

# THE WESLEYAN.

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IN CONNECTION WITH THE BRITISH CONFERENCE.

"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS x. 24.

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## DIVINITY.

### THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And 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."  
MATT. xii. 31, 32.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE WESLEYAN.

DEAR SIR,—I take the liberty of sending you the following extracts from a few of the standard Wesleyan divines, on "The Sin against the Holy Ghost," for publication in your valuable paper. An early insertion will much oblige  
Yours respectfully,

H.

April 19, 1811.

From Mr. Wesley's Sermon entitled, "A Call to Backsliders."

"But do not the well-known words of our Lord himself, cut us off from all hope of mercy? Does he not say, 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men: And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh a word against the Holy Ghost, it shall never be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.' Therefore, it is plain, if we have been guilty of this sin, there is no room for mercy. And is not the same thing repeated by St. Mark, almost in the same words? 'Verily I say unto you,' (a solemn preface! always denoting the great importance of that which follows:) 'All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewithsoever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is under the sentence of eternal damnation.'"

How immense is the number in every nation throughout the Christian world, of those who have been more or less distressed on account of this scripture? What multitudes in this kingdom have been perplexed above measure upon this very account? Nay, there are few that are truly convinced of sin, and seriously endeavour to save their souls, who have not felt some uneasiness, for fear they had committed, or should commit, this unpardonable sin. What has frequently increased their uneasiness was, that they could hardly find any to comfort them. For their acquaintances, even the most religious of them, understood no more of the matter than themselves. And they could not find any writer, who had published any thing satisfactory on the subject. Indeed, in the seven sermons of Mr. Russel, which are common among us, there is one expressly written upon it. But it will give little satisfaction to a troubled spirit. He talks about it, and about it, but makes nothing out: he takes much pains, but misses the mark at last.

But was there ever in the world a more deplorable proof of the littleness of human understanding, even in those that have honest hearts, and are desirous of knowing the truth! How is it possible, that any one who reads his Bible, can one hour remain in doubt concerning it, when our Lord himself, in the very passage cited above, has so clearly told us, what that blasphemy is? "He that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost,

hath never forgiveness: because they said, he hath an unclean spirit," v. 29, 30. This, then, and this alone, (if we allow our Lord to understand his own meaning,) is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost: The saying, he had an unclean spirit; the affirming that Christ wrought his miracles by the power of an evil spirit; or more particularly, that he cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils. Now, have you been guilty of this? Have you affirmed, that he cast out devils by the prince of devils? No more than you have cut your neighbour's throat, and set his house on fire. How marvellously, then, have you been afraid, where no fear is? Dismiss that vain terror; let your fear be more rational for the time to come. Be afraid of giving way to pride—be afraid of yielding to anger—be afraid of loving the world, or the things of the world—be afraid of foolish and hurtful desires. But never more be afraid of committing the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost! You are in no more danger of doing this, than of pulling the sun out of the firmament.

From Rev. R. Watson's Exposition.

VERSES 31, 32. All manner of sin and blasphemy, &c.—The importance of a right understanding of this passage renders the most careful consideration of it necessary. Sin is the transgression of the law; blasphemy, when applied to men, is injurious and calumnious speaking; and when considered as a crime against the Divine Majesty, it consists in reproachful speeches uttered against God, or in a denial to him of those attributes and excellencies which, according to the revelation he has been pleased to make of himself, he is known to possess; and thus in both cases includes in it the idea of wilful and rebellious enmity. For all such blasphemy there is, however, forgiveness upon repentance; but for that particular blasphemy which consists, as expressed in the next verse, in speaking against the Holy Ghost—that is, saying, in opposition to all evidence, and against reasonable conviction, that the "Spirit of God," by which our Lord cast out devils, was the unclean and evil spirit, Satan himself, and doing this from enmity to the kingdom and truth of God, which by these miracles the Holy Spirit attested and established—there is no forgiveness. Nothing can be more clear, than that this is the unpardonable blasphemy of which our Lord speaks, and that these are the circumstances under which it was committed.

