

XXXVII.

The Sin Against the Holy Ghost.

“The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.”— *Matt. xii.*
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Altho the love of God, failing of its purpose, always causes hardening of heart, yet at times it has a still more terrible effect, for it may lead to *the sin against the Holy Ghost*.

The results of this sin are especially crushing and terrible. Christ’s words concerning it are startling and penetrating, casting the guilty soul into everlasting despair:

“He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad. 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. 30-32*).

St. Mark puts it still more harshly: “Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” (*Mark iii. 28, 29, R. V.*).

St. John writes concerning it: “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for him that sins not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (*1 John v. 16-18*).

And St. Paul writes: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the age to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to, be burned” (*Heb. vi. 4-8*). Such cutting words would perplex the soul, if he had not added: “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, tho we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name” (*vs. 9, 10*).

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They are words of comfort, which, however, do not detract from the dead earnestness with which he speaks in the tenth chapter: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful

looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unclean thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that saith, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense; saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" ([Heb. x. 26-31](#)).

Much more might be added. It is written of Esau that he could find no place of repentance. St. Peter and St. Jude, full of indignation, write of persons who "have gone the way of Cain," who "ran greedily after the error of Balaam," and who "perished in the gainsaying of Korach." But these words have no direct reference to the sin against the Holy Spirit. Enough has been said to convince our readers that we treat this fearful sin, not upon our own authority, but upon the authority of the Holy Spirit.

We open the discussion by emphasizing that no child of God could or ever can commit this sin. It is necessary to say this to prevent many souls from being troubled. There is such unutterable distress in these words of Jesus: "All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven; neither in the present world, neither in the world to come." ([Matt. xii. 31-32](#)) For that sin there is no intercession either in heaven or on earth. Such prayer is even denounced and forbidden as unholy. Indeed, we realize how afflicted souls, tossed with tempest and not comforted, especially when suffering from a weak brain and unsound nerves, can become so morbid as to ask: Have I committed that sin? And if so, what is the use of prayers and tears? For then I am lost, hopelessly and forever.

And such cruel spiritual distress may not be allowed. It is the result of a defective religious training, and, still more, of the preaching which, culpably ignorant of the deep ways of the soul, prates about many things, but scarcely ever treats the solemn things that pertain to eternity. It must be reiterated to these afflicted souls referred to, clearly and distinctly, that no child of God ever *can* commit this sin. It does not belong to the broken and contrite heart, but cankers only in the proud spirit that opposes the Lord and His holy ordinances.

It is true the apostle declares that the men guilty of this sin "*were once enlightened,*" and "*have tasted of the heavenly gift,*" and "*were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,*" and "*have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come*"; but they are never said to have had *a broken and a contrite heart*. On the contrary, they mind high things; they rely upon their exalted experiences; boast of a certain partiality which the Lord has lately shown them; but give no evidence that they ever smote the breast, or fell down as dead before the divine Majesty, or ever found it a consuming fire.



It is a singular fact that the very persons who make us think of the word of Scripture, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,” are never afraid of eternal perdition; while those who are in not the least likely to sin against the Holy Ghost are frequently in fear and trembling lest they fall into it. Physicians of insane asylums are familiar with the facts.

And there is but one remedy for these afflicted souls, viz., to feed them with Scripture before they are afflicted. Of course, he that broods and mutters about his sin outside of the Word can not escape being haunted by the Cain-thought of a sin too great to be forgiven, and in the end the loss of his mind. But he who lives near the Word is safe and can *not* be so afflicted.

The Scripture gives a clear and transparent exposition of the sin against the Holy Spirit. The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem were seeing glorious things and were hearing heavenly words, for Jesus was standing in their midst. And while with eye and ear they were tasting of these heavenly gifts, they dared say: “He hath Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.” (Mark iii. 22) And to this blasphemous statement Jesus answered immediately that these persons had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, “*because they said He had an unclean spirit.*” (Mark iii. 30) Wherefore, among well-disposed persons, there can be no difference of opinion in this matter. The sin against the Holy Spirit can be committed only by persons who, beholding the beauty and majesty of the Lord, turn the light into darkness and deem the highest glory of the Son of God’s love to belong to Satan and his demons. And, since the afflicted souls already referred to are conscious of their inability to grasp holy things, and are acquainted with the sinful suggestions of their own heart, yet, despite these suggestions, earnestly desire to be persuaded of their Savior’s love, therefore it is impossible that they can ever become the guilty victims of despair.

It may not be denied, however, that in the hearts of the saints awful thoughts sometimes arise against the Holy One. The pool of iniquity underneath our hearts, with its poisonous gases, continues until death. While we are engaged in the reading of the Word, in prayer, or in holy meditation, suggestions sometimes flash through the mind which startle us as the poisoned sting of a wasp, which we would like to tear from head and heart, from which we shrink with the cry as tho struck by lightning: O God, deliver me! But these suggestions have nothing to do with the sin against the Holy Spirit; for we do not identify ourselves with them, do not cherish them, but cast them aside as we would an adder. They come *through* us, but are not *of* us. Or, rather, they spring from our sinful nature, but are unwedded to our will—in fact, repugnant to our will.

