

Just What Is
**“The
Unpardonable
Sin”?**

by David C. Pack

Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly The Radio Church of God until 1968) until his death in 1986. Hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. God called him in the fall of 1926 and he was converted in the spring of 1927. Over the course of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, God revealed through him a great many true biblical doctrines, which had been lost to the Church through the centuries. After his death, his successors ceased to believe and teach these doctrines. Although copyright law prohibits The Restored Church of God from reproducing and distributing literature produced while he led the Worldwide Church of God, we are committed to the preservation and teaching of all of these truths!

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Printed in the United States of America

What is “the unpardonable sin”? Many worry that they have committed it. But just what *is* the sin that “shall not be forgiven”? Do only converted people commit it—or can non-Christians? The answers are not what you think.

Jesus spoke of a sin that “shall not be forgiven...neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt. 12:31-32). This sin is most often referred to as “the unpardonable sin.”

Widespread confusion surrounds this subject. So many people worry that they *may have* committed, or *did* commit, the unpardonable sin. Yet most have not known how to *recognize* the sin that “shall not be forgiven.”

As a longtime pastor who has worked with many thousands, I have counseled scores of people who were racked with fear, anxiety and concern that they were guilty of this sin. It was often very painful to watch confusion, misunderstanding and guilt unnecessarily grip people who still sincerely wanted to serve God, *after* believing they had committed this unforgivable sin. In many cases, they were absolutely *certain* that they were guilty of it. Invariably, after counseling with them, it was clear that they were not. But convincing them of this was sometimes not easy.

I have often had to explain that the very act of *being concerned* is its own proof that one has not gone far enough to be guilty of this sin. Still, many continued to agonize that they had been condemned by God—with no hope of being restored to the Christian path. It often took long hours—*much* counsel and explanation—to reassure them that they had not committed the unpardonable sin! I was not always able to convince them. Some still *gave up* seeking and obeying God because they had lost hope!

What then is this sin? Can one *know* if he has committed it—or *know* that there is still hope because he has not? These are vitally important questions—and they require clear, PLAIN answers!

Mass Deception

Over two billion people profess to be Christians. While they have slight differences in doctrine, they share generally similar beliefs.

The truth is, most never truly *study* the Bible. Many others never even open it. Most professing Christians have *no idea* what it teaches—on almost any subject. Their beliefs are derived from ASSUMPTIONS based on what they have been TOLD the Bible says.

This is perhaps most true about *what a Christian is*. Before the subject of the unpardonable sin can be understood, the definition of a Christian must be established.

Again, billions believe—PROFESS—that they are Christians. They can also readily give *their* definition of a Christian, but cannot give the *Bible* definition.

Certainly ALL who profess to be Christians want to be saved! This goal cannot be separated from either the question of what is a Christian or that of what is the unpardonable sin.

Pause a moment to consider these points: If one is not a *true* Christian, then the issue of the unpardonable sin may be largely irrelevant. This is something we will clarify later.

On the other hand, if one *is* a true Christian, but commits the unpardonable sin, however it is defined, he will *not* be saved. This much is not hard to understand—but it is very important.

So, understanding the sin that “shall not be forgiven” most certainly *is* relevant to the real Christian! *He* must be very careful not to commit this sin.

First, consider salvation from another viewpoint. If one *desires* to be saved, learns what he must be saved *from*, understands that salvation is a *gift*, but does not know *how* to receive it, what good does God’s offer do him? All of this has everything to do with what a Christian is. Do not be too sure you know the answer.

Surely no sincere person who understands even the most basic teachings of God thinks that He will save those who are *not* Christians (Acts 4:12). Yet almost no one understands the Bible definition of a Christian!

Since only *true* Christians will be saved, then we must know what IS a true Christian. As with any doctrine, we must examine what God’s Word teaches. Then we will be prepared to discuss the unpardonable sin.

So let’s understand how *God* defines a Christian.

What Is a Christian?

Is there a single verse to which we can turn that defines a Christian? There is! But it is not the popular idea taught in the so-called “Christian” world.

The apostle Paul wrote, “For as many as are *led by the Spirit of God*, THEY are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). A Christian is one who has the Holy

Spirit leading him. But is having God’s Spirit absolutely *essential* to being a Christian? A few verses earlier, Paul said, “But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, *he is none of His*” (vs. 9)!

It is that simple! One either has the Spirit of God, and *is* a Christian, or does *not* have it, and is *not* a Christian—is “none of His.” All those who are truly converted must have the Holy Spirit in them.

But what does this *mean*? And is this all there is to Christianity and conversion, with nothing more to understand?

