

Evangelistic Sermons

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CHAPTER TEN -

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

"All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." (Matthew 12:3).

"Therefore they could not believe" (John 12:39).

Whether or not a sin is pardonable or unpardonable depends upon the viewpoint from which you look at it. At least many things that we call unpardonable are things after all that are pardonable. We call things unpardonable because we judge them from the human standpoint, but these same things, when looked at through GOD's eyes of infinite mercy and love fall altogether within the limits of His pardon.

The papers told us sometime ago of a human devil who held a red hot poker against his wife's naked body and told her he would give her a taste of hell, so she'd know what it was like when she got there. We read of a thing like that; we hear of it and we say, "Such a thing is unpardonable;" but it isn't; it's pardonable.

We heard but the other day of a young man who betrayed his innocent, trusting sweetheart and later while out boating pounded her skull in with a blow from the boat oar and then tied a weight to her body and tried to hide his crime beneath the water. And you say, "Such a thing is altogether unpardonable." But I say, "It is altogether pardonable." You say, "What do you mean, Mr. Preacher?" And I say, "Pardon depends altogether upon the viewpoint; GOD will freely pardon what you and I would find it hard to pardon."

But John says in his Epistle, "There is a sin unto death," and JESUS said that it was possible so to sin in this world that a man never could be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come; and because such a thing is possible. it's mighty important for men and women who are liable to get into this fearful condition of soul to know something of what JESUS meant.

People say, "Don't preach about unpardonable sin; it doesn't concern us." But people, there's nothing in all the universe of GOD so much concerns some of us as that very thing, and I think if I did not speak of it the very blood of lost souls would cry out against me at the judgment of GOD; and so to prove the possibility of such a fatal sinning I am going to ask your attention to a three-fold proof - that of Scripture, that of nature and that of experience.

I. The Testimony of Scripture

Way back in the sixth chapter of Genesis, GOD says, "My Spirit will not always strive with men." And that is just as true today as it ever was. Three times GOD told Jeremiah not to pray for certain people because there was no hope for them. He said, concerning Ephraim, "**Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone.**" Suppose God should say that of a human soul. You know Paul speaks of some men whom even GOD had "**given up.**"

Heaven pity you man, if the time should come when GOD would say of you, "He is joined to his sin; let him alone!" Let him alone, conscience; let him alone, minister; let him alone, HOLY SPIRIT; let him sleep on in his sin and his unconcern until the very darkness of eternal night wakes him up to realize his everlasting shame and contempt.

In the Book of Proverbs we read, "**Then shall they call on me but I will not answer, for they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord; therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own doing and be filled with their own devices.**"

As we pass into the New Testament we are confronted in the twelfth chapter of John's Gospel with these words, "**Therefore they could not believe.**" It does not say they would not believe; it says they could not. Something had made it impossible for them to believe, and if they could not believe, by the very nature of the case they could not repent and therefore they could not be forgiven.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews are two very solemn passages. One in the sixth chapter and the fourth verse speaks of certain people for whom repentance is impossible. And in the tenth chapter and the twenty-sixth verse it says if a man continues to live in willful sin after he has received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no longer any sacrifice for that man's sin. It says "**If we sin wilfully,**" but the present participle is used and denotes a continuance in sin.

But the most explicit testimony of Scripture is the word of JESUS Himself in Matthew where He says that all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men but the blasphemy against the HOLY SPIRIT, and this, He says, never will be forgiven. neither in this world nor in the world to come.

What then is the meaning of all this serious Scripture? I cannot tell you all that my soul experiences as I speak upon this solemn theme. You, who know how to pray, pray for him who speaks tonight, and then when you have sent up a prayer for him, pray for those in this solemn gathering whom GOD sees in danger of some day committing the most fearful of crimes.

A man trembling with agony and his eyes filled with tears came to me once at the close of a meeting and said: "Oh, sir, I want so much to be saved, but I have been so terribly wicked and I've fought against GOD so long, that I fear I have committed the unpardonable sin." And I said, "My brother, you need have no fear along that line just now for if you have committed the unpardonable sin you would not be so concerned or feel any more like this about your soul."

When a man once sins against the HOLY SPIRIT in the sense to which the Saviour made

reference, GOD lets him alone for he is joined to his sins and there is no hope for him. No penitent man will ever be rejected for the unpardonable sin. for by his very penitence he proves he has never committed it.

A man could not be penitent if he had committed the unpardonable sin. This is the meaning of John 12:39: "**Therefore they could not believe.**"

They had so repeatedly refused to believe, in the day when that power was still with them, that their faith faculty had become atrophied. The unpardonable sin in a word is spiritual suicide; and it would be as impossible for a man dead in this spiritual sense to repent and believe as it would be for a man physically dead to perform the functions of the human body.

