

WHO COMMITS THE SIN UNTO DEATH? - PART II

BESIDES the two classes of those who are saved among the spirit-begotten, there is a third class – those who go into the Second Death. The "sin unto death" is not only a failure to do something which is good, but a positive doing of something which is evil. The Great Company do not turn to wallow in the mire of sin; but this class now spoken of is a class of spirit-begotten ones that gradually turn from their Covenant until they fall away entirely. They become covenant-breakers. They have covenanted to lay down their lives, and then they break that Covenant, and turn again to sin and to hopeless darkness. This course, being a sin against clear light and knowledge, is a sin unto death.

Who or what is it that sins the sin unto death? "Whosoever is begotten of God doth not commit sin [wilfully]; for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin." That which is begotten of God is the *new mind*, the new will; and the person having that new will, desiring to be in harmony with God, cannot sin the sin unto death as long as he has the mind, the will, the Spirit, of God. As long as his will is in harmony with God he cannot sin with wilfulness and desire. He cannot be in harmony with sin. The new mind cannot consent to sin. If there be a consent to sin, it is an evidence that the old mind has taken control.

We may understand the subject more clearly, perhaps, by considering the action of Congress. Suppose that the Republicans represent the natural man, and that the Republican party had had domination for a long time. Then there came a change of administration. There was a new sentiment, a new mind, there were new aspirations. Another party was in power, and the majority of Congress became Democratic. What made the change in the action

of Congress? It was the new *vote*. The majority carried the day, and decided upon a Democratic form of government to control our Legislative Body. But if Congress should again change and vote the old way, it would no longer be Democratic.

Just so the New Creature came into control of our mortal bodies. Then if the new will should again change, [R5452 : page 136] and advocate as before the things of the flesh, the New Creature is changed again into the old creature. It is not the New Creature, however, that is wallowing in sin. The will has committed the sin unto death. THE NEW CREATURE IS DEAD.

ESAU'S LOSS A WARNING TO THE CHURCH

The illustration used by the Apostle Paul of Esau's seeking vainly with tears to regain his lost birthright, has a lesson of deep interest for us. It may be applied in one way to the condition of the Jewish people, who, having lost the great privilege, or opportunity, of becoming the Spiritual Israel of God, could not get again, as a people, that lost opportunity. That privilege had gone from them; they could not recover it, although this would not hinder any individual Jew from becoming repentant and from becoming personally a member of the Church class.

However, the Apostle's words (Hebrews 12:16,17) seem to apply especially to the Church, and to our danger of losing our birthright, as New Creatures. Esau, "for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." He typified those Christians who barter their glorious inheritance as prospective heirs of the Divine nature and the Messianic Kingdom for the enjoyment of the fleeting pleasures of the present life – "a mess of pottage!"

WHO COMMITS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

As to the general proposition respecting unpardonable sin, we have endeavored to point out in STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

that sins are unpardonable in proportion as they are wilful. The only ones, however, who can commit a fully unpardonable sin are those who have come into the Church – who have made a consecration of their life and have been begotten of the Holy Spirit. If such should fall away, it would be a final matter.

Before coming into Christ, before receiving the Holy Spirit, transgressions might have been committed, but these transgressions would not have the same degree of responsibility as would those of a consecrated Christian; for after one has come into the Lord's family, there is an increase of light and knowledge, and therefore there comes increased responsibility. The Lord said that those who knew His will and did it not would receive many stripes; but those who knew it not and did it not would receive fewer stripes. Many of the Lord's people have committed more or less wilful sins, and have received stripes more or less severe.

The Scriptures tell of a degree of wilful sin that would be unto death, and such sin is mentioned as a sin against the Holy Spirit. This, we understand, is a sin against clear knowledge – a perception of the wrong, and a transgression of God's Law *wilfully, deliberately*. The Jews who crucified Christ sinned against light and had great responsibility. However, the Apostle Peter says, "I wot, brethren, that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." (Acts 3:17.) They realized not that they were crucifying the Lord of glory. But if any begotten of the Holy Spirit should join in any similar crime, we understand that this would be a different matter. The penalty upon such spiritually enlightened ones would be nothing short of the Second Death.

