

Grieve Not the Holy Spirit

By Evan A. Fry

Then came some of the Scribes and said unto him, Master, it is written that every sin shall be forgiven; but ye say, Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven. And they asked him saying, How can these things be? And he said unto them, When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest and finding none; but when a man speaketh against the Holy Ghost, then he saith, I will return unto my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth him empty, swept, and garnished; for the good spirit leaveth him to himself. Then goeth the evil spirit, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there; and the last end of that man is worse than the first.—Matthew 12: 37-39.

THERE HAS BEEN MUCH profitless discussion among highly opinionated but poorly informed people about what constitutes the "sin against the Holy Ghost," or the "unpardonable sin." We shall not risk wasting our time by entering into an endless technical or theological discussion, or attempting a full, complete, and finally authoritative statement as to just what constitutes the unpardonable sin, or what is the sin against the Holy Ghost. But there are some practical, common-sense, easily discerned aspects of this subject which we can review with profit, and I trust with agreement.

In interpreting and understanding correctly the verses which we have used for a scripture lesson, it is necessary to get the background of the entire chapter. Just before these statements of Jesus, we find that he had cast a devil out of an afflicted man, and that the Pharisees, stubbornly refusing to believe even his miracles, had declared that he cast out devils by Beelzebub, prince of devils. That accusation was so illogical that Jesus took it up at once and challenged it, saying that if Satan is working against himself, his kingdom cannot stand; that if you want to enter into a strong man's house and steal his goods, you must first bind the strong man. Anyone could see the logic of that. It would be senseless for you to tie yourself

up so you could go into your own house and steal your own goods. It would be foolish and senseless for Satan to cast himself out of a man so that he could get back in. There must be opposition, before there can be battle. If it was a power of evil in the man in the first place, Jesus must have been manifesting the power of God in casting out that evil, or otherwise there would have been no opposition. Both powers could have occupied peaceably together. By fighting against, and overcoming the power of evil, Jesus proved his control of the powers of good, and bore witness of his divine mission. That was cold, inescapable logic, if you accepted the premise (as the Pharisees did) that the man was possessed of an evil spirit. But still the Pharisees evaded that inescapable conclusion, and denied its implications.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD is the only power in the world or the universe which is capable of forgiving and healing sin, and casting out evil from men's lives and hearts. Men, though eager to be free, cannot free themselves, alone and unaided, from the bondage of sin, from possession by evil. But through the grace of God, the atonement of Christ, and the *abiding* presence of the Holy Spirit, which gives guidance, strength, and courage to the man battling the evil within himself, we may dispossess the evil that has lived with us and controlled us for so many years; we may sweep and clean and garnish our house, spiritually, morally, and sometimes physically, and live in freedom and purity. As the Spirit of truth guides us into all truth, we may fill up the spaces left empty by the dispossession of evil, with good, so that there is no room for evil. The surest way to keep the weeds out of a piece of ground is

to plant it to a crop and cultivate the crop. The surest way to keep evil out of our lives is to plant a crop of good under the direction of the Holy Spirit—our abiding guide and comforter—and cultivate the good. Then there will be no room for the evil.

So long as we follow the directions of the Holy Ghost, keep room for it, do not allow its enemies to come in and abide side by side with it, it will remain with us, an abiding comforter. But the free moral agency of man leaves it everlastingly up to us to choose whether we will cherish evil, or cherish good. The Spirit of God will not dwell in unholy temples, nor will it always strive with man, if that man is stubborn, obdurate, calloused, incessantly bent on evil. Though the good spirit has power to cast out evil, it will not force or violate man's agency. If man chooses to harbor evil within himself, God himself cannot cast it out against the man's will; but neither will God or his Spirit remain, for they cannot tolerate evil, or abide in its presence. So, there is no choice. If the Holy Spirit leads a man to do good, and he deliberately refuses that counsel and does evil, the Spirit leaves, not because it is powerless to battle or to cast out evil, but because God does not force a man against his will.

When the Holy Ghost leaves, the man is on his own. No longer does he have power to withstand or to dispossess evil. He cannot cope with a superior force alone, and he has no more help. When the evil spirit returns, he finds an easy conquest. And not only that, but there is room for much more evil than before, because under the guidance of the Holy Ghost man is enabled to clear from his life not only the evil things, but the neutral, unprofitable things which are not bad, but simply not

good. With all this room to be occupied, the evil spirit can go, as in Christ's illustration, and bring with him seven other devils, who can enter in and find plenty of room in the life which the Holy Ghost has swept and garnished. It is no wonder that when this happens, the man finds himself worse off than before.

