



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XVIII
Issue 444

The "Unpardonable Sin"

(Part 1)

by — J.W. Williams

Therefore I am saying to you, "Every sin and blasphemy shall be pardoned men, yet the blasphemy of the spirit shall not be pardoned. And whosoever may be saying a word against the Son of Mankind, it will be pardoned him, yet whoever may be saying aught against the holy spirit, it shall not be pardoned him, neither in this eon nor in that which is impending (Matthew 12:31-32).

Probably most people under religious influence have been either perplexed or distressed by this alarming phrase. The fear has been aggravated by the way modern evangelists use this idea, finding it a very convenient one with which to frighten those they wish to persuade to seek salvation according to their formula. They will tell their hearers that if they do not respond promptly to the sermon, the Holy Spirit may cease to operate on them for conversion, and in that case they will be eternally lost and doomed. One man so taught declared that he was sure that he was going to hell, because the spirit had ceased to plead with him to become a Christian. Many others have gone insane and suicidal as a result of this entirely needless worry.

It is needless, because "unpardonable sin" is not found in the Scriptures. Though there are a few texts on which this traditional fear is based, these do not teach the thought as it is being forced on people in this needless way.

The popular concept of this subject is that there is just one particular sin never to be forgiven, as signified by the word "THE" in "The Unpardonable Sin," and that if a person commits that sin, his case is irrevocably and endlessly beyond redress.

Just why one particular sin is thus "unpardonable" has never been explained. The idea seems unreasonable, to say the most favorable thing about it. The unreasonableness of the assertion is all the more evident when we real-

ize that a number of conflicting sins are given as being the one that puts the doer into such a hopeless state. We shall consider the ones that have come to our notice as being so dire.

RESISTING "CONVERSION" IS NOT THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

First, we shall examine the common evangelistic alarm and warning referred to above, that "the unpardonable sin" is "resisting the Spirit" by refusing to go forward to the altar in response to the appeal of the evangelist or his helpers in the audience. One case of evangelism was reported to the writer, in which the personal workers seized those with whom they pleaded and dragged them forcibly forward, justifying this with the injunction in the parable to "compel them to come in."

The passage usually cited in order to prove the "unpardonable sin" concerns the Jews who asserted that the Master cast out demons by Beezeboul, their chief (Matthew 12:24-32; Mark 3:22-30 (Beelzeboul); CV). The sin here was blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy must be expressed in words. Their words attributed the spirit's work to Beezeboul. How, then, can sitting still in an audience in silence instead of going forward to an altar be blasphemy?

(see UNPARDONABLE, page 3955)

The "Unpardonable Sin" (Part 1).....	3953
Our Mailbox.....	3958



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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

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- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
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UNPARDONABLE (continued from front page)

Also, how could even words of refusal to personal workers be blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, when no blasphemy is spoken and the Holy Spirit is not mentioned? The Pharisees did really speak blasphemous words against the Spirit by which the Master cast out the demon (Matthew 12:28) when they attributed the healing to Beezeboul.

Their blasphemy was primarily against Him, for they said that He had an unclean spirit; but while they did not name the Holy Spirit, He interpreted their words as being against it, because He did His healing in its power. Thus by their words they secondarily attacked the Spirit of God. So, although they spoke seemingly “against the Son of man” (and – as He said – all words and blasphemies against Him will be forgiven) and not against the Spirit, yet He disregarded Himself and put the Spirit (“the finger of God,” Luke 11:20) into preferred prominence, because He healed by it alone (Matthew 12:28). So, when He mentioned words “*against the Son of man*” as being forgiven, He evidently meant against Himself personally, when the Spirit was not involved. Thus He distinguished between Himself and the Spirit, not only by saying that He healed by it, but that any words or blasphemies against Him would be pardoned, yet that those against the Spirit would not. Mark (3:30) emphasizes this point by saying that this warning was spoken to them “*because they said, ‘He hath an unclean spirit.’*” These quoted words of theirs show the gist of the whole matter.

