us it is a *sin against the Holy Spirit*. And yet — we cannot say that every sin against the Holy Spirit is the unpardonable sin. For if that were so, who then could be saved? After all, who doesn't sin against the Holy Spirit?

When you doubt, isn't that a sin against the Spirit who testifies to us that we are sons of God? When you do things you ought not to do, when you ignore the Lord's call to you, when you walk the broad way of the world, isn't that neglecting or resisting the gift of the Spirit which is in you?

In Paul's letter to the Ephesian Church, he says, "*grieve not the Holy Spirit*." It's evident from the Greek word used that he really said: stop grieving the Holy Spirit. They were certainly doing it, but Paul didn't say they had committed the unpardonable sin, or that there wasn't any hope for them. Therefore we have to say that the unpardonable sin is a sin against the Holy Spirit, but not every sin against the Holy Spirit is an unpardonable sin. Rather, it is *a specific kind of sin against the Holy Spirit*.

What is *this specific sin* against the Holy Spirit? It is a sin against the Holy Spirit by sinning *against better knowledge*. That's suggested in Hebrews 10:26 and 29 where we are told, "*For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.*"

In other words, it's sin which is committed when one know it is wrong.

But again, we must observe that not every sin against better knowledge is the unpardonable sin. It is dreadful to sin against better knowledge. Jesus said about those cities of Galilee, such as Capernaum, which knew the way and refused to walk in it, that it would be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for them.

But although serious, this is not the unpardonable sin. David in his sin with Bathsheba knew better. Yet, he testifies concerning God: "*And thou forgavest me.*" Peter denied his Lord. He knew better and he had also had a special warning. But Peter who went out to weep bitterly, knew the forgiving love of Jesus. The unpardonable sin is a sin against the Holy Ghost, but not every sin against the Holy Ghost. It is a sin against better knowledge; and yet not every sin against better judgment is unpardonable.

What then is it?

Hebrews 10:26-29 says, "*If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth.*" In other words, it's a wilful sin against better knowledge. It's a wilful sin against the Holy Ghost.

Some people think that here or there somewhere, at a given time, they have committed this sin. That's not true. That may have been a terrible sin — but that isn't the unpardonable sin. For the Greek in this statement, "*For if we sin wilfully*" indicates that it is an *ongoing kind of sin*. It is a *persistent, habitual, wilful continuing in sin*, against better knowledge. It is a persistent, habitual and wilful neglect of the Spirit of God and living contrary to the commandments of God. That is why the 6th chapter of Hebrews also pictures it this way: it is a "*trodding under foot of the Son of God;*" it is a "*counting of the blood of the covenant an unholy thing.*"

In other words, basically it consists of a *complete rejection of the way of salvation in Jesus Christ*. It is a wilful, persistent turning of one's back on the Gospel and God's offer of redemption in Jesus Christ. It is a resisting of the Spirit who testifies concerning Jesus Christ as our only hope of salvation; a resisting of the Holy Spirit who calls us to walk in the way of the Lord.

As Hebrews 6 says, the person who commits this sins one who knows the way of salvation. He is one who has tasted the good Word of God. He is one who has been touched by the Spirit of God — but then, against better knowledge — he knows better — he openly and persistently turns his back upon it.

That's also illustrated in the story of Matthew 12 where Jesus spoke of this sin. Jesus had performed many astonishing miracles. He had proclaimed the way of salvation. He had even cast out devils. But what happened? The Pharisees in the face of all this clear evidence that Jesus was

the Son of God, declared that he cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. Openly, defiantly, persistently they rejected Jesus as the Christ, and the salvation He came to bring. They had a knowledge of the truth. They had been enlightened. They knew the way of salvation, but willingly and knowingly they turned their backs on it.

Then, in that context, Jesus solemnly warned them, *"Verily, verily, 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."* The Pharisees in other words, were in danger of committing this sin.

Who are in danger of committing it?

First of all, I should like to point out, there are two kinds of people who can never commit this sin!

- First, they are those who have never heard the Gospel.
- And secondly, they are those who are born again, regenerated by the Spirit of God.

