

HATHQ Q # 13: A Look at “The Unpardonable Sin”

The “Unpardonable Sin” (also commonly known as the sin of ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’) is a particular sin that the Bible tells us “... *will not be forgiven him, either in this age or the age to come*” (Matthew 12:32). A misunderstanding of the exact nature of this sin and what it is and is not has caused many a true Christian a great deal of needless worry, pain, grief, and anxiety. As both the Scripture, and especially the teaching of our Lord, do warn against such a sin, we need to know exactly what it is, what it is not, why it is unforgivable, and how this sin is committed.

There are actually three different sets of Scriptural passages dealing with an ‘unforgivable sin’. They include

Passages in Matthew, Mark, and Luke that deal with sin of “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”, a sin committed by those outside the church

The Hebrews passages on the sin of total apostasy, committed by nominal members of the church

The I John 5:16-17 passage on the “*sin which leads to death*”, a sin that we are not to even pray for the person committing it

We will proceed in the following manner

- I. We will first look at what the Bible has to say on The Unpardonable Sin and determine WHAT the sin IS and IS NOT**
- II. We will answer the following basic Questions about the “Unpardonable Sin”**
 - A. Why should a sin or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit be held to be more grievous than a sin or blasphemy against Jesus Christ or God the Father?
 - B. What is it that makes this sin so different? Why will this particular sin, as opposed to all others, “*not be forgiven him (who commits it), either in this age or the age to come*”?
 - C. How and why, in the light of Jesus statement “*the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out*” (John 6:37) and Paul’s teaching “*For, whoever calls on the*

name of the Lord will be saved” can this sin be unpardonable and no forgiveness extended?

D. Can a Christian commit this sin?

E. How can we say, for certain, that any person who fears having committed this sin and sincerely wishes to repent of his actions, however blasphemous they may have been, HAS NOT committed it?

III. Having laid this foundation, we will take a more extensive look at the various “Unpardonable Sin” passages and at the teachings of such noted authorities as John Calvin and Matthew Henry on exactly what they do say and mean.

IV. We will develop a Summary Sheet of Truths to remember when troubled about this sin.

V. We will state “The Conclusion of the Matter”.

I. Let’s first look at what the Bible has to say on the issue of the Unpardonable Sin and determine WHAT it IS and IS NOT

What, exactly, does the Bible have to say about the “Unpardonable Sin”?

**We may divide the teachings of the Bible on this topic
into three sets of passages:**

First, passages from the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke which deal with the sin of ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’ by those opposing the church

Matthew 12:31-32, wherein Jesus states

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or the age to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32)

Mark 3:20-30, the most informative passage on the nature of the sin

“Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind.’

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He has Beelzebub,’ and ‘By the ruler of demons He casts out demons.’

So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.’

‘Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation’ – because they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’”

Luke 12:8-10, where we read

"Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven." (Luke 12:8-10)

Second, passages from the book of Hebrews which deal sins committed by nominal believers within the church

Hebrews 6:4-6

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Hebrews 10:26-31

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord.’ And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:26-31)

Third, one passage from the book of I John which deals with “a sin leading to death” and our proper reaction to those we see committing it

“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin and there is a sin not leading to death.” (I John 5:16-17)

So, Scripture very clearly tells us of a particular sin ... that will “will not be forgiven ... either in this age or the age to come” ... a sin from which it is “impossible ... to renew them to repentance” ... “a sin leading to [spiritual] death” which is so heinous that we are not even to pray for people we see committing it.

All these passages give very serious warnings against possibly committing such a sin.

So, with this Biblical background, let’s look to see WHAT the sin that “will not be forgiven” IS and what it IS NOT

From the Gospel passages we read ...

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or the age to come.” (Mathew 12:31-32)

Clearly the “Unpardonable Sin” is not just *any* blasphemy or sin that we might commit or utter, for our Lord clearly tells us that “*every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men*” and that “*all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter*” – except for this particular one.

We also see that the “Unpardonable Sin” is not a sin or blasphemy committed against God the Father or God the Son, but is a sin particularly committed against the God the Holy Spirit

“Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or the age to come.”

We know by the phrase “*whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit*” that it is a verbal sin. But the fact that this is a verbal sin should not be overemphasized because we know from the teaching of our Lord that what a man speaks with his mouth comes directly from his heart ...

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts ...” (Matthew 15:16)

II. This brings up several questions that should be dealt with before diving more deeply into the Biblical passages themselves

A. Why should a sin or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit be held to be more grievous than a sin or blasphemy against Jesus Christ or God the Father?

We know for certain that it is not unpardonable because the Holy Spirit is a more important member of the Trinity. No, all three members of the Trinity are fully God and fully equal. The Bible does speak of a division of labor in the Trinity as to the various operations and responsibilities of each member in such matters as creation and the granting and ensuring of our redemption and salvation, but no function performed by one member is ever considered to be more or less important than the others. Indeed, the Holy Spirit, the member of the Trinity against whom this most grievous of sins is committed, is usually *less* well known because His work in our salvation is to show us our sin and point us to Jesus, and not to Himself. But being well less known does not mean that He is of any lesser importance. The greater nature of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be seen in “B.” below.

B. What is it that makes this sin so different? Why will this particular sin, as opposed to all others, “*not be forgiven him (who commits it), either in this age or the age to come*”?

