

The Unpardonable Sin

by Ichabod Spencer (1798-1854)
(*This is a chapter from "A Pastor's Sketches"*)

During the whole of one summer, a young woman of respectable family and of religious education was accustomed to send for me, from time to time, for religious conversation. She had no hope, and her mind was uniformly gloomy. She appeared peculiarly dejected. Time after time, as I visited her, I endeavored as plainly as possible, to unfold the divine promises, and the fullness of Christ to meet all the possible wants of sinners who will believe in Him. Still she remained as sad and downcast as ever. Her most common topic was the magnitude of her sins; she was such a sinner that there was no mercy for her. Repeatedly I showed the error of this notion, by the clear declarations of the Bible, and by the nature of salvation obtained by the Savior; and most urgently I pressed upon her the instant duty of hearing the gospel call to repent and trust in Jesus Christ, while the Holy Spirit was striving with her. I assured her that no sinner need be lost because his sins are great since "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;" and if a sinner perishes, he must perish because he does not repent and believe, not because the merit of Christ is insufficient to reach the extent of his guilt, and not because Christ is not freely offered to him, in the full sincerity and full friendliness of God.

One day, as I was urging this point and entreating her to be reconciled to God by yielding her heart to the persuasions of the Holy Spirit, she said to me:--

"I believe I have committed the unpardonable sin!"

"What makes you think so?" said I.

"Why—I feel so," said she hesitatingly.

"What makes you feel so?"

"The Lord would have forgiven me before this time, if there was any forgiveness for me."

"He will forgive you now, if you will repent of sin and trust in the redemption of Christ."

"No!" said she, "I have committed the unpardonable sin! There is no forgiveness for me!" She wept and sobbed aloud.

I said, "How long have you been thinking that you have committed the unpardonable sin?"

"I have known it a long time."

"What is the unpardonable sin?"

"The sin against the Holy Ghost, which hath never forgiveness, never in this world, for in the world to come."

"What is the sin against the Holy Ghost?"

After much hesitation, she replied, "It is the sin that Jesus Christ mentioned—speaking

against the Holy Ghost.”

“Have you been speaking against the Holy Ghost?”

“Oh no! I have not done that!” said she.

“What then do you mean? What is your unpardonable sin?”

She gave no answer, and I continued to ask, “When did you commit this unpardonable sin?”

She said nothing.

“Tell me what it is.”

She said nothing.

“How came you to commit it?”

She said nothing.

“What makes you think you have committed it?”

“God would have forgiven me before this time, if I had not committed it.”

“Before this time? What do you mean?”

“Why, I have been a great while seeking religion.”

“And because you have been so long seeking it, you think it is no present fault of yours that you have not found it; but that God will not forgive you, because, months ago, you committed the unpardonable sin—is that what you mean?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well,” said I, “I suppose you want nothing more of me, if you are unpardonable. I can do nothing for you if that is the case. I may as well leave you. You may go to your closet, and tell God, as you kneel before him, that you are willing to repent; that you are willing to trust in Christ, and willing to obey God in all things; and that it is no fault of your that you are not a Christian. Tell Him that the only thing now in the way of your salvation is that old unpardonable sin, which He will not forgive. Goodbye.”

I left her at once. The next day she sent for me again. I found her, as I did not expect, in the same state of mind, brooding sadly over the unpardonable sin. After much conversation and aiming to remove the difficulty, and assuring her of her error, she still insisted, “I have committed the unpardonable sin, I know I have, I know I have, I know I have.”

I desired her, after a few moments to quit her agitation, and fix her thoughts on the things which I was going to say to her. Said I, “I shall speak very plainly. You will understand every word of it. Some of the things which I shall say may surprise you, but I want you to remember them. All along through the summer I have treated you with utmost kindness and indulgence. I have always to you when you have sent for me, and many times when you have not. And it is because I feel kindly towards you still, and wish to do you good, that I shall now say some very plain things which you may not like, but they are true:--

“First, you say you have committed the unpardonable sin; but you do not believe what you say. You believe no such thing. You know, indeed, that you are a sinner; but you do not believe that you have committed the unpardonable sin. You are not honest,

not sincere when you say so. You do not believe it.

“Second, it is pride, a foolish pride of a wicked heart, which makes you say that you have committed the unpardonable sin. Influenced by pride you half strive (only half after all) to believe that you have done it. You wish to exalt yourself. You pretend that it is some great and uncommon thing which keeps you from being a Christian. It is the unpardonable sin. Pride lies at the bottom of all this.

“Third, you have no occasion for this pride. There is nothing very uncommon about you. You are very much like other sinners. It is not likely that you could commit the unpardonable sin, if you should try. If do not think you know enough to do it.”

“Why, said she, “Is there not such a sin?”

“Yes; but you don't know what it is; and you don't know enough to commit it.”

“Fourth, you are one of the most self-righteous creatures! I ever saw. You try to think that you are not so much to blame for your irreligion—that you are willing to be a Christian, and would be one, if it were not for that unpardonable sin, which you try in your pride to believe you have committed. You pretend that it is not your present and cherished sin which keeps you in your impenitence. Oh, you are good enough, surely to repent; you would repent, indeed you would, if it were not for that unpardonable sin. That is your heart; self-righteousness and pride.

“Fifth, your wicked heart clings to this idea of the unpardonable sin, as an excuse for your continued impenitence, for your living in the indulgence of sin, unbelief, and disobedience to God, every day. Your excuse will not stand. You make it insincerely. It is not the unpardonable sin which hinders your being a Christian; but your wickedness of heart, your pride, vanity, and insincerity. I shall never again have anything to say to you about the unpardonable sin. If you had any real and just conviction of sin, you would never name the unpardonable sin.”

Some months after this she called upon me in deep trouble. But now her complaint was that she had a wicked, deceitful, and hard heart, opposed to the law of God. She became, finally, as she believed, a true penitent, and professed her religion publicly. But in all her religious exercises there appeared nothing very peculiar, and she never named to me the unpardonable sin.

True light in the conscience is one thing, and a deceitful gloom in the proud heart is quite another. When a sinner has any just sense of his condition, as alienated from a holy God, he will not be apt to think of the unpardonable sin. False conviction is common but useless.

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