Those who have never heard of the Gospel, just haven't been enlightened; they have not tasted the good Word of God; they can't very well fall away, through a persistent and wilful rejection of the testimony of the Spirit, and of the Gospel of Salvation. On the other hand, those who have been born again may commit terrible sins at times, but if they have been born again of the Spirit of God, they will never fall into this sin unto death. After all, Jesus very clearly teaches the Perseverance of the Saints in such passages as John 10:28, 29.

Recall the words of the sixth chapter of Hebrews: *"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 fall away, to renew them unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame."*

In other words, it's people who have heard the call of the Gospel; it's people who have been confronted with Jesus; who were privileged like the scribes and Pharisees, and I might add like us, and then who carelessly and openly turn away. They are the ones who are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. Not the Davids, or the Peters who momentarily slip into sin and repent, but people like Esau, who know of God's promises, who grow up in godly homes, and then wilfully turn their backs on them are the ones who are in danger of committing this sin.

This word of God confronts us with this burning question: have you been born again of the Spirit of God? Have you tasted of the good word of God and as a result have you allowed the Spirit of the Living God to take hold of your whole life and soul? Are you responding to that call of the Spirit that He may become a power in your life?

It is easy to say, "Regeneration, being born again, is a work of God." "God has to do that." "I can't really do anything about it." In a way, that is true. But at the same time that is a half-truth. If anyone baptized in the church does not have the Spirit of God, is that God's fault? Or is that his own fault? Hasn't the indifferent one in the church been resisting and grieving the spirit of God? Has anyone ever asked the Lord for His Spirit in vain? Can a Covenant child ever say, "I wanted to belong to the Lord but the Lord didn't want to be my God?"

Today the Spirit says to you and me: *"Today is the day of salvation." "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Turn ye unto Jehovah and He will abundantly pardon."* And if we don't accept that, or believe that, then we are resisting the Spirit! Then we are placing ourselves in danger of committing this sin unto death!

This is the clear teaching of Scripture concerning the unpardonable sin: if you wilfully harden yourself in sin and unbelief; if you constantly and wilfully neglect the Lord's salvation and grace, there can come a time in which you like Esau, will find no place of repentance. There can come a time in which, as the writer to the Hebrews put it, *"It will be impossible to be renewed again unto repentance."*

Why is it unpardonable?

The sin is unpardonable not because you can commit a sin which transcends the grace of God or because this sin is too big for the blood and sacrifice of Jesus to cover. The Bible says clearly enough, "*The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.*" Furthermore, this sin is unpardonable, not because repentance comes too late. Look at the thief on the cross. Jesus said to him in his dying hour, "*Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*"

The sin is unpardonable because repentance never comes at all! The person who wilfully, persistently neglects the call of the Gospel; the person who wilfully, persistently tramples under foot the claims and sacrifice of Jesus Christ; the person who willfully persistently rejects that testimony of the Spirit of God; that person is in danger of committing the unpardonable sin simply because there can come a time in which God gives him up to a reprobate mind. God, in other words, allows his heart to be completely hardened.

He wants to live in sin. He wants to live without Christ. He doesn't want the spirit to live within him in such a way that he surrenders his life wholly to Jesus; and finally God, as it were, says: "OK, have it your way!"

And that's a sin unto death! Not because it is too big for the Lord to forgive, not because the Lord's love isn't great enough, but because that person becomes so hardened in his sin he never seeks forgiveness. The Spirit no longer speaks to him. The Spirit leaves him.

And that's the sin unto death. That's to be without God and his forgiving grace in this world. That's to be without the love of God forever in hell!

As we are gathered together in the Church we may have reasons to believe that none have committed this sin. It is doubtful that anyone would come if he had.

But one can. The Lord invites us to His Church and says: "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Church.*" Today the Holy Spirit speaks to us through this Word. He is telling us to seek the Lord. He is telling us to surrender our life to Jesus. If today we say "No," and tomorrow we say "No," let me warn you: "That's the way of the unpardonable sin!" "That's the way to travel so that some day you may become so hardened in sin that it may forever be too late."

But on the other hand, to you in the Church, to you as God's Covenant Child, we can say:

*Come ye sinners, poor and needy;
weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus, ready stands to save you.
Full of pity, love and power.
He is able; He is able.
He is willing, doubt no more.*

Richard J Venema

© 2014
www.christianstudylibrary.org