To understand why the nature of this sin against the Holy Spirit is so much greater than all others it is necessary to examine the setting and context in which it was committed.

In the Gospel accounts, the setting of this sin was that of Jesus performing miracles and good works by the power of the Holy Spirit before the very eyes of those who were in the process of committing this sin. These people could directly see the effects of the Holy Spirit at work and had had the clear light of both Jesus’ teaching and the Spirit’s illumination that Jesus was performing His miracles by and through the power of God the Holy Spirit. It is crucial to understand that the knowledge of Jesus’ miracles being worked by and through God the Holy Spirit was clearly perceived and understood, but was *knowingly and deliberately* refused, spurned, and attributed to Satan. And therein lies the unpardonable nature of the sin.

[We want to note that our Lord said that these people were in the process of committing and filling up the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Our Lord is very merciful here in He is giving the people involved a warning and not actual condemnation. He severely warns them that if they persist in this sin they will pass a point where they will be judicially confirmed and hardened in their sin of willful rejection and unbelief and that a spiritual death will irrevocably steal over them.]

Again, the reason that this sin is worse than all other sins and blasphemies is that it is a sin knowingly, willingly and contemptuously committed in direct opposition to the Holy Spirit. In his commentary on the Mark 3 passage, John Calvin writes that Jesus ...

“... concludes that it is no light or ordinary offence, but an atrocious crime, knowingly and willingly to pour contempt on the Spirit of God”.

Let’s think this through.

The initial background setting for this sin is in Isaiah 5:1-5, which is later fleshed out in our Lord’s “*Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers*” in Mark 12:1-12.

We read in Isaiah 5:1-5 ...

*“Now let me sing to my Well-beloved
A song of my Beloved regarding his vineyard:*

*My Well-beloved has a vineyard
On a very fruitful hill.
He dug it up and cleared out its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
He built a tower in its midst
And also made a winepress in it;
So He expected it to bring forth good grapes'
But it brought forth wild grapes.*

*'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.
What more could have been done to My vineyard
Than I have done in it?
Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes,
Did it bring forth wild grapes?
And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard:
I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned;
And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.'"*

In the passage, the owner is God and the vineyard represents His people.

We go next to our Lord's teaching in Mark 12 in which He tells a parable that is based on Isaiah's song of the vineyard given above. Again, the owner of the vineyard is God, the vineyard represents His people, His servants are the prophets, the son is Christ and the vinedressers are the religious leaders of the people – the chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees:

Mark 12:1-12 reads ...

"Then He began to speak to them in parables: 'A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge about it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to the vinedressers and went into a far country. Now at vintage time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated. And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some. Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son'.

But those vinedressers said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.

Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. Have you not even read this Scripture:

*‘The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the LORD’s doing,
And it is marvelous in our eyes’?*

And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left and went away.”

So, in this particular instance, the exceptionally heinous sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is *knowingly* and *deliberately* committed right in the very face of God Himself, as Jesus stands right before them while they *knowingly*, *willingly*, and *contemptuously* reject the Holy Spirit’s proof of Jesus as the Christ, proof displayed right before their very eyes, and seek to kill Him for it. Read it again ...

“Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, ‘They will respect my son’. But those vinedressers said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.

Thus is the knowing, willing, and contemptuous sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’s direct display of Christ as the Son of God held to be more grievous than a sin or blasphemy against Jesus Christ or God the Father.

We note again that our Lord told us earlier that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not a one-time sin, but a series of ever-hardening sins, which, as our Lord warns them, if they persist in it, they will come to and pass a point where God will judicially harden and confirm them in their willful rejection and unbelief, and a consequent state of spiritual death will irrevocably steal over them.

We note also that this sin is not, as some have taught, limited to the time when Jesus walked the earth performing miracles, but can still be committed today. Otherwise, why are there so many warnings against it?

Indeed, even today we are all initially guilty of “*suppress[ing] the truth in unrighteousness*”, and would have continued so, unless God intervenes and gives us a new heart of belief ...

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness ... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased [reprobate] mind” (Romans 1:18,28)

We will speak more on that later. For now, let us move on to see why this sin should be held to be unpardonable.

C. How and why, in the light of Jesus statement “*the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out*” (John 6:37) and Paul’s teaching “*For, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (Romans 10:13) can this sin be held to be unpardonable and no forgiveness be extended?

It is very true that Jesus will cast out no one who comes to Him and that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. We have God’s word that He will grant forgiveness for anything to anyone who sincerely asks for it.

So, why, then, is this sin held to unpardonable? Why will forgiveness not be extended here? Jesus says that all other sins and blasphemies will be forgiven ... so why not this one?

The difference in this case is that those who have committed this sin to its full measure have been confirmed and judicially hardened in it by God, and as a result, will never come to seek or ask forgiveness for it. In short ...

Forgiveness will not be extended simply because forgiveness will not be sought or asked for.

Again, this is a sin which is so heinous in the eyes of God that He will judicially harden the heart of the one who commits it in such a way that they will never seek or even desire repentance for their sin.

Let’s remember that both *repentance* and *faith* are *gifts* of God to individual men:

“When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’” (Acts 11:18)

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Again, Jesus will never cast out anyone who comes to Him and will in every case receive all who sincerely call on His name. We have His word for that. The people who have committed this sin will not come to Him and seek forgiveness because they have, after repeated warnings, been judicially hardened by God; been given up to a debased (or reprobate) mind; and are totally destitute of the Holy Spirit, the One who works repentance in men’s hearts.