We should take heed, therefore, lest, by departing from the Scripture, we estrange our souls from the love of God. This would please Satan only too well. He loves to use that sin against the Holy Spirit to vex weak souls, and their anguish delights his heart. Therefore



they must not be allowed to brood upon this fearful word of Scripture. It is true the Gospel is terribly in earnest, but at the same time it is the Gospel of all *consolation*, and no man may ever rob it of that character.

In close adherence to the Word, we add that ordinary wanderers from God do not commit the sin against the Holy Spirit; for they have seen naught of the powers and glories of the age to come ([Heb. vi.](#)). To commit this sin two things are required, which absolutely belong together:

First, close contact with the glory which is manifest in Christ or in His people.

Second, not mere contempt of that glory, but the declaration that the Spirit which manifests itself in that glory, which is the Holy Spirit, is a manifestation of Satan.

One may sin against the Son and not be lost forever. There is hope of pardon in the day of judgment for the men who crucified Him. But he who desecrates, despises, and slanders the Spirit, who speaks in Christ, in His Word, and in His work, as tho He were the spirit of Satan, is lost in eternal darkness. This is a wilful sin, intentionally malicious. It betrays *systematic* opposition to God. That sinner can not be saved, for he has done despite unto the Spirit of all grace. He has lost the last remnant in the sinner, the taste for grace, and, with it the possibility of receiving grace.

Hence this word of Jesus is divinely intended to put souls on their guard; the souls of the *saints*, lest they treat the Word of God coldly, carelessly, indifferently; the souls of *false* shepherds and *deceivers* of the people who, ministering in the holy mysteries of the cross, contemptuously speak of the “blood theology”—blaspheming the supremest manifestation of divine love as an unrighteous abomination; the souls of all who have forsaken the way; who once knew the truth and now reject it, and who ‘in their self-concept decry their still believing brethren as ignorant fanatics. Their judgment shall be heavy indeed. Nineveh did not resist the prophet, and was exalted above Capernaum and Bethsaida!

From this, Christian love deduces a twofold exhortation:

First, to professed believers, by ignorance and presumption not to tempt others to fall into this sin.

Second, to erring brethren, not to say that *skepticism* is the way leading to the truth. For this very skepticism is the fatal gate by which the sinner enters upon the awful sin against the Holy Spirit.



XXXVIII.

Christ or Satan.

“But the greatest of these is Love.” — *1 Cor. xiii. 13.*

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However fearful the Scripture’s revelation of the hardening of heart, yet it is the only price at which the Almighty offers man the blessed promise of Love’s infinite wealth.

Light without shadow is inconceivable; and the purer and the more brilliant the light, the darker and the more distinctly delineated the shadows must be. In like manner, faith is inconceivable without the opposite of *doubt*; hope without the distressful tension of *despair*; the highest enjoyment of love without the keenest incision of *hatred*. If this is so among men, how much more strongly must it appear when God sheds abroad His love by the Holy Spirit?

Even among men love always loses in depth what it gains in breadth. Hence there are multitudes of men of whom all speak well and no one speaks ill; who, tho not pursued by hatred, are neither loved with passionate love. And there are men whom no one can treat with indifference; who inspire some with ardent love and others with violent hatred. How devoted the love of Timothy and Philemon for St. Paul, and with what hatred did the Jewish teachers persecute him! How affectionate the attachment of the circle of German Reformers for Martin Luther, and how bitter the violence of the Romish hierarchy against him! How deep and tender the love of our Christian people for Groen van Prinsteren, the noble champion of our Christian interests, and how fierce the hatred and bitterness wherewith the men of neutrality have pursued him all the days of his life! The court circles of St. Petersburg almost worship the Russian Czar, while every nihilist abhors him as an incarnate devil.

And this is true in every country and every age. As soon as love has taken root in the *soil of principles*, it separates the best friends and finds its opposite pole in the most fearful hatred. Love which is inspired only by amiable traits, which has no other ground than mutual good will, which is the daughter of a compliant disposition, which is supported by mutual service, burning of incense or self-interest, never arouses such hatred. But as soon as love adopts a nobler and holier character; when it loves the friend not for his appearance, disposition, winning ways, and pleasing forms, but in spite of his unyielding nature, stern claims, and disagreeable traits, simply because he is the bearer of a conviction, the interpreter of a principle, the mighty pleader of an ideal, then hatred can not tarry a year, but follows love in its wake, and rages as bitterly and violently as love’s attachment is tender and animating.

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This was never more obvious than in the Person of Christ. His contemporaries are entitled to fair treatment. With the exception of those to whom it had been specially revealed,