Human beings do not have life inherent within them. They are not born with an immortal soul (Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 18:4, 20; Matt. 10:28). Since you are not immortal, your life will span a certain allotted time, after which you will die. That is absolute (Heb. 9:27). Unless God intervenes in your life, you have no future—no hope—beyond a limited time of about 70-80 years.

You *must* receive the Holy Spirit. But *how*?

Most believe that there are no requirements—no *conditions*—to being saved. This is not true. The following verses prove that there are *three pre-conditions* that must be met just to receive the Holy Spirit.

On the day that Christ established the New Testament Church, the apostle Peter gave a powerful sermon. It was so convicting that 3,000 were baptized. Before baptism, many had asked Peter, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). His instruction was, “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” This is God’s plain command to: (1) *Repent* and (2) *be baptized*—in this order—to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit! Mark 1:14-15 adds that Christ taught one must also (3) *believe the gospel* of the kingdom of God.

From baptism onward, the new convert is led by the Holy Spirit. Once we are ready to discuss the unpardonable sin, this will be critically important to remember.

What Repentance Means

To *repent* means to CHANGE. The repentant mind reflects a completely different, CHANGED attitude. It has gone from the way of pleasing the *self*, to seeking to please *God*. It wants to submit to God and His way!

Human nature is vanity, jealousy, lust, greed, envy, resentment, foolishness and more. It is the way of grasping for self—looking out for self. Notice: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God” (Rom. 8:7-8).

This passage shows that receiving God’s Spirit is crucial if one hopes to please God. Verse 6 had said, “For to be carnally minded is *death*; but to be SPIRITUALLY minded is *life* and *peace*.” The spiritually minded have the Holy

Spirit. Christ called God’s Spirit the “Spirit of truth” (John 15:26; 16:13). He said it would *lead* the convert “into all truth.”

Perhaps the most important truth that a Christian can be led to see is a proper understanding of himself—and the forces at work within his human nature. Ephesians 2:2 reveals that Satan is the “prince of the power of the air.” As the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), he broadcasts a “spirit of disobedience” into the masses around the world. His way is *opposite* to the way of God. He broadcasts a *spirit* of hostility and rebellion against all things that are of God. Satan teaches the way of “get,” instead of the way of “give” (Acts 20:35).

The converted, *spirit-led mind* resists this broadcast (I Pet. 5:9; Jms. 4:7). It is a mind that wants to grow. It exalts God, humbles itself and seeks to please God in *every* possible way. Such a mind wants to draw near to God through prayer, study, fasting, meditation and regularly exercising God’s Spirit—the five TOOLS of Christian growth! It abhors itself (Job 42:5-6) and sees itself as a vile piece of fleshly junk not worthy of God’s marvelous grace and mercy. Repentance is an ongoing, continuous ATTITUDE of wanting to change, of wanting to do better—to *grow*, *overcome* and become more like Christ on a daily basis.

The repentant mind “hungers and thirsts” after God’s righteousness (Matt. 5:6). It believes, through the practice of using *Christ’s own faith* (Eph. 2:8; Rev. 14:12), that Jesus is his personal Savior and that He has paid the death penalty (Rom. 6:23) for the new child of God, now no longer condemned.

The one who has just received God’s Spirit has been given a tiny bit of the MIND OF CHRIST and the *power* and *nature* of God. Peter wrote that Christians are “partakers of the DIVINE NATURE” (II Pet. 1:4), which is God’s. Human nature, once the sole custodian of the mind, is to be slowly *replaced* by God’s *divine nature* through the presence and growth of the Holy Spirit within us. Receiving God’s Spirit does not mean that one has suddenly lost human nature. That nature remains *present* and ACTIVE—in opposition to God’s nature. It is critical that we come to understand this ongoing battle within the converted mind—and how some misunderstand it and fall into believing that they can no longer be forgiven. (Read our booklet *Did God Create Human Nature?* to learn more.)

But some other important instructions from Christ must first be clarified.

Christians Obey God

Hundreds of millions of “Christians” assume that they will be saved at death, simply because they have “accepted Jesus” as Savior. This is not what the Bible says! As James 2:20 states, “FAITH [belief] without works is *dead*.”

Many who teach that there are no conditions for salvation often quote Romans 10. Verse 9 states, “That if you shall *confess* with your mouth *the Lord Jesus*, and shall *believe in your heart* that God has raised Him from the dead,

you shall be saved.” Verse 13 *appears* to make it even easier: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” What could be simpler for would-be Christians? And how often have you heard that all you must do is “believe in your heart”?

But there is much more to these verses than meets the eye!