That such men are judicially “given up” by God is clearly seen in Paul’s teaching in Romans 1:1, 28,

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness ... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased [reprobate] mind”

And so, those who have committed this sin to its full extent have been judicially hardened and given over by God to a debased or reprobate mind and will never seek forgiveness for the sin. That is why it is “unpardonable” and why forgiveness will not be extended – because neither pardon nor forgiveness will ever be sought or asked for.

This was the way it was back in Jesus’ day and the way it still is in our day.

D. Can a Christian cannot commit this sin?

No. For several reasons.

First, according to Jesus Christ, true Christians reside in “My Father’s hand ... and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand”

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.” (John 10:27-30)

Second, we are preserved, or “kept” by God Himself from committing such a sin

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Peter 1:3-5)

Third, our salvation is presented and described in the Bible as a golden chain of events, with each link forged and joined together by God with no break at all in the chain, i.e., those who are “called” by God will be “glorified” glorified by God

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

Fourth, we are told by the Apostle Paul that absolutely nothing will ever be able to separate us from God, whose love for us is founded on and grounded “in Christ Jesus our Lord”, and not in our actions or anything we can or might do

“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:37-39)

A Christian cannot, therefore, commit this sin, but will persevere till the end.

E. How can we say, for certain, that any person who fears having committed this sin and sincerely wishes to repent of his actions, however blasphemous they may have been, HAS NOT committed it?

The passages on the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, though very clear in intent, do have some ambiguities. This brings us to the science of Biblical hermeneutics, which is the science of interpreting the Bible.

The First Rule of Biblical hermeneutics is very logical, ‘*Let Scripture interpret Scripture*’. This means that wherever a passage or a part of a passage of Scripture may be somewhat unclear or ambiguous, it is to be interpreted in the light of other Biblical passages that speak very clearly on the issue.

We refer back to our two passages cited above, the first where our Lord, who is truth itself, has told us

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (John 6:37)

... and the second where the Apostle Paul writing by and under the authority of the Holy Spirit, tells us

“For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’” (Romans 10:13)

Our point is that any ambiguities with the passages on the Unpardonable Sin are to be interpreted in the light of the very clear statements of our Lord that “*the one who comes to Me will by no means be cast out*” and the Apostle Paul that “*whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*”.

Very clearly, anyone *coming to* or *calling on* our Lord for forgiveness and salvation will be received or “*saved*”, and will not be refused or “*cast out*”. Anyone genuinely desiring and seeking forgiveness for any sin of blasphemy cannot have committed this sin unto death, for they have not been judicially hardened into never seeking forgiveness for it’ – and by our Lord’s very own clear and straightforward words, forgiveness will be granted to anyone sincerely seeking it.

Having determined “*What the Bible has to say on The Unpardonable Sin and WHAT it IS and IS NOT*” and having given “*Answers*” to our five basic Questions ...

III. We will now take a more extensive look at the “Unpardonable Sin” passages and at the teachings of such noted authorities as John Calvin and Matthew Henry on exactly what they do say and mean.

Having stated our case, hopefully with sufficient Biblical proof, of what the “Unpardonable Sin” passages do say and mean, we now enlist the help of two of the greatest authoritative

commentators on Scripture that have ever lived – John Calvin and Matthew Henry – to look further into them and their meaning.

So, let's be like the ...

“fair-minded Bereans ... and search the Scriptures ... to find out whether they [the things we say] are so” (Acts 17:11).

Let us first review what the Gospel accounts have to say about the sin of “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”

We start with Matthew 12:31-32, wherein Jesus states ...

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or the age to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32)

Next is Mark 3:20-30, a more informative passage on the nature of the sin ...

“Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind.’

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He has Beelzebub,’ and ‘By the ruler of demons He casts out demons.’

So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.’

‘Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation’ – because they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’”

And finally Luke 12:8-10, wherein we read ...

"Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven." (Luke 12:8-10)

The comments of John Calvin on these Gospel passages are very pertinent here

They speak of the nature and seriousness of this sin ...

“he [Jesus] at length concludes that it is no light or ordinary offence, but an atrocious crime, knowingly and willingly to pour contempt on the Spirit of God. We have already said, that Christ did not pronounce this decision on the mere words which they uttered, but on their base and wicked thought.”

“the reason why *blasphemy against the Spirit* exceeds all other sins, is not that the Spirit is higher than Christ, but that those who rebel, after that the power of God has been revealed, cannot be excused on the plea of ignorance.”

“By detracting from the grace and power of God, we make a direct attack on *the Spirit*, from whom they proceed, and in whom they are revealed to us.”

It is unpardonable because it is willfully and knowingly done ...

“But no man curses the Spirit who is not enlightened by Him, and conscious of ungodly rebellion against Him; for it is not a superfluous distinction that all other blasphemies shall be forgiven, except that one blasphemy which is directed against the Spirit.”

“Why is this, but because those only are *blasphemers* against the Spirit, who slander his gifts and power, contrary to the conviction of their own mind? So also is the import of the reason assigned by Mark for the extreme severity of Christ’s threatening against the Pharisees; *because they had said he had an unclean Spirit*; for in this manner they purposely and maliciously turned light into darkness; and, indeed, it is in the manner of the *giants*, as the phrase is, to make war against God.”

