

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN *NOT* UNPARDONABLE.

## A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPT. 1<sup>ST</sup>, 1861, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

*see vol 11  
page 220*

"Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." Matthew xii. 32.

THESE words relate to what we usually call the unpardonable sin; but is there in all the Bible an unpardonable sin spoken of? That is the question. I think a close attention to that point will prove that there is no such thing spoken of in the Bible as an unpardonable sin, except those sinners and sins which the Lord is not pleased to forgive; and he does not abstain from forgiving them because their sins are unpardonable, but because he is not pleased to have mercy upon them. And hence we must distinguish between a general rule and the exception that the word of God makes to this rule. I shall therefore this morning, in the first place try to point out *wherein consisteth what is called the unpardonable sin*; I shall, secondly, bring forward *reasons why I believe that this sin usually called unpardonable, is not unpardonable*; and I shall then thirdly, and lastly, endeavour to point out, notwithstanding this apparent mitigation of the matter, *the awful solemnity of being the subject of this kind of sin called, in our usual parlance, the unpardonable sin.*

I. First then, we have to point out *WHEREIN this uncommon sin consisteth*; for it must refer to an uncommon sin, it must refer to a sin that is more aggravated than any other sin. And it evidently consisteth in *deadly enmity against the testimony of the Holy Spirit of God.* Some have thought that none of the Lord's people (whilst in a state of nature) have ever committed this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; but I am strongly inclined to think otherwise. I am inclined to think Adam when the fall took place that he himself committed this sin of blasphemy. Had Adam but gone to the tree, the forbidden tree, and have taken the fruit, it would have been simply an act of theft, which would have brought death upon him. But then there were other things that made his sin worse than the mere circumstance of violating the command, and those other things consisted of two things; first, in believing Satan's falsehood in opposition to God's truth. Satan said, 'Ye shall not surely die;' Adam believed this, and went by that falsehood into deadly enmity against God's order of things. And then, secondly, Satan said, 'Ye shall be as gods;' Adam believed this. The woman was deceived, but Adam was not deceived, what he did he did wilfully. And I believe, and could prove, though I will not now stop to prove it, that the sin that he committed was the sin of blasphemy against the Eternal God, that same sin that we are in the habit of calling the unpardonable sin. But passing by that, I will come down to a definition of wherein this sin lies, and all men more or less are tinged with it. But there are three classes of character that will come before us

this morning that appear very conspicuous as the subjects of this awful sin. First, then, I have [said that this sin, so called the unpardonable sin, is deadly enmity; wilful, deadly enmity against the Holy Ghost in that testimony that he has given of Christ, of the new covenant, and of eternal things. Hence go to the 7th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles; there Stephen charges this very matter home upon the persons to whom he was speaking. He says, 'Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted; and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One.' Here is deadly enmity against the testimony of God and against those that received that testimony. Now there are three classes of character that are particularly the subjects of this awful sin. The first I shall name is the infidel, the second is the man who is brought up in an apostate church, and the third is the man who personally apostatizes. First, a man who is an infidel; a man who does not believe in God's word, treats God's book as a book not inspired, not sacred, not given by the Holy Ghost. Why, that man, that infidel, that poor wretch that is so bedevilled, and so blinded, and so degraded as to see, what he cannot help seeing if he looks around, the open fulfilment of the predictions of the Bible; and yet with his infidel head and his infidel heart, his infidel tongue, and his infidel hand, and his infidel foot, he can stand against the scriptures. Now that man is beneath the devil himself, for Satan does believe and tremble. I cannot conceive anything so bad as depravity of sentiment. If a man be faulty in his conduct, if his sentiments be right then there may be hope; but when a man is depraved in his sentiments, so that the very sentiments he holds, concerning the Bible are depraved, that man is sunk, I say, beneath Satan himself. Now this man then is living in malice and deadly enmity against the testimony of the Eternal Spirit of God, and treats the Bible—ay, some of them in a dying hour; I recollect visiting one many years ago, and I spoke to him of the Bible; he mentioned one of the most profane books in our language, and declared on his dying bed, for he lived but few hours afterwards, that he thought no more of the Bible than he did of that profane book: just shewing how he was given up to a reprobate mind. That is one class then I consider that are living in the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, of blasphemy against the testimony of the Holy Ghost. They laugh at Divine inspiration, they laugh at the authority of the Holy Spirit, they laugh at Christian experience, they laugh at those things that constitute the sacredness of the Christian's very existence.