The Apostle Paul points out why the Church can sin this sin unto death. He says that if we sin wilfully, after we have received a knowledge of the Truth, and have tasted the good Word of God, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit – if then we should fall away (not if we should stumble, but if we should completely fall

away, turning again to sin), it would be like a sow that was washed which returned again to wallow in the mire. In such case, the transgression would be to the full.

DID ADAM SIN AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT?

In answering this question we need to have a clear conception of what constitutes the Holy Spirit. The Scriptural answer is that the Holy Spirit, in one of God's intelligent creatures, is the spirit of *sonship*. The brute creation do not have this spirit of sonship. They were not made in the moral image of the Creator. The angels have the spirit of sonship. Adam was created in the moral image and likeness of his Creator – a son of God. Therefore we should understand that he had this Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of sonship.

When Adam became disobedient, it meant a forfeiture of the Spirit of sonship, and the casting of him out from all relationship to the Father. And this relationship to God was forfeited for all his posterity. But God has made an arrangement by which Adam may come back to Him – and all his children may come, if they will. This operation of uplifting and restoring mankind is in the Scriptures spoken of as an impartation, or pouring out, of the Holy Spirit.

This has not yet come to the world, but is now fulfilled in the Church. The Church, accepted to a new nature, under certain special conditions are, during this Gospel Age, begotten to sonship and are classed as sons of God. This receiving of the Church into the relationship of sons *now*, and the blessing of the world later, is referred to in the prophecy of Joel. There the Prophet [R5452 : page 137] speaks of the Lord as "in those days," pouring out His Spirit upon His servants and handmaids; and he declares that, *afterwards*, He will pour out His Spirit upon *all flesh* – that they also may come back into sonship, into relationship with God. – Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-18.

Adam had the Spirit of God. It was received in a natural way; and had it not been for the fall, this condition would have been maintained, just as with the holy angels. These angels, not having forfeited this relationship, need not a special impartation of the Holy Spirit.

COULD ADAM HAVE REPENTED?

Would it have been possible for Adam to repent, after committing this wilful sin? The word repentance may be used in two different ways. We frequently use the word to mean penitence, sorrow over a fault, etc., but this common use of the word is not its full import. It means to get back, to return to a former condition; or to take an opposite course from that in which one has been going. Adam could have repented in the sense of being penitent; but he could not have repented in the sense of getting back to the place where he was before he sinned. That would require the paying the price of his sin by another. St. Paul said of Esau, that he was a "profane person," and "that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." (Hebrews 12:17.) Esau found plenty of opportunity to cry and to be sorry; but he did not find an opportunity to get back that which he had forfeited. And so with Adam.

But such inability to repent is entirely different from what the Apostle means in speaking of the Church. He says, "If we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:26,27.) There could be no repentance for these. Their hearts have become too hardened. They cannot be renewed unto repentance. (Hebrews 6:4-8.) But the provision for Adam is God's arrangement that Christ should taste death for him. But now, Christ dieth no more; therefore, whoever receives once the

benefit of Christ's death and misuses it, comes under the sentence of death a second time, and from this, the Second Death, there is no recovery.

GROUNDLESS FEARS OF SOME

We believe that the majority of people who think they have committed the sin unto death are merely being tormented by fears; and that in most cases they need only to have better instruction respecting the Lord, His character and arrangement. We have had people come to us in great terror of mind, believing that they had committed the sin unto death, and that there was no hope for their reconciliation to God. Sometimes they have merely told us of their fears, and we were puzzled; for their apparent penitence and regret were favorable signs. In some instances, where they have told us the facts of the case, we have been able in five minutes to relieve them entirely, and to show them that they had altogether misunderstood the matter. This gave them much peace. One person told us that the trouble had lasted for eighteen years. Since then this person has been rejoicing in the Lord and serving Him very acceptably.

But the proper thought is that one could not be brought back if he were of the kind that have wilfully and deliberately renounced the Lord. God is looking for a loyal people; and if any show wilful, intentional disobedience, they would not be fit to live at all. However, when we see repentance, we may take a hopeful view.

