

## BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

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All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.—Matt. xii. 31.

Christ died for sinners. He died to atone for the sins of men. Therefore sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men for Christ's sake, when they repent and ask forgiveness of God. But not all sins. There is one exception. There are sins and there is a sin—"blasphemy against the Holy Ghost."

Where is the man who says, "There is no world to come," and who yet professes to believe in the God of Holy Scripture," or who, with much ado, proclaims that "God is so merciful He will not punish?" Let him read this text and the verse which follows it. This Scripture says there is a "world to come" as well as "this world"; that there is continuity of being throughout the two worlds; and (if we take it in connection with other parts of the Word of God which elucidate it.) that there is spiritual death as well as physical death, and "after death the judgment."

A distinction is made between sinning against the Son of Man, the second Person of the Trinity, and sinning against the Holy Ghost, the third Person, for the reason that there is a difference of function between the Son of Man and the Holy Ghost. "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." (v. 32.) And this difference we must examine.

Hear therefore what the Scriptures say of Jesus Christ, the Son of man and the Son of God:—"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John iii. 16. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."—Luke xix. 10. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—Matt. ii. 28. "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you."—John xvi. 7. *Christ is the Saviour of Men*, seeking to save, and bringing salvation.

What, next, do the Scriptures say of the Holy Ghost? "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth, . . . and He will show you things to come."—John xvi. 13. "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth."—John xiv. 16, 17. "He shall testify of Me."—John xv. 26. "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."—John xiv. 26.

Whereas Christ the Son of Man and Son of God, is the Saviour of men, *the Spirit aids us in coming to Him*: guides the heart and the mind; comforts the soul, testifies of Christ, and gives understanding of His life giving truth.

Having examined this difference of function or office, we are now in a position to investigate the nature of the sin against the Holy Ghost, called blasphemy.

It is not the only sin against the Holy Ghost. Every sin of which a man is guilty is a sin against God, the Father who loves us; against Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who saves us; and against the Holy Ghost, the Comforter and teacher. But not every sin is blasphemy. Every sin is *Mortifer*, but the death that would be its natural consequence may be averted, with only the exception of this sin's consequence.

To blaspheme is to speak in terms of impious irreverence. This is the literal meaning. Words, rather than acts, are implied by the word itself. But this sin is constituted, not by isolated, casually dropped words, but by words that are the index of an evil heart, and the fruit of a long-time practice. "He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness,"—Luke iii. 29.

Why is this sin never to be forgiven? We will reason out the answer. Speaking of the wickedness of the world which provoked God's wrath and caused the flood to be sent, He says (Gen. vi. 3.) "My spirit shall not always strive with man." The normal condition of the Holy Spirit is that of *striving* with men to lead them to an understanding and acceptance of the truth. Turn to Eph. iv. 30, and we have a warning and a caution: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

The normal character of the Spirit is *sensitive*. But when God's Spirit ceases to strive with a man, (not momentarily, or for a time, but) *forever*, it is because that man has grieved the Spirit wantonly and with no common grief. He has turned his spirit against God, (cf Job. xv. 13.) to continue in irrevocable estrangement and opposition.

Other references to the Spirit make the question still more plain. "Thou gavest Thy good Spirit to instruct."—Neh. ix. 20. "It is the spirit that quickeneth."—John vi. 63.

To follow the course thus delineated, in other words to refuse the Spirit's instruction and so to forfeit and remove ourselves from His gracious influence and quickening power, is to commit moral and spiritual suicide; it is to cease altogether to love or reverence God; it is to leave off from prayer; it is to despise Christ and to reject all heavenly comforting; it is to wilfully abandon hope of Eternal Life.

Answer now the question: Why is this sin never to be forgiven? It is because the sin itself, of grieving away the Spirit, precludes the possibility of repentance.

Repentance being the gift of God, (see Matt. 9: 13; Acts 5: 31 and 11: 18; Rom. 2: 4,) it might be asked, Will not God always grant repentance? Both Matthew and Luke give the Lord's answer: "Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." But the answer places the onus of repentance upon the individual sinner—"Seek," "Knock." He who will not knock or seek must therefore be a stranger to repentance. But without repentance there can be no forgiveness of sin. Again let it be said, this sin precludes all possibility of repentance, and therefore cannot be forgiven.

In order to obviate all doubt or difficulty it will be well to ask the question, Who are they who stand in danger of committing this sin? We answer: (1) Not the ignorant, for the sin is consciously and of a purpose committed, with knowledge of the facts involved and of the truths transgressed; (2) Not the believer, for he is "kept by the Power of God, through faith, unto salvation"; (3) Nor yet the average unbeliever, in whose case the rebelliousness of heart and mind which he shows is sufficient proof that he is not yet guilty of the sin and in no very immediate danger of committing it, inasmuch as the Spirit of God is yet striving with him; but (4) the intelligent man, who is well informed as to what the Scriptures teach about God, the soul, sin, and Salvation by Jesus Christ; and who knows that he is a sinner and guilty in the sight of God, and is convinced that there is but one way of escape from sin and its consequences but one possible plan of Salvation; but who is confirmed in error, of his own will and choice.

Stier very well defines the sin in his great work, "The Words of the Lord Jesus,"—Vol. ii. p. 165,— "Against the Holy Ghost" means against the most direct and conclusive testimony, by which the person who contradicts and resists is yet entirely convinced, and, consequently, sins with the most complete knowledge and will; and this is the idea most essentially belonging to the unpardonable sin." And again, p. 168, "It is not . . . contemptuous indifference to all that is good and holy . . . but positive hatred." That positive hatred should develop would only be the natural result of the course of life, mental and spiritual, which all that is said about this sin implies.

One thing remains to be considered in connection with this sin—we are not to pray for it. The reason is already abundantly evident; but further evidence of the right sort can only be beneficial.—"My servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept; lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job."—Job 42. 8., As the first Epistle of St. John teaches so here we have the teaching made plain that one may pray for another and be heard for his faith. But let him not pray for this sin: the way by which the answer might have come that other has forever closed, when he finally felt nor heard any further striving of the Spirit.

There may arise conditions when prayer need not be offered and will not be heard, so long as the conditions remain unaltered. Prayer of certain definite character at all events, which the conditions themselves will best suggest to the mind imbued with Christ, need not be offered Jer. 14: 10 12 presents a case in point. But