“Such audacity does indeed proceed from mad blindness, in which, at the same time, malice and virulent rage predominate. Nor is it without reason that Paul says, that though he was *a blasphemer, he obtained pardon, because he had done it ignorantly in his unbelief* (I Timothy 1:13); for this term draws a distinction between his sin and voluntary rebellion.”

“From all that has been said, we may conclude that those persons sin and blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, who maliciously turn to his dishonor the perfections of God, which have been revealed to him by the Spirit, in which his glory ought to be celebrated, and who, with Satan, their leader, are avowed enemies of the glory of God. We need not then wonder, if for such sacrilege there is no hope of pardon; for they must be desperate who turn the only medicine of salvation into a deadly venom.”

They are given to a reprobate mind and will never desire or seek repentance

“Those who reason in this manner [that it is not unpardonable, but that pardon for it is rare] do not sufficiently consider what a monstrous crime it is, not only to profane intentionally the sacred name of God, but to spit in his face when he shines evidently before us. It shows equal ignorance to object, that it would be absurd if even repentance could not obtain pardon; for *blasphemy against the Spirit* is a token of reprobation, and hence it follows, that whoever have fallen into it, have been delivered over to a reprobate mind (Rom.i.28.) ... that in this manner God punishes contempt of his grace, by hardening the hearts of the reprobate, so that they never have any desire towards repentance.”

... as are the comments of Matthew Henry on the Gospel passages

“Here is, The impudent impious brand which the scribes fastened upon Christ’s casting out devils, that they might evade and invalidate the conviction of it, and have a poor excuse for not yielding to it.

“They could not deny that He had cast out devils, which plainly bespoke him sent of God; but they insinuated that *he had Beelzebub* on his side, was in league with him, and by *the prince of the devils cast out devils* ... There was nothing in the manner of Christ’s *casting out devils*, that gave any cause to suspect this; he did it *as one having authority*; but so they will have it, who resolve not to believe him ... The rational answer which Christ gave to the objection, demonstrating the absurdity of it.

“and therefore it is natural to suppose that he will thus bind the strong man, would forbid him to speak when he would, and to stay where he would, and thus show that he had gained the victory over him

“The awful warning Christ gave them to take heed how they spoke such dangerous words as these ... if they had persisted in it, it would be of fatal consequence to them; it would be found a stain against the last remedy, and consequently unpardonable

“Many of those who reviled Christ on the cross (which was a *blaspheming of the Son of man*, aggravated to the highest degree), found mercy, and Christ himself prayed, *Father, forgive them*; but this was *blaspheming the Holy Ghost*, for it was by the Holy Spirit that he *cast out* devils, and they said, It was *by the unclean spirit*, v. 30. By this method they would outface the conviction of all the gifts of the Holy Ghost after Christ’s ascension, and defeat them all, after which there remained no more proof, and therefore they should *never have forgiveness*, but were *liable to eternal damnation*. They were in imminent danger of that everlasting punishment, from which there was *no redemption*, and in which there was *no intermission*, *no remission*.”

We will look, next, at the Hebrews passages

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." (Hebrews 6:4-6)

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord.' And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:26-31)

We note first that these are warnings given to members of the church who are in danger of apostatizing (i.e., abandoning their confession of faith and leaving the church). Every church

will have its bad seed, its goats. They will often enjoy some enlightenment and operations of the Holy Spirit, but none of a saving nature (the Holy Spirit does not give them a new heart, or the gifts of faith and repentance). Some remain in the church all their lives but most reject and leave the faith and are called apostates.

Those who are apostates received true knowledge of the true God and the gospel message. They assented to it, had been baptized, been enlightened to a degree by the preaching of the word, have participated in the Lord's Supper and have experienced some measure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (though not that of a regenerate heart), and perhaps had even seen some of the signs and wonders that accompanied the introduction of the gospel into the early church, and yet still renounced faith in Christ and apostatized. They have voluntarily and willfully abandoned the true way of salvation and by God's judicial decree the cross of Christ will no longer do anything for them but accuse them. The chief example of such a person would be Judas.

Our Lord's "*Parable of the Wheat and the Tares*" assures that there will always be unbelievers and potential apostates within the church. They are those who have only the first two parts of a true saving faith – Notitia and Assensus – but not the third crucial element of Fiducia. Theirs is the "dead" faith of which James speaks in Chapter 2:14-26 of his epistle. Jesus warned quite often of false belief.

Again, this is a willful sin (see Hebrews 10:26) that consists of one's of abandoning their confession of faith altogether, by which they trample Christ underfoot, treat His sacrificial blood as unclean, and insult God's Spirit. Setting aside the true way of salvation, they have no other recourse and are judicially hardened in their apostate decisions.

Before proceeding to the verses themselves, we would like to address two issues that always come up with an inquiry into the sin of apostasy.

First, we want to note very clearly that apostasy by some members of Christian churches does not mean that true Christians can lose their salvation.

No, it rather means that the apostates were never Christians in the first place, for we are very explicitly told in 1 John 2:19 ...

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."

We want, second, to address the wonder that people can be members of the church, participate very regularly in the services, and go very far in the activities and benefits of the church – and yet still fall away (apostatize).

