

afford. The only satisfactory conclusion on this awful subject is, that God was pleased to make this exception from the mercies of his Gospel as a warning to all mankind, who, if not capable of committing that precise sin, may all make dangerous approaches to it. It was designed to exhibit the evil of spiritual pride and bigotry; to show that there are sins of the *INTELLECT* and *WILL*, as well as of the senses, most hateful to God, because leading to a malignant opposition to his holy truth; and that a state of heart is attainable by perseverance in sin, from which the insulted Holy Spirit, after much patience, takes his everlasting flight, and leaves the sinner incapable of repentance. Still, while it operates as a warning, by showing how awful a degree of depravity man is capable of, there is no just ground for any apprehensions to be entertained by pious and scrupulous minds; for, not to urge that the fears of such persons are a sufficient proof that they have not committed the greatest of all offences, it may be confidently concluded, that as those only are charged with the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost who saw the miracles of Christ performed, and yet attributed them to Satan, so no one in these later times can be guilty of this particular crime—and no one is, therefore, on that account excluded from forgiveness. We have no right to enlarge an exception from the mercies of the Gospel, beyond its strict *LETTER*. If any exception to a general rule demands a severely rigid interpretation, it is this, which stands in direct opposition to the general character of the covenant of grace.

From "Notes" on the New Testament, by Rev. Joseph Benson.

By the blasphemy here spoken of, we are evidently to understand injurious or impious speaking against the Spirit of God, such as the Pharisees were now guilty of; i.e. attributing to the devil those miracles which Christ gave full proof that he wrought by the Holy Ghost. That this, and nothing but this, is the sin here intended, is manifest from the connexion in which the words stand in this place; and more especially still, from the parallel passage, Mark iii. 28-30, in which the Evangelist, assigning the reason of our Lord's making this declaration, adds, "Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit;" i.e. "hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of devils casteth out devils." This, then, and this only, is the sin, or blasphemy, as it should rather be called, (and as the Scriptures always call it,) against the Holy Ghost. It is an offence of the tongue; it is committed not by *thinking*, but by *speaking*, by *evil speaking*, by *bellying*, *slandering*, or *reviling* the Divine Spirit, by which our Lord wrought his miracles, ascribing them to the devil: which, in fact, was calling the Holy Ghost, or the Spirit of the one living and true God, the devil: a more heinous crime than which is not to be conceived.

JEWISH SECTS MENTIONED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE PHARISEES.

The Pharisees were the most numerous, distinguished, and popular sect among the Jews. The time when they first appeared is not known, but it is supposed to have been not long after the institution of the Sadducees, if indeed the two sects did not gradually spring up together. They derived their name from the Hebrew word *Pharash*, which signifies *separated*, or *set apart*, because they separated themselves from the rest of the Jews to superior strictness in religious observances. They boasted that, from their accurate knowledge of religion, they were the favourites of heaven; and thus, trusting in themselves that they were righteous, despised others. (Luke xi. 52. xviii. 9-11.) Among the tenets inculcated by this sect, we may enumerate the following, viz:—

They ascribed all things to fate or providence, yet not so absolutely as to take away the free-will of man, though fate does not co-operate in every action. They also believed in the existence of angels and spirits, and in the resurrection of the dead; (Acts xxiii. 8) but, from the account given of them by Josephus, it appears that their notion of the immortality of the soul was the Pythagorean metempsychosis; that the soul, after the dissolution of one body, winged its flight into ano-

ther; and that these removals were perpetuated and diversified through an infinite succession, the soul animating a sound and healthy body, or being confined in a deformed and diseased frame, according to its conduct in a prior state of existence. From the Pharisees, whose tenets and traditions the people generally received, it is evident that the disciples of our Lord had adopted this philosophical doctrine of the transmigration of souls; when having met a man who had been born blind, they asked him whether it were the sins of this man in a pre-existent state which had caused the Sovereign Disposer to inflict upon him this punishment. To this inquiry Christ replied, that neither his vices or sins in a pre-existent state, nor those of his parents, were the cause of this calamity. (John ix. 1-4.) From this notion, derived from the Greek philosophy, we find that during our Saviour's public ministry, the Jews speculated variously concerning him, and indulged several conjectures, which of the ancient prophets it was whose soul now animated him, and performed such astonishing miracles. Some contended that it was the soul of Elias; others of Jeremiah; while others, less sanguine, only declared in general terms that it must be the soul of one of the old prophets by which these mighty deeds were now wrought. (Matt. xvi. 14. Luke ix. 19.)

Lastly, the Pharisees contended that God was in strict justice bound to bless the Jews, and make them all partakers of the terrestrial kingdom of the Messiah, to justify them, to make them eternally happy, and that he could not possibly damn any one of them! The ground of their justification they derived from the merits of Abraham, from their knowledge of God, from their practising the rite of circumcision, and from the sacrifices they offered. And as they conceived works to be meritorious, they had invented a great number of *supererogatory* ones, to which they attached greater merit than to the observance of the law itself. To this notion St. Paul has some allusions in those parts of his Epistle to the Romans, in which he combats the erroneous suppositions of the Jews.