Notice: “*Not* every one that says unto Me, *Lord, Lord*, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven [“of,” not “in,” heaven]; but he that *DOES the will of My Father* which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Paul wrote, “the *DOERS* of the law [God’s] shall be *justified*” (Rom. 2:13). Professing “the Lord Jesus” is not enough to be justified. Besides, *professing* is very different than *confessing* Him.

Jesus never taught that people should just “believe on Him” to receive salvation. When a young man asked Christ what he must do to have “eternal life”—receive salvation—Christ told him, “If you will enter into life, *KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS.*” Hearing this, and knowing that the man was rich, the disciples were shocked. They did not understand how obedience was possible and asked, “Who then can be saved?” Christ answered, “With men this is impossible; *but with God all things are possible*” (Matt. 19:17, 25-26).

Christians are required to obey God’s laws. That is the *truth* from His Word!

The false teachers and deceivers of this world’s Christianity will tell you that you *need not* keep God’s Law. They will tell you that it *cannot be done*—that it is *impossible*—and that you should not even try. Matthew 19:26 plainly says otherwise!

These “ministers” are basically saying, “Go right on sinning. It’s okay! God does not care, because He knows His law is too harsh for you to keep. And besides, Christ kept it *for* you. You are *already* justified, sanctified and spiritually perfect—because of what Jesus did.”

This reasoning is ludicrous and mocks Christ’s sacrifice. It attempts to prove that salvation is complete upon merely “accepting Jesus.” Far more people should be concerned with whether Christ *accepts them*. (Read our free booklets *What Do You Mean “Water Baptism”?* and *What Is True Conversion?* to understand the calling, repentance, baptism and conversion process.)

The book of Acts speaks of “the Holy Spirit, [which] God has given to them that *OBEY Him*” (Acts 5:32). God only gives His Spirit to those who practice His commands. Obedience to God is not only a *qualifier* for receiving eternal life, it is also absolutely essential to both receiving and *continuing to receive* the Spirit of God.

What sin is must also be established, for sin is the *opposite* of obedience. The apostle John wrote, “Sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4). But, on the other hand, Psalm 119:172 states, “...for all Your commandments are righteousness.”

We have seen that receiving God’s Spirit is preceded by repentance of having broken God’s Law, and baptism (Acts 2:38). At this point, a new spirit-

begotten life begins. The newly-begotten child of God is now an “*heir* of God, and *joint heir* with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).

Fruit Must be Developed

Many New Testament verses speak of Christians having the “mind of Christ” within them. This happens through the in-dwelling of God’s Spirit. But God’s Spirit does not sit static, bottled up and unproductive, inside the Christian. It is ACTIVE—not passive!

In this way, Christians are *directly* connected to Christ. You must realize this point. Christ told His disciples, “I am the true VINE, and My Father is the husbandman” (John 15:1). While the Father is the actual owner of the vineyard, Christians are connected to the Father through the Vine, which is Christ.

Now notice verse 2: “Every branch in Me that bears not fruit *He takes away*: and every branch that bears fruit, He purges it, that it may *bring forth more fruit*.” Yes, Christians must bear fruit. If they do not, the consequences are serious. They could be “taken away.” Christ explains further: “I am the vine, you are the branches [individual Christians]: He that abides in Me, and I in him, the same *brings forth much fruit*: for without Me you can do NOTHING. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (vs. 5-6).

This passage introduces two important points that must be comprehended: (1) The amount of fruit that Christians develop must increase, and (2) God “takes away” those who do not bear fruit “and casts them into the fire, and they are burned.” Of course, that *is* serious. It means that there is a point past which God no longer works with a person.

This would certainly not happen right away, after one sin or even a series of sins, but it does happen after a certain point. This is what the scripture says.

Understand this! God’s Spirit is much like a river. It moves—it flows, and PRODUCES! Earlier in John, Christ said, “He that believes on Me...out of his belly shall *flow rivers of living water*. But this spoke He of the SPIRIT, which they that believe on Him should receive” (7:38-39).

When Christians receive the Holy Spirit, it immediately becomes active—and productive—in their lives. Christ in them, as the Vine to which they are connected, produces “good works” of righteousness (Eph. 2:9-10). This means obeying God’s Law and bearing many kinds of fruit. Paul explained how the love of God is practiced in a Christian’s life: “And hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5). Galatians 5:22-23 lists eight more fruits of the Holy Spirit. All must be cultivated—*developed!*

The true Christian—the Spirit-led converted mind—must never become negligent and careless about practicing “*every word of the Bible*” (Luke 4:4).