Second, those who are brought up in an apostate church. I will take the Romish church; I will not mention others that come rather nearer, in some respects, to truth, lest it might look as though I was speaking from an unkind feeling, and my subject is too weighty to admit of anything in the shape of prejudice or of partiality. Now, then, if a person belong to an apostate church, that person is reckoned an apostate. Hence, Saul of Tarsus; he was born in, and brought up in an apostate church; and that religion which he held, the doctrines that he held, made him a blasphemer; he himself says so; he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; 'but,' he says, 'I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.' I know very well that there is a line of distinction to be drawn that I shall carefully have to notice presently between that that is done in ignorance, and that that is done in wilful malice; but I very much question the propriety of the reading of that verse which I have just quoted, where it is given in our version, 'Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.' In the first place, the word *it* is not in the original; and I very much question whether it should not be read in this way; 'Who before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; and did it ignorantly,' not *it*, the word *it* is not in the original, there is no

How turn to  
page 280 L



and fiery indignation which shall devour (that is, if they die in that state) the adversaries.' Here, then, look at the infidel; look at the man in the apostate church, and look at the man that personally apostatizes; and these are marks of reprobation; all these are signs of being given up to a reprobate mind; all these are signs, and awful signs too, of eternal perdition. But again, the apostle Peter treats of the same subject; 'It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness,' because they would not have known, when they turned against it, how to fight so well against it; 'than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog,' so such persons were never anything else than dogs: they were in sheeps' clothing, but they were dogs; they were carnivorous, and they are carnivorous still; 'The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.' Now then, take these three characters; first, the infidel, who is sunk beneath Satan, as I have said, for Satan does believe. And there is something so repulsive in the very company of a man that can have the daring, demoniacal hardihood to look the Bible in the face, and declare it to be an uninspired book, and that he does not believe a word of it; there is something repulsive in his company; you always feel that you are in connection with the very lowest depravity of which human nature is capable, I hold with all my high doctrine sentiments, that it is the duty of every man to believe the scriptures, revere his Maker, avoid the wrong, and do the right; but then I make an essential difference between this duty of every man, and that principle of regeneration by which alone one soul can be saved.

Now I will state my reasons why I believe that this sin of enmity committed by the infidel against the Holy Ghost; that this sin committed by the whole of the apostate church or churches against the Holy Ghost; that this sin of crucifying Christ afresh; that this fearful sin of blasphemy against God, I will now state my reasons why I believe it is not unpardonable. The first is what the Saviour himself says about it in the 3rd chapter of the Gospel by Mark, and the 29th verse. Speaking of this subject, he says of such persons, that they are 'in danger of eternal damnation.' Do you not see here, the Saviour does not say of such that they absolutely and certainly shall be damned with an eternal damnation—but he says they are *in danger of* eternal damnation. They have the marks of reprobation, therefore there is something uncommon and something awful in their condition. Little do men think how sacred God's word is in his eyes. 'Are not,' saith Jeremiah, 'O Lord, thine eyes upon the truth?' And he makes the truth the life, and shield, and buckler, and the everything of his people. Take his truth away you take everything away, and substitute in the place thereof satanic falsehood. Now the Saviour says of such that they are *in danger of* eternal damnation. Take these words into connection with our text, you will find that our text lays down a general rule and that other scriptures shew that there are exceptions. Let me give you an example from the 8th chapter of John: the Saviour said to those very persons who had committed this sin—for they said he had an unclean spirit—'Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil.' What was that but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, to charge Christ with having a 'devil?' Now the Saviour says, 'I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go ye cannot come.' Now then, your natural inference from these words would be that those persons to whom he was then speaking, who had committed this sin of blasphemy, that they must of necessity die in their sins, that they must of necessity be eternally excluded from heaven,—you would think so from these words. But read on a little further in the 8th of John, and the Saviour turns to the subject again, and he says, 'I said, therefore, unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.' There is a qualifying clause you see: the one seemed to make it positive: now the Saviour says,

have them  
back to 291

'If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.' I think, friends, we ought to beware of preaching the Gospel in that way that would make the salvation of any sinner impossible. Here am I, this morning, and I say it with shame, I say it in the sight of my Maker, that my heart has blasphemed the Holy Ghost many times,—that my heart has blasphemed God the Father many times,—that my heart has blasphemed Jesus Christ many times. Does not the Scripture say, 'Out of the heart proceedeth blasphemies?' But they could not proceed from the heart if they were not there.

