

without lessening the devotional interest or impairing the missionary action, it may not be possible to do something in the way of regular instruction which will tend to give a fuller knowledge of our Church's history and of the testimony committed to its care. Information or suggestions bearing on this part of the Committees work should be sent to N. E. Jordan, B.A., Strathroy Ont., as soon as possible, in order that a report may be prepared before the meeting of next Assembly.

The Decline of Family Prayer.

A veteran missionary was once asked, says *The Outlook*, on his return from the Orient, what sign of change during his ten years' absence most impressed him. He replied, "The decline of family worship in the Christian homes where I am a guest." A contrast of this sort among Unitarians between the present and the preceding generation has recently been noted in the "Christian Register." It is not limited to them, and is an increasing contrast. Not only is the morning family worship omitted, but the blessing at the table also. Some theory of causes is likely to come first to mind, but a more important matter is the consideration of effects. It is a well established psychological principle that expression has a stimulating reaction upon feeling, and that the life of feeling so depends on the stimulus of this reaction that if it be restrained the feeling declines. Moreover, while religion is essentially personal between each individual and God, religious feeling cannot be satisfied without social expression, since we are essentially social persons. Neither is the individual the social unit, but the family is the integer, and the individual but a fraction. The decadence of family worship is not only the impoverishment of social religious feeling, but it is the promotion of the excessive individualism from which in our time both the family and the community suffer.

Many can remember when evening as well as morning prayer was the rule in religious families. Social engagements and late hours have altogether driven out the evening prayer, and early trains to business now threaten to exclude the morning prayer. But to maintain the spirit of religion apart from its form is a hope without warrant from experience. There are, no doubt, a few

"Whose faith has centre everywhere,
Nor cares to fix itself to form."

It is otherwise with most of us. It is otherwise in every family where there are children. A religious spirit cannot grow, neither can it sustain itself, except at a "poor dying rate," apart from embodiment in outward expression. So long as a faithful life in purity of heart depends on the habitual realization of the presence of God and our filial relation to Him, so long is the daily acknowledgment of this at the family altar indispensable for those who would not only make their daily calling a divine service but teach their children to do so. What is the quarter-hour that one should grudge it for this? "Prayer and provender hinder no man." Time is given to fit the outer man for his daily going forth into the world, but the inner man is no less needy.

The Sin Against the Holy Spirit.*

BY REV. ADDISON P. FOSTER, D.D.

Our Lord was accused by the Pharisees of casting out demons by the help of Satan. It was an outrageous charge, but as the miracle itself was beyond question, His enemies could find no other way to break its force. On this Christ sternly warned His hearers not to commit the sin against the Holy Spirit.

THE NATURE OF THE SIN.

What is this sin? Christ implies that the Pharisees were guilty of it. The incident certainly shows the elements of the sin. The wrong-doing of the Pharisees on this occasion enters into the mysterious sin. *They treated divine goodness as evil.* When God's power through Christ healed the demoniac, they called it devilish. Nothing strikes a more serious blow at humanity than to confound moral distinctions. Here were the great teachers of a nation trying to obliterate the moral sense of the community. Christ's work they attributed to Satan. It was the act of wreckers luring a ship upon the rocks. It was the consummation of villainy.

These Pharisees were guilty in another way; *they defied the personal influence of God.* God works on men through the Spirit. The name then meant to the Jews, — for it was before the doctrine of the Trinity was fully formulated, — God in contact with humanity. So here Christ claimed to cast out demons by the Spirit of God. The Spirit's close relation to man's soul these false teachers repudiated, and this was a fearful sin.

More than this: Christ wrought His miracles to substantiate His claims. The Pharisees in trying to break their force *were guilty of rejecting evidence for Christ.* Treating His miracle as from the devil, they regarded it as proving nothing. They closed the door against the plainest evidence. It is amazing how far belief is under our control. We can refuse to hear evidence. We can twist and torture the argument to be deducted from evidence. We can close heart and intellect against the force of truth. This marvellous power over beliefs is why Christ says the Spirit shall convince men of sin because they believe not on Him.

One other element in their sin was *dishonoring and opposing the Holy Spirit.* Our Lord calls the Pharisees' conduct "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." Could anything be more horrible than to charge that His work was from Satan? But *blasphemy*, as the Jews understood it, meant resistance of the Divine influence and treason against God. God reconciles us to Him as loving and loyal subjects, if at all, through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit alone can move out hearts and bring us to Christ. To defy the Spirit, then, is to oppose the one influence that can save us. It is to smite the loving hands that reach out to snatch us from the raging seas.

All this shows what is this great and mysterious sin against the Holy Spirit which Christ denounces. It is the sin of defiant refusal to accept Christ as Saviour, or, in briefer words, of persistent impenitence. Such impenitence is the result of confounding good and evil, of struggling against the fatherly influence of God, of disregarding the plainest proofs of Christ's claims, and of driving the Spirit from our hearts.

THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SIN.

It is not strange, then, that this sin is declared to be *eternal*. In Mark, according to the impressive change in the Revision, Christ declares that he that "shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." The single word "eternal," as manifestly interpreted by the statement preceding that the sin has never forgiveness, throws a flood of light on certain vexed questions in eschatology. There is an unending sin. Such a sin can have no forgiveness and is a bar against any escape from sin's penalties.

This same sin is pronounced *unpardonable*. Evidently this is not from any arbitrary decision of God, but is founded in the soundest principles of reason. The sinner by his persistent opposition to the truth blunts the faculty which should perceive the force of argument, weakens his will-power so that it can no longer resist temptation, quenches the still, small voice of the Spirit urging him to repent, and becomes unable to appreciate and accept Christ. The sin goes on forever, and its consequences, like the flame of fire that follows a comet through the affrighted skies, are inseparable from it.

THE SOURCES OF SIN.

Our Lord is gracious, and after His dreadful rebuke of this sin proceeds to indicate its sources. If these are known, the sin itself can be avoided.

The sin begins in an evil heart. An impure and rebellious character prompts to an attitude that, if encouraged, leads to this sin. Our desires and passions, if allowed, will rule us, and if unchecked may in time lead us to inconceivable wickedness. The Pharisees' pride, avarice and lust for power caused them to denounce the holiest deeds of Christ as of the devil.

We may be led into an unpardonable sin by *rash words*. It is far easier to retreat from a false position before than after we have committed ourselves by public speech. When the word has gone from our lip, pride forbids its recall; we bolster it with others; one evil word succeeds another until blasphemy is rampant on our tongue. There is a blasphemy that is worse

*A Meditation based on (Matt. xii. 22-27; Mark iii. 29-30) in the Bible Study Union Course on "The Teachings of Christ."