The Bible warns of those who become lukewarm and slothful—passive—in following Christ. To those who fall into this attitude, there are many admonitions to “wake up” to the fact that they are drifting, and no longer *growing*!

Christians Set Apart by Truth

Now let’s return to the question of what a Christian is. We must not accept a partial or incomplete answer to this vital question. Remember, only the true Spirit-led Christian will receive eternal life—salvation!

Shortly before His crucifixion, Christ prayed, “I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil. They are *not of the world*, even as I am not of the world. *Sanctify them through Your truth: YOUR WORD IS TRUTH*” (John 17:15-17).

It is the TRUTH that sets the Christian apart (sanctifies him) from other people. He is not *of* the world and its ways, customs and traditions. It also means that he understands the truth about the unpardonable sin. How else could he know how to avoid it?

In Mark 7:7-8, Christ said, “Howbeit *in vain do they worship Me*, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the *commandment of God*, you hold the *tradition of men*.”

Virtually every command (and doctrine) of God has been counterfeited through popular, but false, *traditions*. This includes popular notions of the unforgivable sin. Many have accepted them without examining what the Bible says. Since the world does not even understand that I John 3:4 defines *basic* sin, how could it possibly understand the *unpardonable* sin?

Christ Explains Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

Throughout His ministry, Christ was attacked and accused by religious leaders who felt threatened by what He taught.

On one occasion, Christ had healed a blind and dumb, demon-possessed man. The onlookers were amazed when this man could suddenly see and speak. As a result, the scribes and Pharisees “went out, and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him” (Matt. 12:14). Shortly after this, a Pharisee confronted Christ with a question about where His power to perform this healing came from—and accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan: “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow does not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (vs. 24).

Christ knew exactly what was happening and saw their motives were to *deliberately* attack and accuse (vs. 25). So He explained how Satan’s kingdom could not be divided and *survive*—“stand.” He continued, “He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathers not with Me scatters abroad” (vs. 30).

Incidentally, this means that Christ’s Church is *unified*. Some become confused about this. Consider. Even Satan knows that his kingdom cannot

be divided and remain “standing.” Certainly, Christ is at least as smart as the devil! People either gather where *Christ* is gathering, or they are not part of His Church!

This background introduces Christ’s oft-misunderstood statement about the unforgivable sin. Let’s read it: “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit* shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, *it shall not be forgiven him*, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (vs. 31-32).

Mark’s account concludes in a slightly different way, so it is also helpful to read: “Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit has never forgiveness, but is in *danger of eternal damnation*” (3:28-29).

Matthew explains that “*all manner* of sin and blasphemy” SHALL be forgiven, but that “blasphemy and speaking against the Holy Spirit” are unpardonable—unforgivable. It is critical to know that the Greek word used for blasphemy is the same, whether it is against the Holy Spirit or the Son of man. The key must be *who* or *what* is spoken or blasphemed against, not the act itself.

What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Is it simply taking God’s name in vain—swearing? Is *any* form of swearing “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”?

The key to understanding this is to properly define the word *blaspheme*. The Greek word, here translated “blaspheme,” means “*intentional* indignity offered to God or sacred things.” This is important to grasp. INTENT is involved.

The scribes and Pharisees knew exactly what they were doing. Remember, they held a council for the specific purpose of *plotting* against Christ. Their actions were not a result of sudden anger or impulsive, short-sighted thinking. They had *intent*—pre-meditated and deliberate INTENT—to discredit and murder Christ, even though they knew He was sent from God and acted through God’s power!

Some sins are committed because they have been carefully thought out toward a particular end. Deliberate *planning* has been involved, as with the Pharisees. When such willful, pre-meditated *intent* comes into play, one is in grave “danger of eternal damnation.”

Many ask if non-Christians can commit the unpardonable sin. The Pharisees were certainly not converted—not Christians. Yet Christ said their intent placed them in danger of committing this sin. There is the answer!

It was in the context of instances where Jesus and the apostles carried out powerful miracles that all could see—healing the sick, cleansing lepers, raising the dead and casting out demons (Matt. 10:8)—that Christ warned how those who rejected these obvious miracles that only God can do could be in danger

of the unpardonable sin. This will become more important for vast numbers on Earth alive today to understand when powerful miracles foretold to come appear just before the Return of Christ.

Many religious leaders today, who *profess* to believe in Christ, are modern “Pharisees.” They *deliberately* misrepresent our doctrines—and *deliberately* call us false prophets. This Work of God is reaching people in all countries of the world in ever-increasing numbers. These false prophets, from the false “Christianity” of this world, love to accuse us of being false prophets, because they, like the scribes and Pharisees who were threatened by Christ’s teaching and healing, are threatened by the good works of truth that we are teaching.