But as long as a man has the power to repent and the disposition to do it, there is no sin that will put him beyond the pale of GOD's forgiveness.

The unpardonable sin is not profanity; if it were there are some in Heaven now who would have no right to stay there. It is not licentiousness, for JESUS said to the woman taken in adultery, "Go and sin no more." It is not drunkenness for some of the mightiest servants of GOD have been men like John Bunyan and S. H. Hadley and John B. Gough, and others like them whom GOD has pulled out of the very quagmires of drunkenness and shame. It is not murder, for Paul's hands were red with human blood, but GOD saved him and after a mighty service let him enter Heaven with a song of victory on his lips.

I have met men who thought it was one thing and others who thought it was another. But in this particular sense there is no unpardonable sin. There is no special form of sin that will not be pardoned if a man but crave that pardon at the hands of GOD. There is no sin for which CHRIST's blood will not atone. There is no depth of hell on earth that will not be emptied, if man will but take the way of escape that GOD has made.

This answers the question whether the unpardonable sin is an act of the soul or a condition of the heart. It makes it plain that it is the latter rather than the former.

No matter what kind of fruit a tree may bear, it is the inner life of the tree, the disposition, the root of the tree that is responsible for the kind of fruit that it bears. And it's so with the sin that a man commits. Any sin may mark the point of transition from the place of hope to the place of despair.

"There is a time, we know not when,
A place we know not where
That marks the destiny of men
From glory to despair."

Any act or sinful deed of the soul may mark that time and that place and fix the character beyond repair, but as in the case of the tree, so in the case of the man; it is the inner condition, the disposition of the man, the calloused condition of the heart, that is responsible for the sin, whatever it may be, that puts him beyond the pale of GOD's forgiveness.

Now if you will imagine the history of these Jews you will discover the nature of the unpardonable sin. The opposition of these blaspheming Jews did not begin on the day He cured the unhappy demoniac and it did not end there. It began farther back, at the very beginning of His ministry. Time and again evidence of His divinity flashed out before them, *but they shut their eyes and would not see.*

The first miracle he ever performed, when He turned the water to wine at Cana should have been enough to convince them. but they said, "**We will not believe on Him.**" One Sabbath day a man with an unclean spirit came into the Synagogue and JESUS was there. Even the Devil recognized Him and left testimony to His person, but JESUS said, "**Hold your peace and come out of this man.**" and when the evil spirit obeyed they were all amazed, and said, "**What thing is this? For with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits and they do obey.**" But this was not enough. They hardened their hearts and said, "**He is not the Son of God.**"

Once more He was in the Synagogue and before Him stood a man with a withered hand, and at the command of JESUS. he stretched it forth and it became whole like the other one. What will the Pharisees do with this evidence, will they receive it? No! They took council among themselves how they might destroy Him.

He entered a village one day. just as a funeral procession was coming out. A widowed mother was about to bury her only boy. JESUS said. "**Young man arise**" and instantly the gloom of the grave was dispelled by the flush of life. I say, "Pharisees what will you do with evidence like this?" and they cry, "**Away with it; we will not believe.**"

One day it was noised about that JESUS was going to the grave of Lazarus. Certainly now, He will not think of trying to raise this man to life who has been four days in the grave. A great crowd had gathered about the grave. Can He do it? Can He call back to life this man who has been in the sepulchre so long that decomposition has commenced? And now JESUS cries with a loud voice. "**Lazarus, come forth,**" and as before, Omnipotence waited upon His word and Lazarus that was buried, lived again. Once more the Pharisees stood face to face with the question, Is not this proof enough of His divinity?, and once more they cried. "Away with your proof, away with your evidence." And so it was from the very beginning to the very end.

The time when JESUS told them of their awful sin, which they had either committed or towards which they were rapidly hastening was only one instance of a hundred others like it. Here was a man blind and dumb and possessed of a devil and at a word from the Son of GOD, he spake and he saw and he became sane. In the presence of a proof such as this it was no longer possible to doubt. His divinity was proven too clearly to be denied and they were convinced.

The common people cried out with great enthusiasm, "**This is the Christ, the Son of God.**" But what did the Pharisees do? To have admitted that fact would have been to have repudiated all their past resistance and to have acknowledged this man as CHRIST, the MESSIAH. This with diabolical resistance they resolved they would not do. They would escape the necessity of believing. They were convinced of the truth but they shut their eyes and would not see.

They could not deny the fact and so they will interpret it. They will ascribe it to the Devil. False and absurd, hellish and satanic, but what matter, let the cause of Judaism be saved at any cost.