The Pharisees were the strictest of the three principal sects that divided the Jewish nation, (Acts xxvi. 5.) and affected a singular probity of manners according to their system, which, however, was for the most part both lax and corrupt. Thus, many things which Moses had tolerated in civil life, in order to avoid a greater evil, the Pharisees determined to be morally right; for instance, the law of retaliation, and that of divorce from a wife for any cause. (Matt. v. 31. et seq. ix. 3-12.) During the time of Christ, there were two celebrated philosophical and divinity schools among the Jews, that of Schammai and that of Hillel. On the question of divorce, the school of Schammai maintained, that no man could legally put away his wife except for adultery. The school of Hillel, on the contrary, allowed of divorce for any cause, (from Deut. xxiv. 1) even if the wife found no favour in the eyes of her husband—in other words, if he saw any woman who pleased him better. The practice of the Jews seems to have gone with the school of Hillel. Thus, we read (in Eccles. xxv. 26.) "If she go not as thou wouldest have her, cut her off from thy flesh; give her a bill of divorce and let her go;" and in conformity with this doctrine, Josephus, who was a Pharisee, relates that he repudiated his wife who had borne him three children, because he was not pleased with her manners or behaviour!

Further, they interpreted certain of the Mosaic laws most literally, and distorted their meaning so as to favour their own philosophical system. Thus, the law of loving their neighbour, they expounded solely of the love of their friends, that is, of the whole Jewish race; all other persons being considered by them as natural enemies, (Matt. v. 41, compared with Luke x. 31-33) whom they were in no respect bound to assist. Dr. Lightfoot has cited a striking illustration of this passage from Maimonides. An oath, in which the name of God was not distinctly specified, they taught was not binding, (Matt. v. 33) maintaining that a man might even swear with his lips, and at the same moment annul it in his heart! So rigorously did they understand the command of observing the Sabbath day, that they accounted it unlawful to pluck ears of corn, and heal the sick, &c. (Matt. xii. 1, et seq. Luke vi. 6, et seq. xiv. 1 et seq.) Those natural laws which Moses did not

sanction by any penalty, they accounted among the petty commandments, inferior to the ceremonial laws, which they preferred to the former, as being the weightier matters of the law, (Matt. v. 19. xv. 4. xxiii. 23) to the total neglect of mercy and fidelity. Hence, they accounted causeless anger and impure desires as trifles of no moment; (Matt. v. 21, 22, 27-30) they compassed sea and land to make proselytes to the Jewish religion from among the Gentiles, that they might rule over their consciences and wealth; and these proselytes, through the influence of their own scandalous examples and characters, they soon rendered more profligate and abandoned than ever they were before their conversion. (Matt. xxiii. 15.) Esteeming temporal happiness and riches as the highest good, they scrupled not to accumulate wealth by every means, legal or illegal; (Matt. v. 1-12. xxiii. 4. Luke xvi. 14. James ii. 1-8) vain and ambitious of popular applause, they offered up long prayers in public places, but not without a self-sufficiency of their own holiness, (Matt. vi. 2-5. Luke xviii. 11) under a sanctimonious appearance of respect for the memories of the prophets whom their ancestors had slain, they repaired and beautified their sepulchres (Matt. xxiii. 29) and such was their idea of their own sanctity, that they thought themselves defiled if they but touched or conversed with sinners, that is, with publicans or tax-gatherers, and persons of loose and irregular lives. (Luke vii. 39. xv. 1 et seq.)

But, above all their other tenets, the Pharisees were conspicuous for their reverential observance of the traditions or decrees of the elders; these traditions, they pretended, had been handed down from Moses through every generation, but were not committed to writing; and they were not merely considered as of equal authority with the divine law, but even preferable to it. "The words of the Scribes," said they, "are lovely above the words of the law: for the words of the law are weighty and light, but the words of the scribes are all weighty."

Among the traditions thus sanctimoniously observed by the Pharisees, we may briefly notice the following: 1. *The washing of hands* up to the wrist before and after meat, (Matt. xv. 2. Mark vii. 3.) which they counted not merely a religious duty, but considered its omission as a crime equal to fornication, and punishable by excommunication. 2. *The purification of the cups, vessels, and couches* used at their meals, by ablutions or washings, (Mark vii. 4.) for which purpose the six large waterpots mentioned by St. John (iii. 6.) were destined. But these ablutions are not to be confounded with those symbolical washings mentioned in Psal. xxvi. 6. and Matt. xxvii. 24. 3. *Their fasting twice a week*, with great appearance of austerity, (Luke xviii. 12. Matt. vi. 16.) thus converting that exercise into religion which is only a help towards the performance of its hallowed duties. The Jewish days of fasting were the second and fifth days of the week, corresponding with our Mondays and Thursdays; on one of these days they commemorated Moses going up to the mount to receive the law, which, according to their traditions, was on the fifth day, or Thursday; and on the other, his descent after he had received the two tables, which they supposed to have been on the second day, or Monday. 4. *Their punctilious payment of tythes*, (temple-offerings,) even of the most trifling thing. (Luke xviii. 12. Matt. xxiii. 23.) 5. *Their wearing broader phylacteries and larger fringes* to their garments than the rest of the Jews. (Matt. xxiii. 5.) These phylacteries were pieces of parchment, or the dressed skin of some clean animal, inscribed with four paragraphs of the law, taken from Exod. xiii. 1-10, and xiii. 11-16. Deut. vi. 4-9, and xi. 13-21, all inclusive; which the Pharisees, interpreting literally, (as do the modern rabbins,) Deut. vi. 8, and other similar passages, tied to the fronts of their caps, and on their arms. The fringe was ordered by Moses, as we read in Num. xv. 38, 39. He, therefore, who wore his phylactery and his fringe of the largest size, was reputed to be the most devout.

With all their pretensions to piety, the Pharisees entertained the most sovereign contempt for the people; whom, being ignorant of the law, they pronounced to be accursed. (John vii. 49.) Yet such was the esteem and veneration in which they were held by the people, that they may almost be said to have given what direction they pleased to