Their sin was that of disbelief and denial of His Messiahship, when one purpose of His miracles was to prove it (John 5:36; 10:25). So, as long as they did not believe in Him as the Christ on the evidence of such powerful deeds as this healing, they could not be forgiven, because forgiveness comes by faith (Acts 10:43; 13:38). Yet when blasphemers in unbelief, because of ignorance, become believers, they can be and are forgiven, as three thousand of this same nation of blasphemers were in one day (Acts 2:37-41), and as Saul, the worst sinner of them all, who was also a blasphemer (I Timothy 1:13), obtained mercy because of that ignorance.

Disbelief might, therefore, in a sense be said to be “unpardonable,” provided that we see that such lack of pardon needs not to be fixed and endless, “*in this eon or the eon to come,*” because pardon is received through faith – but disbelief can be changed to belief. It was so in the case of the three thousand and of the “*chief*” of such sinning blasphemers. So even if we say that disbelief is unpardonable, either in this eon or the next one, it is not so endlessly or hopelessly, because disbelief ends as well as every age does. The words, “*neither in this world [eon], neither in the*

world to come” do not, therefore, express endless hopelessness, or endlessness in any sense, but only declare that, so long as people disbelieve, there can be no pardon. Yet when the same people change to a believing attitude, there can be. The fact is that neither in this eon nor in the next can disbelief be passed over, so as to make pardon possible. Eventually the whole world will be brought to God, many redeemed by faith, the rest freed at the jubilee.

THE “SIN UNTO DEATH” IS NOT ENDLESS HELL OR DEATH

What is generally meant by “unpardonable sin” is scripturally called “*sin unto death*” (I John 5:16). Since death is the penalty for sin, unpardoned sin would entail death. Yet, if we are going to use unscriptural language anyway, instead of saying “unpardonable sin” it would be better to say “unpardoned sin,” as we just have, and not to make it seem endless.

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was unto death; but they will have a resurrection, for all of the dead in *hades* (the grave, or the unseen) are to come forth (Revelation 20:13). Thus the case of such sinners unto death is not hopeless. Many criminals appeal to the executive for pardon of a prison term and are refused, but after serving their term they automatically go free. So with the unforgiven dead: their sentence was not “endless death.” The fact that their death penalty is lifted by resurrection is a fact of pardon, so that they are at least temporarily pardoned. If their penalty had been endless death, there could be no resurrection of the “unsaved” to judgment – and no living Savior, for that matter; for those who speak of “unpardonable sin” generally believe in substitutional sacrifice, which would involve our Savior in the same endless death hypothetically imposed on sinners. Even though substitution is an erroneous view of His sacrifice, yet he was made “*a sin offering for our sakes*” (II Corinthians 5:21, CV), and so died the same death that was put on sinners, so that if that death was endless, we would be without a Savior even in the true view of inclusion instead of substitution.

The only way to fix hopelessness on those who sin unto death would be to make the death penalty endless. Such is the view of brethren who think that there is no hope for the mass of humanity. Fortunately, their view is mistaken. The divine Judge did not attach the word “endless” to the death-sentence on Adam (Genesis 3:17-19), nor did He put “torment” in place of “*death*” in such an endless sentence. If He had done the latter, endless torment should have swallowed up our Savior as effectively as endless death would have done, and more terribly. How fortunate that men are so often mistaken in spite of their ef- ►

forts to understand God! So then, the penalty of sin was neither endless death nor endless hell torment, but just death, beyond which a resurrection is a certain prospect.

There is no article before “sin unto death” in I John five. The *Concordant Version* recognizes this by translating :17, “*there is a sin not to death.*” If we put the article before each occurrence, we imply that there are only two sins possible: one to death, the other not to death. The first sentence imposed on sin (Genesis 3:17-19) made the penalty double – suffering in the flesh and death. So, then, after unpardoned (not “unpardonable”) sinners pay the penalty of (temporary) death for sin, they must rise out of it and pay the other part of it. That future judgment is for their salvation, not for a hopeless mockery of their feelings, nor for “satisfaction to justice,” which is an unscriptural theological phrase reflected from the sternness of human implacability. These sinners will stand in judgment before the great throne that is “white,” not black and forbidding.

If there was no future time when evil men’s accounts are balanced, the problem of the uneven lot of the righteous as compared with that of the unrighteous would overwhelm the faith of the godly. This problem was raised by Job (21:7-12), David (Psalm 73:2-14) and Solomon (Ecclesiastes 8:11-14), all of whom found the solution in the certainty of a future judgment for sinners when they will answer for their evil in a way they do not now, as it is pointed out by these three patriarchs of old.