Anything! Anything! Anything under Heaven rather than faith in this individual as the CHRIST, the MESSIAH, the Anointed of GOD. That was and that is the unpardonable sin; not any special form of sin, not so much an act of any kind, but a conscious, determined, persistent and hateful resistance to the CHRIST of GOD; a resistance in spite of the fullest light blazing all about and any man who so persistently denies the CHRIST in the face of such light, so repeatedly insults the SPIRIT of GOD is in danger of grieving that SPIRIT for ever away and of being left alone and given up to his sin.

You might be guilty of many hideous crimes and yet not commit the unpardonable sin and you may sit still in your seat this moment and in the spirit just mentioned say, No, to the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD and thereby be guilty of that very thing. The unpardonable sin only marks the limit of resistance beyond which a man cannot go and be saved; it is that

"Line by us unseen
By which each path is crossed
Beyond which GOD Himself hath sworn
That he who goes is lost."

Any sin, I repeat, may fix the character and mark the awful condition of heart, and when it becomes true you will be eternally lost, not because you cannot be forgiven, but because you cannot ask forgiveness.

You may so set your will against GOD that your will becomes fixed, and when this is so, what was said of those Jews may be likewise said of you, "**Therefore, they could not believe.**"

Now this must be a comfort to every man who feels the least concern for his soul, for that is the surest sign you have not driven away the SPIRIT of GOD. Then. I pray you, do not do so tonight; and if there is one here who can sit through a meeting like this untouched, unmoved and unconcerned, while it does not necessarily mean that you have passed the limit of resistance, it does mean that you are nearing its awful verge and I pray God you may draw back before it be eternally too late.

II. Testimony of Nature

Now look for three or four minutes at the testimony of nature. It is the law of nature that if a man will not do a thing the time is bound to come when he cannot do it.

- You go home from this meeting and take a rope and tie your arm to your side and simply leave that rope there long enough, refusing to use that organ for the purpose GOD gave it to you and the time will come when you will have lost forever the capacity to lift that arm again.

- Put a bandage on your eye. You need not puncture the eye; simply leave the bandage on long enough. refusing to use that organ for the purpose GOD gave it to you, and the time will come when your eye will have lost forever the power and the capacity to see.

- Put a stopper in your ear; you need not puncture the drum; simply leave the stopper there long enough, neglecting and refusing to use that organ for the purpose GOD gave it to you and the

time will come when your ear will have lost forever the capacity to hear.

- Harden your heart long enough. refusing to use it for the purpose GOD gave it to you and the time will come when your heart will have lost forever the capacity to feel and believe.

"Therefore they could not believe."

If you will give an honest testimony. some of you will say that you are finding it harder to accept CHRIST tonight than you honestly believe you would have found it, ten, fifteen or thirty years ago. This is all the proof you ought to need of the truth of what I am saying.

This is the psychology of the sin. Age fossilizes and habit hardens or softens the soul according to its nature. You are what you will to be, and years ago with some of you, many years ago - when the first call came to you for a definite decision for CHRIST, you thought it over and you willed to say, No. Because you said No the first time, it was easier to say No the second time. Metaphysics will teach you that the first thought on this subject, when the moment of decision comes again is the thought that was registered on the plastic cells of your brain when you first willed to say No to GOD. And so you said No, again and then you said it again. You said it 365 times last year. Time has stamped this decision deeper and deeper into your nature until tonight every former decision you have ever made unites with every other and at the call again to CHRIST, your whole being, brain, blood, and soul hurls back at GOD the No that has become a part of your very self.

This is the psychological law of nature that explains why most decisions for CHRIST are made in youth. People say, "Isn't it strange that so few old men decide for CHRIST?" No, it is not strange: it would be strange if they did. Nine-tenths of all the decisions for CHRIST are made before the age of twenty.

People, do you know what that means? Suppose we consign all infants and those who died before they are 12 to Heaven. This certainly fixes the age of responsibility high enough, and science won't even stand for that. The law in some States prescribes hanging at the low age of twelve. Then bear in mind that about one-fourth of all the other people die before they are 20, and that the average length of life is only about 33 years, and I will tell you what these figures mean.

- They mean if you are 25 years of age, and still unsaved, that the chances of your ever becoming so are five thousand to one against you.

- If you are 35 years old and still unsaved, the chances are twenty-five thousand to one.

- If you are 45 years old and not converted, the figures run up to eighty thousand.

- If you are 50 and still out of CHRIST, the figures almost appall you; one hundred and fifty thousand to one against you,

- If you are 75 and still unsaved you are almost the same as doomed and damned tonight.

My GOD, arouse men tonight! Help them to think and to act, before it is too late. Before that unseen line is passed between GOD's patience and His wrath and all hope be gone forever. I do not believe that one man in a million who has reached the age of ninety yet unconverted ever has the least desire to know CHRIST.

Testimony of Experience

And now, in the last place, you will find all this backed up by the testimony of experience and observation.