Blasphemy, or speaking against the Son of Man, was remissible; such as denying his Messiahship, calling him a wine-bibber and gluttonous, &c.; all which, though high and dangerous crimes, yet were not excluded from the divine mercy; but when, after the Pharisees had always admitted, according to the faith of their nation, that devils could not be cast out but by the Spirit of God, and had seen how intimately connected all the works of Christ were with a holy doctrine and a holy life, they were so far influenced by their wicked passions, as to resist that evidence of a divine power in his case, which they admitted in other cases, the cases of their own children or disciples, to be conclusive; and when they audaciously attributed that power exerted by Christ to Satan himself, of which they had sufficient proof, even upon their own principles, that it could only proceed from the Spirit of God, and yet, after all, wilfully and most wickedly, said of the power of the Holy Spirit, "This is the working of Beelzebub himself," this fatal offence was committed. Our Lord had thrown a veil around him by his humility, which often hid the glory of his majesty, so that men might for a time question

who he might be. Not so the Holy Spirit; he fully revealed himself in the works of Christ; so that had they been performed by the meanest of their prophets, the Pharisees would have acknowledged in them the finger of God, which now they denied; and therefore they sinned directly and wilfully against the Holy Ghost. This was their blasphemy and their crime, and our Lord solemnly declares that those who had been guilty of it should not be forgiven, neither in this life, nor in the world to come. This phrase is equivalent to, "Shall never at any future time be forgiven;" hence Mark expresses it, "Is in danger of eternal damnation."

There is no reference in this expression to the notions of the Jews, that some sins would be forgiven to the seed of Abraham after death; for it is not probable that our Lord would seem to sanction so unscriptural an opinion by even an allusion: nor is "the world" or age "to come" to be understood, with others, of the age of the Messiah; for that had already commenced. The expression, as appears from similar phrases in the later Jewish writers, was proverbial for never; or, if there was in it any reference to a future state, it signifies, that as in this life that sin could not be forgiven, so, at the day of judgment, there could be no declaration of its having been forgiven, though the forgiveness of sins of every other description will then be made manifest and publicly proclaimed. So clearly is the nature of this sin marked, that it is somewhat surprising that there should have been so much difference of opinion respecting it. One of the least defensible notions is that which refers it forward to the rejection of the Gospel after the Holy Ghost had been shed forth in his miraculous gifts; whereas, the very occasion on which our Lord uses the words, and the particular character of the crime itself, which consisted in attributing the casting out of devils by the Spirit of God, to the agency of Satan, proves indubitably that the sin might not only at that time be committed, but was actually so. The chief differences of opinion have, however, arisen, not from any difficulty in ascertaining in what the original crime consisted, but from the questions, how far others beside the Pharisees could be guilty of it; and from what its irremissibility arose. As to the first, it is difficult to say whether those Jews who might see the miracles of the Holy Spirit wrought by the apostles, and ascribe them to Satan, did not also commit precisely the same offence. They probably did; but still we have no authority for saying that this sin could be committed by any but the eye-witnesses of the miracles themselves, or at least by those who fully admitted them as facts. We are likewise to recollect, that there are blasphemies often committed against the Holy Ghost, of a deeply aggravated and dangerous nature, by infidels and scoffers and apostates, which are not the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; and these are not to be confounded with it, though awfully criminal. As to the second question, in what the irremissibility of this sin consisted, perhaps it is best for us at once to confess our ignorance. Certain it is, that the pretended solution of those who make it merely a consequence of the nature of the offence, cannot be admitted, because in that respect it stands on the same ground as many other offences. The Pharisees, they tell us, by resisting the strongest evidence, put themselves beyond the possibility of being convinced of the truth, because no higher evidence could be given them; but this was equally true of all obstinate unbelievers then, though many of them were not charged with this particular offence; and it is also equally true of all unbelievers now, who have received all the evidence which God intends to