

# **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE UNPARDONABLE SIN**

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God must have a terrific sense of humor. All the while that people created in His image arrogantly deny His existence and the Record of His Creation, they are eating bread that constantly proclaims anew the miracle of creation. Each tiny seed with its embryo and endosperm sustains the very life of God's enemies.

Try to imagine yourself a single seed cast into the darkness of the earth. The soil around you is dry and powdery so that your bed becomes your tomb unless some precious rain from heaven falls. Only then can you awaken to fruit-bearing life.

In prescientific ages, people marveled at the mysterious miracle in the seed. The Creation story in Genesis tells four times of the divine miracle in every seed, renewed and extended in uncounted trillions of germinations since day three of Creation. Even to-day, the totality of scientific knowledge is powerless to invent one such life-giving seed.

A favorite theme of Scripture from early times compares seeds to the spoken words of God. "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and . . . watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give . . . bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth" (Isaiah 55:10, 11). Jesus built on this concept in His parable of the sower: "The seed is the word of God," He said (Luke 8:11).

Without moisture in the soil, changes in the permeability of the seed coat and inner layers cannot take place. And when the embryo germinates, the little plant must have rain if its searching roots are to absorb nutrients for growth. The Bible compares the Holy Spirit's action in the Christian life to showers of rain falling on thirsty plants. In other words, even Jesus' brilliant sermons cannot germinate into new life in human hearts without the gift of the Holy Spirit. Mountains of seed sown in a dust bowl would be wasted.

What can really change the hard hearts of men, women, and young people? Only that gift which is just as miraculous as the life imprisoned inside the seed—heaven's Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, all the preaching in the world is like sowing seeds on a parking lot.

The Bible pictures drought-stricken human hearts as hard, cracked earth. "Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the

Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you” (Hosea 10:12). Joel promises that God will break the world’s terrible spiritual drought by showers of rain symbolizing His Holy Spirit. “The Lord your God . . . hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain.” “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:23, 28).

The “former rain” and “latter rain” are symbols of two distinct gifts of God’s Holy Spirit. The apostle Peter recognized the initial outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as “the former rain.” “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house. . . . All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. . . . Then Peter stood up . . . and addressed the crowd: ‘. . . This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people”’” (Acts 2:2-17, NIV).

Christ had sown the gospel seed in His years of patient ministry—with meager fruitage. Now, with the gift of the Holy Spirit watering the seed like showers on parched earth, the seed sprouted up in thousands of human hearts. “Those who accepted [Peter’s] message were baptized, were added to their number that day” (verse 41, NIV). Those spiritual showers have continued to fall from that day forward through twenty centuries as the Spirit has continued to work on human hearts.

Pure, soft rain is itself a joy that no one can appreciate like one who has lived through California’s horrendous dry seasons when the blistered earth cakes up like split tarmac and even the wild animals die of thirst. The searing winds like dry blasts from an oven, the swirling dust storms, the tantalizing sight of dark clouds congregating over nearby mountains, only to dissipate again into the relentless copper days of burning sun. How welcome were those first few drops of rain when finally the agony was over! Then to lie in bed hearing the gentle patter of an all-night rain on the roof of our home was sheer heaven. Famine averted once more!

How does the Holy Spirit provide the moisture to enable seeds of gospel truth to germinate in hearts? The answer illustrates the uncanny relationship of our human existence to the revealed truths of Scripture.

Although God is the ultimate Source of every blessing we enjoy, He does not simply dole out all good things to us without our cooperation. He provides good earth, sunshine, and rain. But He

never excuses the farmer from cooperating with Him. The Scriptures do not teach a doctrine of personal salvation in which the individual has nothing to do. Jesus paid it all, yes, but the new birth is a matter of the human cooperating with the Divine, just as in a physical birth, humans cooperate with the Divine in procreation.