Look at the way some people die. Now I don't believe the HOLY SPIRIT ever ceases to strive with some men until the last opportunity for coming to CHRIST has been forever lost in death, and that is the moment when that man's probation ends. But I am thinking now not so much of the probation, that ends at death, as I am of the probation that ends before death; for there is a time when it is impossible for a man to say, Yes, to GOD. Many a man in his dying moment has said, "I would believe if I could, but I can't,"

There have been some awful deathbeds among the wicked. Listen, while I tell you of one. He was a young skeptic, brainy in many respects, and the minister had come to show him the need of repentance. "Be gone," he cried, "I don't want any of your religious twaddle; I want none of your cant and hypocrisy; I am not going to die, and if I were, I would die as I have lived." Four weeks later the doctor sat by the same bed, and to him the young man said,

"Tell me, doctor, I am not going to die; I cannot die now."

"My poor friend," said the doctor, "I cannot deceive you; it won't be long until you will be with your GOD."

"My GOD?" gasped the young man, "I have no GOD; I have fought against GOD and against my mother's prayers all my life and now you tell me I must die. Do you know what that means," he added in an awful whisper; "it means if I die today I will be in hell! Take it back. Tell me I am not going to die!"

"Father, it was you who taught me this way, you told me to go this way, and now you say I am to die," and as he lifted himself on his pillow he began to curse and such a torrent of profanity poured from his feverparched lips that it seemed like a wail from the bottomless pit of hell. They carried his mother fainting from the room, while on the father's brow there gathered great drops of perspiration as his gifted son fell back on his pillow, a corpse, in the very midst of his cursing.

I tell you, friends, that experience all over the world is proving that GOD's SPIRIT will not always strive with a man, and that JESUS CHRIST did not make a mistake when he said that man could sin in a way that he could never be forgiven.

But this was a young man. Most men who have become old and gray-haired in sin and in unconcern, do not die that way. Death-bed repentance is usually made by those of lesser years. Occasionally an old man snuffles and whines for mercy on his death-bed, but it's the exception and not the rule. It is neither scriptural nor scientific for an old man to die in this way.

Statistics show that only about three men out of sixty who have lived out of CHRIST to the age of eighty show signs of repentance when they die. Old men usually die as they have lived. Ingersol went through a great deal of trouble to prove that Tom Paine died that kind of a death. I don't know whether he did or not. But, suppose he did. Some men can't die any other way.

Here is an old man dying and thousands die just like him. His memory and all his faculties are in perfect working order. His reason is clear and bright. He has just written his will two hours ago. You go to that man and say,

"Don't you want some one to read the Bible to you?"

"No, I don't want to see a Bible."

"Don't you want some minister to pray for you?"

"No, I don't want to see a minister."

"Are you not afraid to go out with your sin into eternity?"

"Not in the least."

"Are you not afraid to meet your GOD?"

"No, not at all."

And you put your hand on that man's heart and he is more excited than is common at such a time. "Past feeling," Paul puts it. A sinner let alone; the 'SPIRIT of GOD grieved away.

A man don't need to be in his coffin to be dead. There are men walking your streets today who are as dead spiritually as they ever will be in the eternal world. I believe there are men in your city today who are just as truly condemned as if they were in hell.

Oh, friend, I would to GOD that you might see that there must and will come a limit some time to your resistance to JESUS CHRIST, and that it will come upon you like a thief in the night, and that you will be lost and may not know it yourself.

Over and over again you have said "No" to GOD and still He has not left you. Time and time again you have spurned His mercy and trampled under foot the sacrifice of His Son for your soul, but I fear for you tonight lest you should say "No" again.

The great Napoleon was sitting in his camp sad and dejected. Half of his army had been annihilated and as yet he did not know how the fortunes of the day were to end. Suddenly there came running into his camp an orderly, who cried, "Cheer up, Sire, you've gained the victory." "Yes," said the great general, "I've gained the victory, but another such victory would cost me my kingdom."

Oh, man, you've gained the victory, haven't you. You've gained the victory over your mother's prayers; you have gained the victory over the tears and entreaties of your wife and little ones: you've gained the victory over the pleadings of the minister: you've gained the victory over the tender, patient spirit of GOD: but what I fear for you is that if you win a few more such victories, or another such victory today, it will cost you your soul.

I tremble as I think of giving the invitation tonight. I don't want ever to think that anyone has committed this awful crime against the HOLY SPIRIT under my preaching. So much rather would I that you go home tonight without an invitation than to say that fatal "No" to GOD; but as an ambassador of GOD, standing in CHRIST's stead tonight, I must give you this opportunity, though you have murdered ten thousand others. I tremble while I do it. I feel sure that some will make their final choice tonight. If you have the least spark of a desire, there is hope for you. And while GOD's SPIRIT still pleads and friends are praying for you, will you say "Yes" to God?

~ end of chapter 11 ~