“UNPARDONABLE” SHOULD BE WRITTEN “UNPARDONED”

What may be called “unpardoned sin” is discernible in the case of Israel in the wilderness. They were warned that they would not be forgiven when they sinned at that time (Exodus 23:21; Joshua 24:19); but that did not mean hopelessness, for God forgave them from Egypt to Kadesh-Barnea

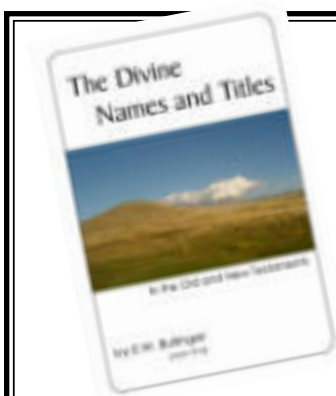
(Numbers 14:19-21). The sense in which they were not pardoned, as they were warned in the two references cited above, was that the two penalties imposed on sin (suffering and death) were inflicted on Israel in the time of the Judges, as in the wilderness. They suffered many severe troubles, and in many cases, death; but remember that it was temporary death, until their future resurrection.

We have said that what is called “unpardonable sin” should be named “unpardoned sin,” and we should note that it is only temporarily unpardoned, as in the case of Israel just cited. That such sin is merely “unpardoned” can be shown from Hebrews 10:28, for here such offenders are only “dying without pity,” but not to remain in death endlessly without hope of relief, as we shall see in a moment, from the case of Moses. When we realize that such withholding of pardon is only for the time being, the gloom of those misinterpretations of Scripture which we have been considering vanishes, and room is left to rejoice in the infinite mercy and love as manifested on Golgotha. That the unpardoned state of Israel is only for a season becomes evident when we read the new covenant, which promises pardon and forgetfulness of her sin. “*I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy.*” Then He will have compassion on those for whom He did not have compassion, and say to those whom He had called “Not My People,” you are My People (Hosea 2:23).

A resurrection of sinners to judgment shows that their death sentence was not for eternity, because any resurrection is at least a temporary parole, as it removes the death penalty for sin.

MOSES’ SIN WAS UNPARDONED

Moses was one of the Israelites included in the warning of not being pardoned for sin committed in the wilderness (Exodus 23:21), and he came within the seemingly hope-



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less condition stated in Hebrews 10:28. Though his sin was not against the law of Sinai, it was a direct disobedience of a command given to him personally, and he died for it, as stated in this last citation regarding his fellow sinners at that time. At least his sin came clearly under the warning in Exodus 23:21. He angrily smote the rock instead of speaking to it the second time, as instructed, and took to himself the credit for the miracle. For this double sin he was sentenced to die before going into the promised land. When he sought pardon and remission of the sentence, God abruptly told him to quit praying for it. So he died penally, not of age, but in the full strength of his body. He sinned “unto death,” as John later termed such a transgression.

Just as John said not to ask concerning pardon for such, so Moses found it of no avail to pray for remission. Was Moses therefore hopeless? Some have hastily so concluded. Did God merely taunt him unmercifully by making him see what he missed when He showed him the beautiful promised land? So people reason who say that there will be no probation for those raised to future judgment. One young minister, when asked why then should they be raised, told the writer that it will be a cause of rejoicing to the saints in the kingdom to see the wicked punished, citing Revelation 18:20 as evidence. He believed in a resurrection of only part of the dead to a hopeless judgment; but if that limited judgment affords joy to the saved, why does not an indulgent Father raise all and so increase their joy? Jonathan Edwards went farther and said that it will increase the bliss of the saved in heaven greatly to see the victims of divine wrath writhing in hell. Why not switch to his doctrine and find greater joy yet?

The spirit of Jonah is not dead, and the spirit of divine compassion cannot die, for it resides in our Father – so, no, Moses is not in a hopeless state. He is in the list of those who will be perfected at that day (Hebrews 11:40). “*Sin unto death*” does not mean an unpardonable and hopeless state, but only the certainty of paying the penalty of temporary death, beyond which is the other blessed certainty of a resurrection to mercy.