Herein lies another irony that will be better understood later in the booklet. All who are still *concerned* that they have committed the unpardonable sin almost certainly have not. But many who are *not* concerned may either have committed it or are in danger of doing so!

Anyone can foolishly curse or use God’s name in vain, and almost immediately be sorry about it and repent. But the unpardonable sin is when a person *deliberately hardens* himself against God’s Spirit, and the power and guidance of that Spirit. Usually, such people become deceived (Heb. 3:13) early in this process, but later *willfully* choose to continue in their actions until they destroy both their conscience and any further desire to repent.

Willful Sin

Do not confuse WILLING sin with WILLFUL sin. Some, believing that they have committed the unpardonable sin, exclaim, “But I *willingly* committed this sin.” Certainly it is true that every time a person sins, they were *willing* to do it. But the Bible does not warn specifically about “willing” sin. Rather, it warns against “willful” sin. Of course, it does warn against *all* forms of sin.

Let’s now examine Hebrews 10:26-29 to begin to understand *willful* sin. This is where the misunderstood word is found: “For if we sin WILLFULLY after that we have received the *knowledge of the truth*, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has *done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*”

Willful sin has to do with ignoring important knowledge—TRUTH.

People quench the Holy Spirit by overriding the way it guides them over a long period of time! Hebrews 3:13 reveals that some become “*hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*” But this hardening process does not occur overnight. It takes time. People have to persistently *choke* God’s Spirit. Eventually, this ongoing action becomes “willful,” or premeditated, deliberate. Chapter 10, verse 29 explains that those who practice sin have “trodden

(Christ) under foot.” They have counted His “blood” as “unholy.” This leads to the all-important statement that they “have done despite unto the Spirit of grace [forgiveness].” The key is they have committed *willful* sin—meaning *full of will!*

Let’s consider for a moment the attitude of the Pharisees. John 8:30 records, “As He spoke these words, many believed on Him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, *If you continue in My word*, then are you My disciples indeed” (John 8:30-31).

This is basic Christian instruction. Christians believe in (on) Christ’s sacrifice, and *then* they practice—“continue in”—His word!

Some stop at the “believe on” stage. They do not go on to *practice* Christianity. They do not actively *copy* the life of Christ. Their thinking—and “Christianity”—comes from entirely different motives.

Six verses later, Christ confronted the very ones who just “believed on Him.” Notice how hostile and murderous their attitudes quickly became: “...but you seek to kill Me, because *My word* has no place in you...But now you seek to kill Me, a man that has told you *the truth*, which I have heard of God...And if I say *the truth*, why do you not believe Me?” (vs. 37, 40, 46).

These are extraordinary statements! They reflect the attitudes of so many today. Many who claim to “love Jesus” do not obey “His words.” These are deceived and unconverted. They have been seduced into believing in a false conversion. On the other hand, the few truly converted Christians today are seen as un-Christian by the world because they reject popular, but false, doctrines.

The Pharisees and certain others *appeared* to want to follow Christ—maybe even initially thought themselves sincere—but holding deceitful, murderous thoughts under the surface.

To intentionally plot, act or move against God’s Spirit is also to consciously *know* what you are doing in attributing the power of God to the devil. Christ was warning the Pharisees that this is what they were in danger of doing. When one deliberately—with knowledge—ignores, squelches, or quenches the warning pricks coming from the Holy Spirit within a converted mind, they are passing the threshold of the unpardonable sin. They are making a “willful” decision not to respond to God’s Spirit. This blasphemes the work of His Spirit.

Therefore, ANY sin that is continued (practiced) and remains unrepented of—by willful choice—becomes unpardonable. God will not forgive it because it has not been preceded by repentance!

But there is much more to understand!

The Battle in the Mind

Many Bible passages describe human nature. None is more powerful than Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: *who can know it?*”

Pause and think deeply about this verse. God says your mind is “deceitful *above all things*.” Though it is “*desperately* wicked”—and that is obviously *very bad*—it is even more deceitful. No wonder the verse concludes, “who can know it?”—or “who could possibly believe it is that bad?” Very few believe this of themselves. They have no idea of the great capacity within their own minds to deceive themselves about practically everything!

The greatest deception almost always involves compromise with sin. Peter recorded that Paul wrote “some things hard to be understood” (II Pet. 3:16). This is true. But there were times when God used Paul to write very clearly—and even poignantly and dramatically—about certain matters. The Christian conflict in overcoming sin is perhaps the greatest case-in-point.