SIN AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT UNFORGIVABLE

We are to recognize a difference between a sin against the Holy Spirit and the sin unto death. In other words, a sin against the Holy Spirit may be of various degrees of heinousness in the sight of God. We might think of *small* sins and of *great* sins against the Holy Spirit. No sin against the Holy Spirit is *forgivable*. But some of these sins might be punished with *stripes*, and others with *death*.

The Holy Spirit of sonship was not possessed by the Pharisees, to whom Jesus directed His words. But they had some knowledge of the light of the Holy Spirit in our Lord's person. The Holy Spirit was manifest in Him in a remarkable degree. The Jews were in different degrees of condemnation, in proportion as they had the eyes of their understanding open. Those who received a little knowledge, and refused that little, had less responsibility than those who saw more and refused it. And [R5453 : page 137] those who misrepresented Him were not so much sinning against Him as against the Holy Spirit in Him.

Our Lord said that all manner of sin and blasphemy would be forgiven men except a sin against the Holy Spirit. This would not be forgiven them. The Pharisees, not having been received into God's family, nevertheless had a large measure of light, and therefore a large measure of responsibility. And when they, with much light, misrepresented it, this showed a measure of wilfulness on their part which, Jesus said, would be sure to have punishment. Very few, we may say, at that time, had so full a knowledge that they could be culpable in the fullest sense.

THE SIN OF JUDAS

The sin unto death is a full sin against the Holy Spirit, the sin against full light and knowledge, deliberate, wilful sin. We know of only one person who had such full light and full opportunity prior to our Lord's resurrection and the coming of the Pentecostal blessing; and that one person was Judas. His special light consisted in that he not only saw Jesus, and saw His miracles, and was a witness of His noble character, but Judas had himself received of this holy Spirit by impartation from Jesus, and had used it, casting out demons, etc.

Jesus said, "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born!" (Mark 14:21.) Judas had a sufficiency of light, not to condemn him merely to stripes and punishment, but so to condemn him that he

would have no further opportunity and hope. He had sinned against very great light. Aside from Judas we know of no other who has ever sinned the sin unto death, except those who may have proven unfaithful after having been begotten of the Holy Spirit as New Creatures, and who had thus received the mind of God, the Holy Spirit.

TREATMENT OF SPIRITUAL SICKNESS

The Scriptures also imply that any who have gotten into a condition of very low spirituality might have a possibility of recovery, not through themselves, but through the ministry of faithful ones of the Royal Priesthood. The Apostle James speaks of some who are "sick." He says to let such a one call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, and that the prayer of faith shall recover him to God's fellowship – and he adds: "He that converteth [recovereth] a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death." (James 5:20.) Apparently that soul is in death's throes; but if he manifest a sufficiency of faith, and will call in some true brethren and humbly confess his sin and ask for prayers, he would seem to be taking a step that would be considered favorably by the Lord, who might give him a further opportunity and trial. **[R5453 : page 138]**

Our thought is that, ordinarily, there would be no need for the individual to confess his trespasses to any one, unless it were to a person who had been trespassed against, and to whom, therefore, apologies would be due. Otherwise our sins are to be confessed only unto the Lord, unless under extreme circumstances, where one had lost fellowship with the Lord, and felt that there was nothing for him otherwise but complete alienation from God. In the latter case, we would advise such a brother to call in the Elders of the Church and make a confession, that his sin against the Holy Spirit may be canceled.

LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Some have asked: Was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira unpardonable? We answer, It was an unpardonable sin; for Ananias and Sapphira are both still lying dead. They may have some future opportunity, so far as we know. It is not for us to determine the degree of wilfulness connected with their wrong-doing. The Lord only would be able to know, and He has not yet manifested His decision. It may be that they were merely cut off from the present life, and will have some opportunity in the future. If they were really begotten of the Holy Spirit, this could not be; for all those who are to have a part in the Little Flock or the Great Company receive their chastisements and purifying experiences in this life, and none of them will receive any punishment in the future life. The Apostle says we will not come into condemnation with the world. We receive our trial for life or death everlasting in the present time.