I am glad to see then that there is no such thing in the Bible spoken of as an unpardonable sin; 'the blood of Jesus Christ,' without exception, 'cleanseth from all sin.' Thus then if we are to understand our text as positive, making no exception, we could not have had the Saviour's words, where he says they are in danger of eternal damnation. And again, in the 5th of Matthew, he says, 'Whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire;' does not say he shall certainly be damned, but he is in danger. And I am sure you will all see the difference between an absolute declaration and that which indicates merely danger. That is one reason then, the Saviour's explanation of this in the 29th verse of the 3rd of Mark, why I believe the sin usually called unpardonable is not unpardonable.

My second reason is this, that as this uncommon sin brings the wrath of God to the uttermost, the wrath of God came upon the blasphemous Jews, as it will on all blasphemers, infidels, apostate churches, and apostate persons, the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost; now if I read such a scripture as that, that those persons had blasphemed the Holy Ghost, and the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost, and I had no scripture corresponding with that in salvation matters, I must stand silent. But while I read of the wrath of God coming to the uttermost, I also read of One who is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. So then, if I am one of these blasphemers, or have been, and I have brought myself under the uttermost of God's wrath, so that I belong to the category of Saul of Tarsus, one of the chief of sinners, he belonged to the tribe that constitute the chief of sinners; though this be the case, yet Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost. Can that wrath reach further than he can? Is that wrath more powerful than Christ? Is the wrath of God's law more powerful than Emmanuel. No, my hearer, 'Feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.' When I look, then, at what Emmanuel is, God and man in one person; and when I remember that there is all the excellency of his complex person in his atonement, I dare not preach an unpardonable sin, because I can find no such thing in the Bible; and I believe that God the Son, Christ Jesus, that he is able to blot out my blasphemy, any sin, let it be whatever it may. Then, perhaps, you will ask here, why does he distinguish between blasphemy against the Son of man, and blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? Well, the scriptures nowhere particularly explain this, and I do not think it requires an explanation; I think the thing explains itself. The more majestic the person, the greater is the crime of sinning against him. If a few of you conspire to get some private man out of a good situation, and put somebody else into it in an underhand way, well, you would not be hanged for that; but you ought to be ashamed of it, though. But if the same persons should devise some plan by which to dethrone our monarch, and put some one else into her place, you would be hanged for it then; that would be high treason.

Just so sin, against the Son of man as the Son of man considered, is not so great, because the Son of man is not so great as God; 'My Father is greater than I.' So it is great to sin against the manhood of Christ; but to sin against Deity, to sin against infinite Deity, eternal Deity, the Eternal Spirit of God, the sin must be measured by the majesty of the person against whom you sin. You may say things against me, speak disrespectfully of me,

speak against one another; we ought not to do so, but we do sometimes; there is a fault in that, but not to equal the crime of speaking against the Most High God. I think, therefore, that that explains itself. Thus, then, when I look at the exception the Saviour makes, 'In danger of eternal damnation;' when I look also at the fact that although this uncommon sin brings wrath to the uttermost, there is a Saviour that saves to the uttermost, I dare not join in the general sentiment to say that there is such a thing as unpardonable sin.

My third reason is, that all things are possible with God. Impossible to renew them to repentance—I should not like to say that it was impossible for God to do that. God is absolutely omnipotent. Infinite power, eternal power, always the same. Is anything too hard for the great God? No, nothing too hard for him; all things are possible with God. That being the case, I dare not say that a creature can do something that God cannot undo. But, say you, he might have made a law that such and such sins should not be forgiven. Well, you must find out that law. Well, say you, it is said, 'He that blasphemeth shall be put to death.' Well, that means a temporal judgment upon an extraordinary sin; for the wages of all sin is death. 'He that offendeth in one point, is guilty of the whole.' Thus, then, when I look at the Saviour's making an exception—when I look at the infinite ability of Christ to save—and when I look at the fact that all things are possible with God, I dare not hold that there is a sin that is unpardonable.