Paul described the continual struggle within his mind as a WAR! This war is best introduced by the instruction he wrote to the Galatians: “*Walk in the Spirit*, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For *the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh*: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would” (5:16-17).

The Revised Standard Version puts verse 17 a little differently: “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these *are opposed to each other*, to prevent you from doing what you would.”

Make no mistake—Christianity *is* war! It is *not* a toboggan ride down a gentle slope. It is trudging *uphill*, battling the pulls of the flesh.

God’s Spirit *leads*. It never *possesses*, as would a demon spirit. It will not *force* you to do what is right, but will rather *lead* you in the right direction. Deceit and lack of vigilance can cause people to slip backwards into sin, often without noticing it.

The seventh chapter of Romans is virtually a textbook on how Christianity is a daily war within the mind. Let’s examine it.

Verse 7 states, “What shall we say then? IS THE LAW SIN? GOD FORBID. No, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I *had not known lust, except the law* had said, You shall not covet.” Paul understood that God’s Law is what showed him sin for what it was. He recognized that the law was “holy, and the commandment *holy, and just, and good*...For we know that the *law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin*” (vs. 12, 14).

Most “ministers” believe the Law *IS* sin—that it is *unholy, unjust and bad!* To this thinking, God inspired Paul to write, “God forbid.” Yet Paul explains that the carnal mind (Paul acknowledged he still had human nature) is naturally contrary to God’s Law (Rom. 8:7). This caused Paul to struggle continually with the impulses to do wrong, when the Holy Spirit within him told him to obey God’s spiritual Law: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) *dwells no good thing*: for to will [the desire to do what is right] is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would *I do not*: but the evil which I would not, *that I do*” (vs. 18-19).

Is Suicide Unpardonable?

This question often arises: What if one commits suicide—self murder? If one's very last thought and action was to commit this sin, can such a person be saved? In other words, was this person's decision, which ended his life in an *unrepentant* state, tantamount to committing the unforgivable sin?

In today's society, suicide is increasingly viewed as an acceptable means of solving one's problems. In some legal systems, medical professionals have been given the right to assist in the suicide of those whose conditions render them incapable of carrying out the act themselves. Suicide is slowly being rationalized, and even becoming honorable. Aside from the moral and ethical issues this raises on the human level, what does God say about suicide?

The Sixth Commandment states, "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). There is no distinction made between killing another person and killing oneself.

A person considering suicide has reached that point by allowing circumstances in his life to rule over him. Paul asked, "Know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). In verse 12, he exhorts us, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof"

In Matthew 22:39, Christ taught, "...You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*." In Ephesians 5:29, Paul stated, "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it..." A person contemplating suicide may *say* that he hates himself, but his real motivation is utter *self-love*, to the point that he totally disregards the feelings and needs of *others*, and the impact that his actions will have on his family and friends. In I Corinthians 13:5, Paul stated, "[Charity (love)] seeks not her own..." He also stated, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel [an unbeliever]" (I Tim. 5:8).

Those who commit suicide may receive the same judgment as those who permanently ignore any other sin. Their ultimate reward is shown in Revelation 21:8: "But the *fearful*, and *unbelieving*, and the abominable, and *murderers*, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the *second death*." James 4:17 draws the distinction at what one "knows" to be right.

The Bible clearly shows that the unpardonable sin is any sin unrepented of (I John 5:16). Killing is certainly sin—and self murder is no exception. One who kills himself is certainly at least in jeopardy of being left in an unrepentant condition before God. The Bible does not directly tell us whether God overlooks and forgives such an action because the person is no longer present and able to reconsider and repent.

Do not ever consider "chancing" that He will!

These verses picture a man doing battle—and at WAR! Paul continues to develop what he is describing. Now notice: “For *I delight in the law of God* after the inward man: But I see ANOTHER LAW in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and *bringing me into captivity to the law of sin* which is in my members (vs. 22-23).

Winning the War

In this verse, Paul introduces what he calls “another law”—“the law of sin.” He understood that two opposing laws confronted one another within the battlefield of his mind! This was a struggle Paul fought *after* being converted! He understood that God’s Spirit and his flesh were locked in a titanic struggle, from which could come only ONE WINNER!

At times, Paul felt overwhelmed with the need for God to help him achieve victory: “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the LAW OF SIN” (vs. 24-25). This describes a man locked in mortal combat!

Paul understood that only God could help him *defeat* the enemy that was his carnal mind! He knew that, on his own, he would have been defeated, and driven from the spiritual battlefield.