In the day of the Apostles, when a partial community of interest was established, a number of the faithful sold possessions and contributed to the general fund. Although there was nothing compulsory upon any in respect to this selling of property and giving to the common treasury, the very fact that those who did so were highly esteemed in the Church would naturally become a snare to some who, without the real spirit of helpfulness and sacrifice, would desire to have the approbation of the brethren.

STARTLING RESULTS OF WILFUL DECEPTION

Ananias and Sapphira were of this class, desirous of the approval of the Church, yet deficient in the real spirit of sacrifice. They had a property which they determined to sell; and in order to pose before the believers as saints of a high order, they pretended to give to the general fund the full amount received from the property. Secretly, however, they had much less generous sentiments. They agreed together that they would retain part of the sale-money for

future contingencies, yet would pass as sacrificers to the full amount.

The wrong of their course is manifest. As the Apostle Peter declared, the property was their own, and after they had sold it they still had a right to do as they pleased with the proceeds. But they should have been honest about the transaction, and if they wished to give a tenth, a half, or all of the amount, it was a matter of their own business alone, and no one would have had the least right to find fault with or criticize them. The entire wrong consisted in the deception practised – the palming off of a part of the price as the whole, for the purpose of deceiving the Church and of gaining applause for an amount of sacrifice more than they made. As St. Peter said, they lied, not to man, but to the Holy Spirit of God. In this, and in this alone, consisted the sin for which they died.

The record is that "great fear came upon all the company" – great reverence for God and for the Apostles, His representatives. It brought also a realization that *consecrations* to the Lord were far from meaningless forms. This meant, not only to those who had already espoused the Lord's cause, but also to all who for some time thereafter would identify themselves with the Church, that any who were insincere would best make no pretensions to discipleship. Quite probably the influence of the lesson lasted for a considerable time – during the lives of the Apostles.

We may consider a lesson which may properly be learned from this incident of the past by the Lord's consecrated people of today. The lesson is that God desires "truth in the inward parts" – in the heart – and that any who have not this quality – candor, honesty, truthfulness – cannot be pleasing to God; and therefore cannot share in the glories to be dispensed shortly to the Elect class of this Gospel Age. – Psalm 51:6.

As we look at ourselves, we come to realize how imperfect are all the members of the fallen race; and when we consider God's

perfection, we can conceive of only one quality that the fallen creature could possess that would meet with Divine approval. That one quality is *honesty*. The true Christian must, in honesty, confess his own shortcomings, his own deficiencies. He must, in honesty, acknowledge that his sufficiency is of God, through Christ, and not of himself. He must honestly strive for the standard set before him in the Gospel. He must honestly admit that he cannot do the things that he would. He must candidly and fully accept the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, as the covering for his blemishes. We are inclined to the belief that the greatest sin in the Church – amongst the consecrated believers – is the sin of dishonesty; the sin for which Divine disapproval is so excellently illustrated in the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

This is an individual matter still, as it was in the days of the Apostles. Each individual of the Lord's people must answer for his own course, to the Lord Himself. It therefore behoves all who are seeking Divine approval, to see to it that they are not influenced by the prevalent disposition to hypocrisy, but that they deal with the Lord in purity and honesty of heart. They should see to it that, having covenanted to give to God and His service their all, they keep nothing back, but consider that their time, their influence, their means, their lives, are fully devoted to the Lord, and that they use these as His – as they believe He would wish to have them used – as faithful stewards.

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STRENGTH-DEVELOPMENT

The strong right arm is only strong
Because an active will
Has made it serve. But were that arm
Left idly hanging still,

'Twould lose the hoarded strength of years,
And lose more rapidly
Than it was gained, by Nature's law
Of inactivity.

'Tis true of souls. They gather strength
With every cross they bear,
With every humble sacrifice,
With every heartfelt prayer,
With every conflict bravely met,
And trial bravely borne;
With every throb of anguish felt
When tender ties are shorn.

The tears and toils of His dear ones
Are wisely, kindly, sent
By Him who knoweth what they need
For soul-development.
The path of idleness is one
By vagrant children trod.
They grow in grace most rapidly
Who labor most for God.

Unknown.

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