It is a remarkable and upsetting event to us whenever an active and seemingly faithful member of the church apostatizes.

But our Lord Himself teaches that it is to be expected

He gives us the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-23) in which He relates the sad cases of

“he who received the seed on stony places ... he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet has no root in himself, but endures only for a while” and “he who received seed among the thorns ... and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches chokes the word and he becomes unfruitful.”

He also gives us two specific examples of just how far a person can appear to be saved and progress in the church, but have only a self-deceived false assurance

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:21-23)

“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God I thank You that I am not like other men – extorters, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the

other, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’” (Luke 18: 9-14)

The Apostle Paul, speaking of the whole nation of Israel, tells us how a whole people can be sincere and even zealous, but still be wrong ...

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:1-4)

The quintessential case of apostacy, showing just how involved with a church and with God a person can be and still finally apostatize, is Judas Iscariot – for he was an intimate disciple of Jesus Christ for over three years, saw all of His testifying miracles and even performed miracles himself in His name, and yet, still betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver.

Again, all of these are warnings for true Christians to always be on their guard and to, as both Peter and Paul both tell us ...

“... be even more diligent to make your call and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10)

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

We note again that these apostates were never true Christians in the first place ...

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”

We also note again our teaching that a true Christian is “kept” by God Himself and cannot and will not commit the sin of apostasy, but will persevere to the end.

Now back to the Hebrews passages themselves ...

Concerning the Hebrews 6:4-6 passage

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." (Hebrews 6:4-6)

First, we will provide some clarifying definitions from Mathew Henry and they follow with some comments of both John Calvin and Matthew Henry:

"enlightened" – The teachings of Christianity are “understood of notional knowledge and common illumination”

"taste of the heavenly gift" – “feel something of the efficacy of the Holy Spirit in his operations upon their souls, causing them to taste something of religion ...”

"made partakers of the Holy Ghost" – “that is, of his extraordinary and miraculous gifts; they may have cast out demons in the name of Christ, and done many other mighty works” (Confirm Jesus Christ in Matthew 7:21-23)

"taste of the good word of God" – “they may have some relish of gospel doctrines, may hear the word with pleasure, may remember much of it, and talk well of it, not having it dwell richly in them”

"tasted of the powers of the world to come" – “they may have been under strong impressions concerning heaven and hell, may have felt some desires of heaven, and dread of going to hell.”

"These lengths hypocrites may go, and, after all, turn apostates."

The comments of John Calvin on Hebrews 6:4-6

“What then is to be said? Since the Lord gives the hope of mercy to all without exception, it is wholly unreasonable that anyone for any cause whatever should be precluded

“The knot of the question is in the word, *fall away*. Whosoever then understands its meaning can easily extricate himself from every difficulty. But it must be noticed, that there is a twofold falling away, one particular, and the other general. He who has in anything, or in

anyways offended, has fallen away from his estate of being a Christian. But the apostle speaks not here of theft, or perjury, or murder, or drunkenness, or adultery; but he refers to a total defection or falling away from the Gospel, when a sinner offends not God in some one thing, but entirely renounces his grace ...

“For he who falls away forsakes the word of God, who extinguishes its light, who deprives himself of the taste of the heavenly gift, who relinquishes the participation of the Spirit. Now this is wholly to renounce God. We now see whom he excluded from the hope of pardon, even the apostles who alienated themselves from the Gospel of Christ which they had previously embraced, and from the grace of God; and this happens to no one but him who sins against the Holy Spirit. For he who violates the second table of the Law, or transgresses the first through ignorance, is not guilty of this defection; nor does God surely deprive any of his grace in such a way as to leave them none remaining except the reprobate.

“But here arises a new question, How can it be that he who has once made such a progress should afterwards fall away? For God, it may be said, calls none effectively but the elect, and Paul testifies that they are really his sons who are led by the Spirit, (Rom. viii. 14;) and he teaches us that it is a sure pledge of adoption when Christ makes us partakers of his Spirit. The elect are also beyond the danger of finally falling away; for the Father who gave them to be preserved by Christ his Son is greater than all, and Christ promises to watch over them all that none may perish. To all this I answer, that God indeed favors none but the elect alone with the Spirit of regeneration, and that by this they are distinguished from the reprobate; for they are renewed after his image and receive the earnest of the Spirit in hope of the future inheritance, and by the same Spirit the gospel is sealed in their hearts. But I cannot admit that all this is any reason why he should not grant the reprobate also some taste of his grace, why he should not irradiate their minds with some sparks of his light, why he should not give them some perception of his goodness, and in some sort engrave his word on their hearts. Otherwise where would be the temporary faith mentioned by Mark iv.17? There is therefore some knowledge even in the reprobate, which afterwards vanishes away, either because it did not strike roots sufficiently deep, or because it withers, being choked up.

And by this bridle the Lord keeps us in fear and humility; and we certainly see how prone human nature is otherwise to security and foolish confidence. At the same time our solicitude ought not to be such as not to disturb the peace of conscience. For the Lord strengthens faith in us, while he subdues our flesh: and hence he would have faith to remain and rest tranquil as in a safe haven; but he exercises the flesh with various conflicts, that it may not grow wanton through idleness.