You are not different from the rest of God’s servants. What they faced, you face—and will continue to face throughout your conversion. Like these men, *you* can win the war. When you do, here is the marvelous, satisfying result: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2). Moffatt translates verse 1 this way: “Thus there is no *doom* now for those who are in Christ Jesus; the *law of the Spirit* brings the life which is in Christ Jesus, and that law has set me *free* from the *law of sin and death*.”

Savor this. Paul knew that he had not *deliberately* set out to disobey God. He was not guilty of WILLFUL disobedience. But at times he lost individual *battles* on the way to winning the overall *war*. This is what he is saying, and this is what will happen in *your* Christian struggle. Each time Paul sinned (yes, ministers and servants of God do also sin), he was certainly *willing* to do it—but he never sinned *willfully*. The same must always be true of you.

A single sin, or series of sins, does not define an entire life. The question must always be, “How is the whole *war* going?” I have seen people win a particular battle, only to lose the war—and have seen others lose three battles in a row, but go on to win the overall war. That is the key—and *goal*!

Never forget this great principle! It has everything to do with avoiding the unpardonable sin! For only through a yielded attitude of mind toward God will you finally master sin, which, as Paul also wrote, “does so easily beset us” (Heb. 12:1).

What Does *SAVED* Mean?

The popular belief about salvation is that it is achieved at the moment of conversion. As previously mentioned, much is said of how “Christ did it all for you,” or “righteousness is *imputed* to your life—it is not *actual*.” Of course, if this general idea were true, salvation would be easy—it would require no *effort*. This is *not* what the Bible teaches!

We need to briefly examine what salvation is. There is so much confusion and misunderstanding about this most important subject in God’s Word. This knowledge is critical to comprehending why some do not understand the unpardonable sin. Just thinking that they are *saved now* makes any concern about committing an unforgivable sin confusing.

Let’s examine several verses in Romans 5 that explain how God’s mercy is obtained.

First, verse 6 states, “For when we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Before conversion, you are “without strength.” You have no power to do *anything* about your circumstances. Christ’s intervention is necessary.

Now verse 8: “But God commends [begins] His love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us.” There is nothing that you or I did to deserve Christ’s sacrifice. Out of love (John 3:16), God sent Christ to give Himself while we were still living in and practicing sin.

Next verse 9: “Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be *SAVED* from wrath [the death penalty] through Him.” Recognize that only our *PAST* is justified (made right) by the blood of Christ. His blood has literally “saved” us from the “wrath” of God—the death penalty (Rom. 6:23).

Finally, verse 10: “For if, when we *were enemies*, we were *reconciled* to God *by the death* of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be *SAVED BY HIS LIFE*.” Once our past is “reconciled,” we can have a relationship with God, because sin no longer cuts us off from Him. The barrier of sin (Isa. 59:1-2) has been removed. The law no longer holds any claim over our lives!

But the terms *reconciled* and *justified* are not the same as *saved*. These terms come into play upon repentance and acceptance of Christ as Savior. That event wipes our past clean. But it does nothing about our *future*. Justification and reconciliation are not the equivalent of the gift of salvation. Christ’s blood, of and by itself, gives no one salvation.

A Christian is “*JUSTIFIED*” when his past sins are forgiven (Rom. 3:24-25). He remains on the path to salvation “through *SANCTIFICATION* of the Spirit” (II Thes. 2:13). Sanctification means *a setting apart for a holy use or purpose*. God’s Spirit, within the begotten mind, sanctifies the believer.

You now know that you are saved by Christ’s *LIFE*. Did you notice the words “shall be” before that phrase in Romans 5:10? Read it again. It is written in the *future* tense, not the past or present tense! It means that we

are *not yet* saved, but we *are* forgiven. Salvation is something that “shall” happen in the future. The verse does not say that we are “now saved,” but rather *shall be*.

Will you believe men? Or will you believe the PLAIN WORDS of the Bible?

Grasp this! Salvation does not happen at the moment of justification and reconciliation. Rather, this is the moment the salvation process *begins*.

“Saved”—Past, Present, Future

It is important to understand exactly *when* a Christian is saved. This is a subject of great confusion and misunderstanding. Comprehending it is critical to everything about salvation.

The Bible teaches that you are saved in *three distinct ways*. All of them represent what is best described as the *process* of salvation.

Romans 6:23 explained that the wages of sin is death. At repentance, baptism and conversion, a Christian is forgiven by the blood of Christ and is immediately *saved* from the penalty of PAST sins. So, in one sense, it can be said that the person has been “saved,” *at that moment*, from DEATH!

But this is not the whole story. There are two more applications of when and how a person is saved.