Our hearts are seedbeds into which the inspired words of truth fall; there they can take root and bear fruit. The “fallow ground” of a proud, selfish, world-loving heart must be “broken up” by repentant sorrow for sin and a choice to turn away from it. Weeds of rebellion and worldly cares must be pulled up so that the plant can have room to grow. As in many Californian farms, stones must be patiently dug out of the soil so that roots searching for moisture and nutrients can have unimpeded room.

But even deep plowing in good soil is in vain unless showers moisten it. Water does two essential things: it softens the otherwise impenetrable shell of the seed so the embryo can awaken; and it releases the nutrients in the soil to be assimilated. So does the Holy Spirit release the dormant faculties of the human soul so that the Word can sprout and grow. If you could imagine a gentle shower of pure, soft rain that could melt a concrete parking lot and transform it into a lovely garden, you would have some idea of what this precious gift from heaven can do for human hearts.

How the Holy Spirit works can best be seen at Pentecost. If Jesus’ story had ended at Calvary, His life would have seemed a virtual failure. All His miracles and teachings would merely offer us an impossible ideal. Even on that last night of His life, His disciples were still arguing among themselves as to “which of them should be accounted the greatest” (Luke 22:24). And even after the Lord’s Supper and the remarkable display of the Saviour’s love in washing their feet and serving them, the disciples were such cowards that at Jesus’ arrest, trial, and crucifixion, “all the disciples forsook him, and fled” (Matthew 26:56). After the cross, these “brave” men holed up in an upper room with the door tightly bolted “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). If the story had ended there, where would Christianity be today?

Even the disciples, who witnessed the crucifixion, didn’t understand until the resurrection. Then everything came into focus. Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). The most amazing reality of time and eternity had transpired

before their eyes, and from then on they were constrained to tell what they had seen and heard with their own eyes and ears of the Word of life (see 1 John 1:1). Their pride, ambition, strife for supremacy, love of the world—all was crucified now with Christ. They could have sung Isaac Watts's hymn:

When I survey the wondrous  
cross,  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

This mysterious melting of soul was what the Holy Spirit did, setting the apostles free to cooperate with God. Always, when human souls are freed from the tyranny of self, it is as much a miracle as was Pentecost. Hammers and dynamite may blast rocks into slivers, but you can't grow a garden in gravel chips. Something must melt rock into fertile soil. The Cross, validated by the resurrection, alone can do it. Such has been the true work of conversion through nearly 2,000 years since Pentecost.

"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.

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.

These words were spoken by Jesus because of the position which the Pharisees took concerning a notable miracle which He 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 spake 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." Matt. 12:24. Instead of glorifying God, by whose Spirit this wonderful thing was done, they accused Christ of having a devil, by whose aid he performed miracles.

That this accusation constituted, the unpardonable sin. Mark tells of our Saviour'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. This sin consists in attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil.

But it is not by words alone that people 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 world before the flood. 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 stiflings 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.

To crucify the Son of God afresh is the unpardonable sin. To have seen His great love for and then to deliberately reject Him is to subject Christ to crucifixion again. There is but one unpardonable sin, 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. Christians 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 sinners may be saved, it follows that if a sinner 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 Gal. 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 someone deliberately rejects that, he cannot by any possibility be saved.

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 walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." 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.

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 individual 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 be 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. “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

But there is more to the story. There must come at last another shower of the Spirit known as the “latter rain.” Peter’s application of Joel’s prophecy to Pentecost is only a partial fulfillment.

The agricultural economy of ancient Israel was dependent on the seasons and climate. The first rains in the autumn were the “early rains,” enabling the seed to germinate and grow. But the harvest could never come unless the barley grain should ripen, and a harvest is what farming is all about. In order for the grain to ripen into “the full corn in the ear,” the latter rain must fall in the spring. Then, says Jesus, the farmer “immediately . . . putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come” (Mark 4:28, 29).