6. *To renew them again to repentance, &c.* Though this seems hard, yet there is no reason to charge God with cruelty when anyone suffers only the punishment of his own defection ... Thus it happens that they cease not to add sin to sin, until being wholly hardened they despise God, or like men in despair, express madly their hatred to him. The end of all apostates is, that they are either smitten with stupor, and fear nothing, or curse God their judge, because they cannot escape from him.

In short the Apostle warns us, that repentance is not at the will of man, but that it is given by God to those only who have not wholly fallen away from the faith ... But when one rises up again after falling, we may hence conclude that he had not been guilty of defection, however grievously he may have sinned.

“*Crucifying again, &c.* He also adds this to defend God’s severity against the calumnies of men; for it would be wholly unbecoming, that God by pardoning apostates should expose his own Son to contempt. They are then wholly unworthy to obtain mercy. But the reason why he says, that Christ would thus be crucified again, is, because we die with him for the very purpose of living afterwards a new life; when therefore any return as it were unto death, they have need of another sacrifice, as we shall find in the tenth chapter. *Crucifying for themselves* means as far as in them lies. For this would be the case, and Christ would be slandered as it were triumphantly, were it allowed men to return to him after having fallen away and forsaken him.”

The comments of Matthew Henry on Hebrews 6:4-6

“This therefore is no proof of the final apostasy of true saints. These indeed may fall frequently and foully, but yet they will not totally nor finally from God.

“The apostle describes the dreadful case of such as fall away after having gone so far in the profession of religion. (1.) The greatness of the sin of apostasy. It is *crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to open shame*.

[1.] It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance. It is extremely hazardous. Very few instances can be given of those who have gone so far and fallen away, and yet ever have been brought to true repentance, such a repentance as is indeed a renovation of the soul. Some have thought this is the sin against the Holy Ghost, but without ground. The sin here mentioned is plainly apostasy both from the truth and the ways of Christ. God can renew them to repentance, but he seldom does it; and with men themselves it is impossible.

“God will restrain himself no more about such wicked apostates: he will let them alone and cast them out of his care; he will command the clouds that they rain no more upon them. Divine influences shall be restrained; and that is not all, but such ground *is nigh unto cursing*; so far is it from receiving the blessing, that a dreadful curse hangs over it, though as yet, through the patience of God, the curse is not fully executed. *Lastly*, its end is to be burned. Apostasy will be punished with everlasting burnings, the fire that shall never be quenched. This is the sad end to which apostasy leads, and therefore Christians should go on and grow in grace, lest, if they do not go forward, they should go backward, till they bring matters to this woeful extremity of sin and misery.”

Concerning the Hebrews 10:26-31 passage

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord.’ And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:26-31)

The comments of John Calvin on Hebrews 10:26-31

“26. *For if we sin willfully*, or, voluntarily, &c. He shows how severe a vengeance of God awaits all those who fall away from the grace of Christ; for being without the one true salvation, they are now as it were given up to an inevitable destruction.

“Those who sin, mentioned by the Apostle, are not such as offend in any way, but such as forsake the Church, and wholly alienate themselves from Christ. For he speaks not here of this or of that sin, but he condemns by name those who willfully renounced fellowship with the Church. But there is a vast difference between particular fallings and a complete defection of this kind, by which we entirely fall away from the grace of Christ. And this cannot be the case of anyone except he has already been enlightened, he says, *If we sin willfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth*; as though he had said, ‘If we knowingly and willingly renounce the grace which we had obtained.’

“And that the Apostle refers only to apostates, is clear from the whole passage, for what he treats of is this, that those who had been once received into the Church ought not to forsake it, as some were wont to do. He now declares that their remained for such no sacrifice for sin, because they had willfully sinned after having received the knowledge of the truth. But as to sinners who fall in any other way, Christ offers himself daily to them, so that they are to seek no other sacrifice for expiating their sins. He denies, then, that any sacrifice remains for them who renounce the death of Christ, which is not done by any offence except by a total renunciation of the faith.

“This severity of God is indeed dreadful, but it is set forth for the purpose of inspiring terror. He, cannot, however, be accused of cruelty; for as the death of Christ is the only remedy by which we can be delivered from eternal death, are not they who destroy as far as the can its virtues and benefit worthy of being left to despair? God invites to daily reconciliation those who abide in Christ; they are daily washed by the blood of Christ, their sins are daily expiated by his perpetual sacrifice. As salvation is not to be sought except in him, there is no need to wonder that all those who willfully forsake him are deprived of every hope of pardon ... But Christ’s sacrifice is efficacious to the godly even to death, though they often sin; nay, it retains ever its efficacy, for this very reason, because they cannot be free from sin as long as they dwell in the flesh. The Apostle then refers to those alone who wickedly forsake Christ, and thus deprive themselves of the benefit of his death.

“... for he who willingly and with deliberate impiety extinguishes the light of God kindled in his heart has nothing to allege as an excuse before God.”

The comments of Matthew Henry on Hebrews 10:26-31

“1. From the description he gives of the sin of apostasy. It is *sinning willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth*, sinning willfully against that truth of which we have had convincing evidence. This text has been the occasion of great stress to some gracious souls. They have been ready to conclude that every willful sin, after conviction and against knowledge, is the unpardonable sin: but this has been their infirmity and error. The sin here mentioned is a total and final apostasy, when men with a full and fixed will and resolution despise and reject Christ, the only Savior, – despise and the Spirit, the only sanctifier, – and despise and renounce the gospel, the only way of salvation and the words of eternal life; and all this after they have known, owned, and professed, the Christian religion, and continue to do so obstinately and maliciously. This is the greatest transgression: the Apostle seems to refer to Num. xv. 30, 31. They were to be cut off.