THIS IS NOT THEOLOGY, or mysticism, or abstract theory. It is plain, demonstrable common sense and practical psychology. When a man who has been evil turns from that evil, wills to become righteous, enlists on God's side, and receives of his help to overthrow the evil within his nature, he knows by whose power he has overcome. He knows that his own powers are inadequate. He knows the nature of the Holy Spirit which has been his strength. He knows that it will not abide in the presence of willful sin. He knows of the sacrificial atonement of Christ; he knows that through that atonement and the grace of God he has been saved from evil forces with which he was not capable of coping alone. He knows some of the joys of doing good, the bliss of fellowship with God and Christ. He has had assurance of even greater joys to come, a foretaste of life eternal. If after all this knowledge and experience, a man denies the power of the Holy Ghost, rejects its leadership, returns and continues obdurately in sin, he blasphemes against it. The good spirit will leave, because its very nature is antagonistic to evil; it cannot abide where evil is. But every man is master in his own house. Either the Holy Ghost, or the spirit of evil is a guest by invitation or by sufferance, but not both of them. Where one is, the other will not come.

Jesus said that whoever should blaspheme against him might be forgiven, but whosoever should blaspheme against the Holy Ghost could never be forgiven, in this world or the next. A man might very easily blaspheme against Christ in igno-

rance, failing to understand or comprehend as yet the kind of person he was, or the purpose of his earthly ministry and sacrificial death. That kind of sin may be forgiven, if a man eventually perceives the truth and repents of his past ignorance and unwitting neglect. But after we accept Christ, know him for ourselves, receive an incontrovertible evidence of his divinity and of his power over sin by reason of what he does in our lives; after the abiding presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit of promise, comes to us to bear added witness of him; after evil has been eradicated from its position of control over us, what then? If we deny Christ, we deny the witness of the Holy Ghost. We deny his power over sin and evil. We deny the joy of fellowship with God, which we have partially experienced here, and hope to experience more fully hereafter. We deny, not in ignorance, but in full knowledge of what we are doing. We deny because of a deliberate choice for evil. We spurn and negate, by our actions, the atonement of Christ; we deny his divinity, his love, his grace.

What else could we expect to happen to such an one, save what Jesus said would happen? There can be no forgiveness for this kind of denial, committed in full knowledge. It is the turning against a tried and tested friend, who has done everything for you, only to have his mortal enemy move in and usurp his rightful place in your friendship and gratitude. When a man blasphemes against the Holy Ghost, in sure knowledge of what he is doing, he is denying Christ; his atonement is no more effective for one who stubbornly refuses to accept it, and the sinner who returned to his old ways is lost. He has trodden under foot the Son of God, counted the blood of his sacrifice an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace.

At some time or other, the Spirit of God comes to every one of us, to entice us to good, to lead us in the

way where we shall find a testimony of Jesus, and a more abundant life. If we refuse to follow its leadings, there may be another chance, for perhaps we are too ignorant to know their meaning. But if we taste of the heavenly gift, and follow the spirit unto full knowledge and assurance, and then allow evil to re-enter our lives, the Spirit will withdraw, and a sevenfold evil will return to occupy the place which has been swept and garnished. Let us then grieve not the Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption, but follow Him into all truth.

Make Somebody Glad

On life's rugged road
As we journey each day,
Far, far more of sunshine
Would brighten the way
If, forgetful of self
And our troubles, we had
The will, and would try
To make other hearts glad.

Though of the world's wealth
We have little in store,
And labor to keep
Grim want from the door,
With a hand that is kind,
And a heart that is true,
To make others glad,
There is much we can do.

A word kindly spoken,
A smile, or a tear,
Though seeming but trifles
Full often may cheer;
Each day of our lives
Some treasure 'twould add,
To be conscious that we
Had made somebody glad.

Those who sit in the darkness
Of sorrow so drear,
Have need of a word
Of solace and cheer.
There are homes that are desolate
Hearts that are sad—
Do something for some one,
Make somebody glad.

—From an Old Scrapbook

Nothing astonishes men so much as common sense and plain dealing.—Emerson.