What does this symbolize? “The harvest is the end of the world” (Matthew 13:39). Not only must Christians be prepared for death, but those who will be alive when Jesus returns in glory as He promised must be prepared to meet Him. This is compared to a harvest. “I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, . . . in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out. . . , crying with a loud voice . . . , Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe” (Revelation 14:14, 15).

The grain ripening for the harvest at the end of the world represents spiritual maturity, growing up into Christ, developing a character of mature faith.

The Bible also uses a wedding as a parallel symbol of Jesus’ return. The church is like a little girl growing up to be a bride. No bridegroom in his right mind would marry the flower girl at a wedding, no matter how beautiful she might be. He wants a bride who is mature and who can appreciate him and stand beside him as a wife. Revelation records the grandest note in the triumphant anthem of praise: “Let us be glad and rejoice, . . . for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:7, 8). Christ’s church, His bride, grows to maturity of faith as the result of the last outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit on the earth, the “latter rain” of righteousness.

This will mean new truths, new understandings of God’s character. “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day” (Proverbs 4:18, NIV). Only those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” can see and appreciate the latter rain of the Spirit when He comes.

No TV program or movie can offer events as thrilling as God’s plan to prepare men and women to be Christ’s grown-up bride. The righteousness that covers them is a garment given them; they will never claim an iota as their own. At last God will have a mature people who appreciate the sacrifice of the Lamb. All those who will welcome the Son of man coming on the white cloud will have outgrown their self-centered desires for personal rewards. Christ’s bride will never marry Him for a meal ticket. A higher motivation has captured their hearts. “The love of Christ constraineth us” (2

Corinthians 5:14). Theirs will be the bride's concern for her Husband's honor and vindication.

According to the scenario we find in Revelation, the latter rain of the Spirit will enable Christ's followers to finish His commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (see Mark 16:15). As this happens, two harvests will ripen side by side. The true grain will ripen for harvest and so will the grapes of wrath, which symbolize the multitudes that will finally reject Christ and His grace, those who would crucify Him again in the persons of His saints if they could.

God wants to pour out His Spirit here at the end of the world as He did at Pentecost when the gospel began to be preached. Why can't it happen now?

Pastor Wurmbbrand spent 14 years in a communist jail in Romania. This is part of what he wrote: Let me tell you about a man who was in prison with me. Demitri was a pastor whose backbone had been beaten with a hammer. When certain vertebra was hit, he was paralyzed so that he could only move his neck.

You can imagine what a tragedy this was. If he had been in a home or hospital, he would have had a wife, mother, or nurse to take care of him. How would we take care of him? There was no running water to wash him, no linen to change him. He lay there in his human waste. He could not stretch out his hands to drink a cup of water. The others who could walk and work were taken to slave labor during the day. When they came back in the evening, he had to wait for them to help him drink a cup of water.

He lay like this in prison for a couple of years. It was hell on earth. Then in December 1989, Romania had a revolution and the dictator Ceausescu was overturned. Freedom came and Demitri was released from prison to be with his family and friends. No doctor could help him, but now he had loving hands to help him. He still could not move hand or foot.

One day someone knocked at his door. It was the Communist who had crippled him. He said, "Sir, don't believe that I have come to ask forgiveness from you. For what I have done, there is no forgiveness, not on earth or in heaven. You are not the only one I have tortured like this. You cannot forgive me; nobody can forgive me. Not even God. My crime is much too great. I have come only to tell you that I am sorry about what I have done. From you I go to hang myself. That is all." He turned to leave.

The paralyzed brother Demitri said to him, "Sir, in all these years I have not been so sorry as I am now, that I cannot move my arms. I would like to stretch them out to you and embrace you. For years I have prayed for you every day. I love you with all my heart. You are forgiven."

Demitri had learned love from Jesus who called Judas "friend," who prayed for those who crucified him, and who accepted Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor, and made him an apostle. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Why can't it happen now?

Next: "Your Home in the New Jerusalem."