“SIN UNTO DEATH” IS NOT HOPELESS

Having to die “without pity” need not imply endless hopelessness, for a person can be temporarily without a certain blessing, and later enjoy the possession of it. This is shown by the very idea of hope, or rather expectation itself, for we read in Ephesians 2 that the nations, who once had “no expectation,” were later made partakers of it by being brought “near” to that from which they were formerly distant.

The idea of Israel’s being temporarily unpardoned is made clear by the language cited (Numbers 14). God had threatened the unfaithful Israelites with death (seemingly so, probably as a test to Moses, :11-12). Moses prayed for their pardon (:19). God replied that He had granted it (:20). Nevertheless, He immediately sentenced them to forty years of wandering in the desert until death came in a natural, instead of an earlier penal way. He remitted the threatened death verdict, but imposed the penalty of wandering in sorrow to end in death at another time and in a different way than He had just before warned them.

So the Israelites died under the pardon assured in :20. Thus, strange as it may seem, they were not pardoned according to the first references (Exodus 23:21; Joshua 24:19), yet were pardoned after all. They were not pardoned, in that the penalties for disbelief and disobedience fell on them, consisting of the judgments that over-took them in the desert (Exodus 23:21), and later through the conquests by the nations (Joshua 24:19), as recorded in the book of Judges; but they were pardoned at Kadesh-Barnea and not summarily slain, as, had been threatened.

So it should be emphasized that while the Israelites were not to be pardoned according to the warning mentioned, their case was not hopeless, or else they would not have been pardoned even at Kadesh-Barnea. Nevertheless, those who speak of unpardonable sin might well claim that they had committed it; but they suffered their penalties in the desert under divine mercy, for a resurrection awaits them, though it be to shame and eonian contempt (Daniel 12:2). Yet having served their jail sentence, will they still be kept in jail, or be worse off than citizens of America who are constitutionally assured of immunity from a second punishment for the same offense?

[edited]

(to be continued)

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Your ministry is a blessing to us here in the Pacific NW, and we are continuing to pray for you all. We pray that God's Word would race and be glorified and that the living Word would keep going forth from all the believers who live among the "dead" there in your home located in the midst of the funeral grounds! God surely does have a great sense of humor does He not? – **WA**

For over 55 years I taught and preached the immortality of the soul and the fires of an eternal hell. Now nearly 80, I have come to see, through the enlightenment of Father's spirit, these precious truths. Praise God! – **NC**

As I survey things from my current position, it still continues to stun me as to how the premier doctrine of the "good news" is men demanding that most of their brethren go into unending hellfire from a God that hates his own creation. But I remember feeling as they do. I remember almost everything in sight being a threat that was eternally dooming people. This is what causes the immense tension and hatred in fundamentalism. – **OH**

Thanks for all that you do. Hold fast to the faith. – **IA**

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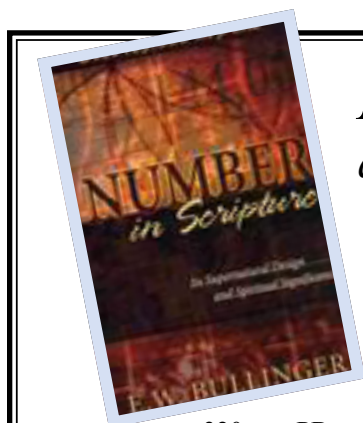
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I was overwhelmed with your article, *The Approach Present* in the [BSN #436](#). I will never read Ephesians 2:8 again without being humbled at what Father has done for the likes of me. I am enjoying the [videos](#) from the conferences as well. Keep up the good work. We need folks like you. You are truly a Godsend. – **NC**

I've been enjoying your [short videos](#). They are just the right length for my ADD. God bless you as you share the gospel of grace. – **PA**

Of all the emails I receive and have received on a daily basis, yours is by far the most influential and timely in walk. I appreciate your thoughts. They are simple and profound and communicate the truth exceptionally well. Thank you for taking time to do this. – **MO**

Wow! I just finished *The Purpose of Faith's Refining Fire* by Travis Penner in [BSN #437](#). It was awesome. To be reminded of all of this is of great importance to me, I do need reminding at times or else I get lost in my own little world. "... that our God (my Father) should be counting you (me) worthy of the calling ..." – **NM** ■



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