My fourth reason, the last I shall name, is that of the universal tone in which the scriptures speak of sinners. I am aware I have the word 'whosoever' in my text, but then that 'whosoever' is qualified in the 3rd chapter of Mark; and so if it be true that there is some sin that cannot be pardoned, then why does it say that 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that *whosoever* believeth in him shall never perish, but have eternal life.' Well then, if I am brought to believe, I have no right to conclude that there is no pardon for me. '*Whosoever* believeth;' then if I am speaking this morning to any, whatever you have been, if you are brought now to believe, then look at the Saviour's words, that when you were that blasphemer you were not damned; you were in danger, that is, you had the mark of reprobation about you, but then there was a salvation to the uttermost; you had entailed wrath to the uttermost, but there was a salvation to the uttermost; and all things are possible with God; and 'whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life.' 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.' Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me;' *whosoever*, mark; let a man have been whatever he may. So that the *whosoever* in our text is overruled by the most universal *whosoever*s we have in the Bible. And what should we do without them? Why, I might come into a sick room, and the man might say, Well, perhaps I have committed the unpardonable sin, sir, and it's no use for you to pray for me. But the Bible says, '*Whosoever* believeth;' if you have committed that which is by man called, although nowhere by the Bible, the unpardonable sin—called in the Bible the great transgression, and called blasphemy, but it is not called unpardonable, mind this; I shall catch it, I have no doubt, for this sermon, for daring to break out of the usual route, I am quite aware of that; and if men were as tenacious for God's Word as they are for the creed in which they have been taught by man, they would pay less respect to the creeds of men and more respect to the Word of God. Therefore I say the Bible nowhere calls it the unpardonable sin; and if that be so I have no right to create what the Bible does not contain. I say to that man, 'whosoever believeth;' and if he cannot go so far—well sir, I do not think I do believe, I'm afraid I do not; I am a poor sinner; well then I will come to this scripture, 'Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me;' well, what do you

turn to page 1

say to that? Well, the poor sinner says, I was, sir, once offended. But you are not offended now? No, no, no; I see that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; my only struggle is whether he can save a blasphemer like me, whether my sins can be blotted out; whether the deadly enmity that I have nourished can be blotted out.

Need I remind you of one, that tyrant, see him make the streets of Jerusalem run down with innocent blood; see that tyrant, as tradition tells us—though I have not much faith in tradition, sometimes none, sometimes little, sometimes hardly any—that it was Manasseh that commanded Isaiah to be sawn asunder. And yet this same Manasseh was brought to repentance, a pardoned sinner; and who shall say he is not now before the throne of God, joining with Saul of Tarsus and others, the chief of sinners adoring the greatness of that mercy, and the efficacy of that blood that blotted out his numerous sins of double and treble dye? Ah, my hearer, is anything too hard for the Lord our God? ‘Whosoever.’ But if you tell me there is an unpardonable sin I cannot say this; I must say to the man, well, if you have committed this unpardonable sin I cannot pray for you. But it says ‘whosoever.’ Not that these invitations are general; they all describe the character; he that believeth, and he that is not offended. It matters not what you have been in times past if you believe now; it matters not how much you have blasphemed in times past if you are reconciled now. And then as though the Lord himself would not let us lose sight of this infinite liberality of the gospel, he makes the Bible almost close with these beautiful words,—‘The Spirit and the Bride say, Come;’ the Holy Spirit teaches the poor sinner and convinces him of his sin; and the Bride, that is the church, sees that that poor sinner is wounded by the Spirit of God; and the Spirit of God says to him, Come, and the Bride joins with the Spirit on the ground of that characteristic, and says, Come. Not the Bride says Come, and then the Holy Spirit afterwards; no, the Holy Spirit first; he, the Holy Spirit, seals, he puts the mark of conviction upon the sinner, and then the church says, come and hear our minister; come and hear our free-grace gospel; come and hear our Jesus Christ; come and hear what our God says, and what our God can do ‘And let him that heareth say, come; and let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.’ And I am sure the poor convinced blasphemer can have no objection to the freeness of it, for he must acknowledge that if it reach him and he be a partaker thereof, it must be free indeed. Thus then I have pointed out as well as I could what appears to me to be this supposed unpardonable sin; I have set before you four reasons why I believe it is not unpardonable; first, that Christ says they are *in danger* *merely* of eternal damnation, second, that while that uncommon sin entails uncommon wrath, or wrath to the uttermost, Christ can save to the uttermost; third, that all things are possible with God, and consequently pardon of every sin; and fourthly, and lastly, that the scriptures nowhere make any exception, but declare that *whosoever*; so that if I be a believer in Jesus, if I have a wish to come to him, and a willingness to be saved freely, take the water of life freely, then I am not to interpret the scripture in a way that will take that from me which the Lord will give me.