“2. From the dreadful doom of such apostates. (1.) There remains no more sacrifice for such sins, no other Christ to save such sinners; they sin against the last resort and remedy.

“(1.) *They have trodden underfoot the Son of God.* To trample upon an ordinary person shows intolerable insolence; to treat a person of honor in that vile manner is insufferable; but to deal thus with the Son of God, who himself is God, must be the highest provocation – to trample upon his person, denying him to be the Messiah – to trample upon his authority, and undermine his kingdom – to trample upon his members as the offscouring of all things, and not fit to live in the world; what punishment can be too great for such men?

“(2.) They have *counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing*; that is, the blood of Christ, with which the covenant was purchased and sealed, and wherewith Christ himself was consecrated, or wherewith the apostate was sanctified, that is, baptized, visibly initiated into the new covenant by baptism, and admitted to the Lord’s Supper. Observe there is a kind of sanctification which persons may partake of and yet fall away: they may be distinguished by common gifts and graces, by an outward profession, by a form of godliness, a course of duties, and a set of privileges, and yet fall away finally.

“(3.) *Those have done despite to the Spirit of grace*, the Spirit that is graciously given to men, and that works grace wherever it is – the Spirit of grace, that should be regarded and attended to with the greatest of care, – this Spirit they have grieved, resisted, quenched, yea, done despite to him, which is the highest act of wickedness, and makes the case of the sinner desperate, refusing to have the gospel of salvation applied to him. Now he leaves to the consciences of all, appeals to universal reason and equity, whether such aggravated crimes ought not to have receive a suitable punishment, a sorer punishment than those who died without mercy?

Third and last, we take up the I John 5:16-17 passage

“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin and there is a sin not leading to death.” (I John 5:16-17)

The comments of John Calvin on I John 5:16-17

“A sin which is not unto death. That we may not cast away all hope of the salvation of those who sin, he shows that God does not so grievously punish their falls as to repudiate them. It hence follows that we ought to deem them brethren, since God retains them in the number of

his children. For he denies that sins are to death, not only those by which saints daily offend, but even when it happens that God's wrath is grievously provoked by them. For as long as room for pardon is left, death does not wholly retain its dominion.

"There is a sin unto death. I have already said that the sin to which there is no hope of pardon left, is thus called. But it may be asked, what this is; for it must be very atrocious, when God thus so severely punishes it. It may be gathered from the context, that it is not, as they say, a partial fall, or transgression of a single commandment; but apostasy, by which men wholly alienate themselves from God. For the Apostle afterwards adds, that the children of God do not sin, that is, they do not forsake God, and wholly surrender themselves to Satan, to be his slaves. Such a defection, it is no wonder that it is mortal; for God never thus deprives his own people of the grace of the Spirit; but they ever retain some spark of the true religion. They must then be reprobate and given up to destruction, who thus fall away so as to have no fear of God.

"Were any one to ask whether the door of salvation is closed against their repentance; the answer is obvious, that as they are given up to a reprobate mind, and are destitute of the Holy Spirit, they cannot do anything else, than with obstinate minds, become worse and worse, and add sins to sins. Moreover, as the sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit ever brings with it a defection of this kind, there is no doubt but that it is here pointed out.

"But it may be asked again, by what evidences can we know that a man's fall is fatal; except the knowledge of this was certain, in vain would the Apostle have made this exception, that they were not to pray for a sin of this kind. It is right to determine sometimes, whether the fallen is without hope, or whether there is a place for a remedy. This, indeed, is what I allow, and what is evident beyond dispute from this passage; but as this very seldom happens, and as God sets before us the infinite riches of his grace, and bids us to be merciful according to his own example, we ought not rashly to conclude that anyone has brought on himself this judgment of eternal death; on the contrary, love should dispose us to hope well. But if the impiety of some appear to us not otherwise than hopeless, as though the Lord pointed it out by the finger, we ought not to contend with the just judgment of God, or seek to be more merciful than he is."

The comments of Matthew Henry on I John 5:16-17

"2. There is a great distinction in the heinousness and guilt of sin: *There is a sin unto death* (v. 16), and *there is a sin not unto death*, v.17. (1.) All sin, as to the merit and legal sentence of it, is unto death. *The wages of sin is death*; and *cursed is everyone that continueth not in all the things written in the book of the law, to do them*, Gal. iii. 10. But there is a sin unto

death in opposition to such sin as is here said *not to be unto death*. This surely must include all such sin as by divine or human constitution may consist with life; in the human constitution with temporal or corporal life, in the divine constitution with corporal or with spiritual evangelical life. [1.] There are sins by which human righteous constitution, are not unto death; as divers pieces of injustice, which may be compensated without the death of the delinquent. In opposition to this there are sins which, by righteous constitution, are to death, or to a legal forfeiture of life, such as we call *capital crimes*. [2.] There are sins which by divine constitution are unto death; and that either death corporal or spiritual and evangelical. *First*, Such as are, or may be, to death corporal. Such may be sins of gross hypocrites, as Ananias and Sapphira, or, for aught we know, of sincere Christian brethren, as when the Apostle says of the offending members of the church of Corinth, For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep, 1 Cor. xi. 30. There may be sin unto corporal death among those who may not be condemned with the world. Such sin, I said, is, or may be, to corporal death. The divine penal constitution in the gospel does not positively and peremptorily threaten death to the more visible sins of the members of Christ, but only some gospel-chastisement; *for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*, Heb. Xii. 6. There is room left for divine wisdom or goodness, or even gospel severity, to determine how far the chastisement or scourge shall proceed. And we cannot say but that sometimes it may (*in terrorem – for warning to others*) proceed even to death. Then, *Secondly*, There are sins which, by divine constitution, are unto death spiritual and evangelical, that is, are inconsistent with spiritual and evangelical life, with spiritual life in the soul and with an evangelical right to life above. Such are total impenitence and unbelief for the present. Final impenitence and unbelief are infallibly to death eternal, as also a blaspheming of the Spirit of God in the testimony that he has given to Christ and his gospel, and a total apostasy from the light and convictive evidence of the truth of the Christian religion. These are the sins involving the guilt of everlasting death. Then comes,

IV. The application for the direction of prayer according to the different sorts of sin thus distinguished. The prayer is supposed to be for life: *He shall ask, and He (God) shall give them life*. Life is to be asked of God. He is the God of life; he gives it when and to whom he pleases, and takes it away either by his constitution or providence, or both, as he thinks meet. In the case of a brother's sin, which is not (in the manner already mentioned) unto death, we may in faith and hope pray for him; and particularly for the life of soul and body. But, in the case of the sin unto death in the forementioned ways, we have no allowance to pray. Perhaps the Apostle's expression, *I do not say, that he shall pray for it*, may intend no more than, 'I have no promise for you in that case, no foundation for the prayer of faith.' 1. The laws of punitive justice must be executed, for the common safety and benefit of mankind: and even an offending brother in such a case may be resigned to public justice (which in the foundation of it is divine), and at the same time also to the mercy of God. 2. The removal of

evangelical penalties (as they may be called), or the prevention of death (which may seem to be so consequential upon, or inflicted for, some particular sin), can be prayed for only conditionally and provisionally, that is with proviso that it consist with the wisdom, will, and glory of God that they should be removed, and particularly such death prevented. 3. We cannot pray that the sins of the unbelieving and impenitent should, while they are such, be forgiven them, or that any mercy of life or soul, that supposes the forgiveness of sin, should be granted to them, while they continue such. 4. In case it should appear that any have committed the irremissible blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and the total apostasy from the illuminating convictive powers of the Christian religion, it should seem that they are not to be prayed for at all. *For what remains but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, to consume such adversaries?* Heb. X. 27. And these last seem to be the sins chiefly intended by the Apostle by the name of *sins unto death*. Then, 5. The Apostle seems to argue that there is a sin that is not unto death; thus, *All unrighteousness is sin* (v. 17); but were all unrighteousness unto death (since we have all some unrighteousness towards God or man, or both, in omitting or neglecting something that is their due), then we were all permanently bound over to death, and, since it is not so (the Christian brethren, generally speaking, having right to life), there must be a sin that is not to death. Though there is no venial sin (in the common acceptation), there is pardoned sin, sin that does not involve a plenary obligation to eternal death. If it were not so, there could be no justification nor continuance of the justified state. The gospel constitution of covenant abbreviates, abridges, or rescinds the guilt of sin.”

Let us now turn to our next step, which is to ...

IV. Construct a Summary Sheet of meaningful points to remember when troubled about this issue.

In this step we urge you to reread our entire Paper for two reasons ...

First, for the additional clarity which a second reading brings

Second, to make a Summary Sheets of meaningful “truths” that you can bring out and read whenever you are troubled by thoughts of this sin.

Lastly, we state ...

V. The Conclusion of the Matter.

We have shown you the truth about this sin and backed it up with Scripture and the commentaries of great Biblical authorities.

If you continue to be troubled by recurring bouts with this issue, you need to by and with the grace of God take charge of it.

Do not miss the point, there are only two options for you here:

Either you, through a regular and diligent use of the means of grace, allow the Holy Spirit to take control of your spiritual life ...

Or, you can do nothing and let Satan have a major influence over your spiritual life.

When deciding which to do, you should remember what your Lord has said to you ...

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5)

I hope no part of “*without Me you can do nothing*” is unclear to you.

So, again, if you remain troubled over this sin, you need to ...

Decide if you are going to be guided by Scripture and the teachings of our Lord, or be guided by the lies and accusations of Satan and your own “feelings”. [Note: This should really be a “no-brainer”!]

You need to go to God in prayer for help in *making and keeping* your decision.

You need to ask Him to forgive you for your repeated doubts, little faith, and unbelief.

You need to pray “I believe, help my unbelief”.

You need to decide whether you really believe the points on your Summary Sheet, and if you do, the next time you are troubled by thoughts of this sin, you need to pray to God and say to yourself ...

“I will not be troubled by this because I know and believe the Biblical truths on my Summary Sheet and I also know that the foundational basis of my salvation and my standing before God is the righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to my account, which nothing can even remotely shake.”

Now, as the Catechism says, go out and fulfill your “chief end” which is ...

“... to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone be the Glory