There are three very solemn considerations arising out of this. The first is, that this disbelief of the Bible, that this oneness with an apostate church, and that this apostacy into a state of enmity against the truth, is a most fearful state of things; it is a mark of reprobation. Hence said Moses of the very persons, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, (16th of Numbers,) that rose in rage and malice against the great institution of that dispensation—what was the great institution? the priesthood of Christ; and the man that fights against that great institution? the Holy Ghost, and blasphemes the Holy Ghost, because the Holy Ghost is the revealer and testifier of that priesthood; Moses saw their sin was an uncommon sin, he saw there was a heinousness about it, a blasphemy

about it to the last degree, and therefore he said, 'If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth upon her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick unto the pit, then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.' No sooner were the words fallen from the mouth of Moses than the earth clave asunder and swallowed them up for their awful sins. Ah then ye blasphemers, little do you think, with what power you are calling down the wrath of your Maker; little do you think how you are filling the magazines of his wrath that must if grace prevent not some day burst forth with tenfold fury upon your guilty heads. He will vindicate the honour of his name, the purity of his word, and the rights of his dominion. It is an awful state to be in. And then the second thing I notice is, that God will not forgive this in the world to come. But is there any forgiveness in the world to come? Yes, in a way of confirmation. When the saints rise at the last great day they will be proclaimed as blessed, and they will be commanded to come and take possession of the kingdom. They had forgiveness before this, but then their forgiveness is confirmed, their body and soul reunited; that state of freedom from sin into which Christ hath mediatorily brought them is then confirmed. But the other shall appear at God's judgment seat, your hell will be a double hell, sir; your hell will be a treble hell, sir; the wrath of God will come upon you to the uttermost, sir; your hell will not be mere condemnation, it will be eternal damnation. Ah, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Thus then while our text as we see from other scriptures has its exceptions, yet at the same time a state of blasphemy is a fearful state; the wrath which it entails, the hell to which they must come will be awful to the last degree; these are they that shall receive the greater damnation. I do not wonder at all at the apostle Paul saying, 'By the grace of God I am what I am:' I do not wonder at his looking with trembling at the pit whence he was digged, at the state from which he was delivered. So then my hearer in the first place we see what the sin is, at least I hope so; in the next place I have stated to you the reasons why I believe there is no such thing as unpardonable sin; and in the next place that this state of blasphemy is nevertheless a fearful state, and entails wrath to the utmost.

Now my last point, and with that I close, is this: that it is a remarkable thing, you will find that the conversion of such characters is very rare. How rare it is for a Roman Catholic priest to be vitally converted. How rare it is for a rank, blaspheming infidel to be converted. How rare it is for a man who is a personal apostate, once professed to be a friend, and is now become a deadly foe, how rare it is for such to be converted. There is now and then an infidel converted, but yet they are but few, very few, just here and there one. There is now and then one brought out of a fixed apostate church, but very few; now and then a blasphemer converted after all his blasphemies, but very few. May the God of mercy preserve us from venturing on such fearful precipices. Ah, it is a frightful thing, for although what I have said may seem in some little measure to mitigate the matter, yet in another sense it does not; for I do not like to hold the doctrine that God cannot pardon—nor on the other hand can I hold the doctrine that all sins are alike; they are not alike: not that there is any such thing as a little sin, but still you do read of greater sins, sins very great, of greater damnation. May the Lord guide us into the mysteries of his holy Word. I do not suppose that you have felt the subject this morning perhaps very refreshingly, but if it has not been refreshing, I hope and trust it may have furnished you with something to think about; and at any rate it does remind us of the preserving hand of God in keeping us while in a state of nature most of us.