The word *salvation* is derived from the word *saved*. So the second way is the most obvious, and it is the actual receiving of eternal life, the pinnacle of salvation. This happens at the resurrection of the dead in Christ (I Cor. 15:50-55; I Thes. 4:13-18), upon His Return. This is FUTURE!

But no one receives *eternal* salvation NOW. All must first undergo a life of trial, testing, learning, growing and overcoming.

So then, the third way one is saved is that he is “being saved”—an ongoing process—throughout his lifetime. Many verses reveal that nothing is automatic simply because conversion has taken place. This is why Paul says, in II Corinthians 2:15 (RSV), that Christians “are being saved.” This is written in the present progressive tense, because salvation is a PROCESS. To believe that salvation is complete upon conversion insults God. It ignores all of the verses we have read about obeying Him!

Besides, if you were automatically saved at conversion, then what would be the point of living out the remainder of your natural life? If salvation is finished at the moment of conversion, why does God not simply take you directly to salvation after you “accept the blood of Jesus”? (To learn more about this subject, read our booklet *Just What Is Salvation?*)

Conversion Is Not Easy

Christ taught His followers that Christians must PERSEVERE in this life. They must demonstrate STICK-TO-IT-IVENESS. He told His disciples, “But he that shall ENDURE unto the end, the same shall be *saved*” (Matt. 24:13; 10:22).

Of course, this is not what professing Christians are being taught. Most see conversion as a two-week cruise on the “love boat.” How many Christians do you know who actively talk about using—EXERCISING!—God’s Spirit within them to overcome and grow?

Many do talk about “having” the Holy Spirit, and even acknowledge that it is a spirit of “power” (II Tim. 1:7), but almost none talk about tapping and utilizing that Spirit to win the *war* (II Cor. 10:3-4) of salvation. Take time to read how Paul exhorted Timothy to understand that he was a “soldier” (II Tim. 2:3-4). Soldiers fight in wars. He also told Timothy to “war a *good warfare*” (I Tim. 1:18).

This principle applies to more than Timothy—it means you!

Now look at what Paul told the Ephesians: “Finally, my brethren, be *strong* in the Lord, and in the *power* of His might. Put on the **WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD**, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we *wrestle* not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness [wicked spirits] in high places” (6:10-12).

Yes, Christians battle against Satan. When they are under temptation, they “wrestle” with him and his demons (“wicked spirits”). But this is done through the “power of *His* (God’s) might,” not their own!

Why do most people think that salvation is easy? This presents a great irony: Many either think they have unknowingly, almost incidentally, committed the unpardonable sin, and have lost out on eternal life—or that being saved is practically automatic and that the danger of committing the unpardonable sin is either nil or extremely remote. Neither is true!

Notice further what Christ taught His disciples: “Enter you in at the **STRAIT** [narrow, difficult] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to *destruction*, and *many* there be which go in thereat: Because **STRAIT** is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and *few* there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

Does it sound like Christ wants you to believe that salvation is easy, that there is no *struggle* involved? Obviously not! Salvation represents the narrow, difficult—“strait”—**WAY**!

On the other hand, He does not want you to become a *defeatist* who quickly thinks, at the first onset of sin, that you have failed in the Christian path! He wants you to rely on Him and say with Paul, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, *but Christ lives in me*: and the life which I now live in the flesh *I live by the faith of the Son of God*, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). This is not a picture of one who would believe himself to be quickly condemned by God because of almost any infraction.

After internalizing that, you must still follow Christ’s command to “*Strive* to enter in at the *strait gate*” (Luke 13:24). The Greek word for *strive* can also be translated *agonize*. Sometimes the battle *can* seem like, or even *be*, agony.

This is why Paul wrote the Hebrews, “You have not yet *resisted unto blood*, STRIVING [agonizing] against sin” (12:4). This depicts an all-out, ferocious struggle against sin. There is no better verse in the Bible that demonstrates how Christianity is truly a war against the pulls of the flesh and the temptations of Satan and this world.

Paul also wrote the Colossians, “Whereunto I also labour, STRIVING according to His working, which works in me *mightily*” (1:29). Paul did the striving, but he only succeeded through the power of God that worked in him “mightily.” Do not forget this in *your* struggle with sin.

When you need God’s extra help, because you are not overcoming as you should, ASK HIM! Hebrews 4:16 tells us to “*Come boldly* unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to HELP in time of NEED.” There will be many times that you will “need” God’s “help.”

Keep your eyes on God. Remain in instant contact with Him. Ask Him for SPECIAL POWER when you need it. When you have tripped up—sinned—it is not the end for you, but rather it is a signal that you were not vigilant or close enough to God. Determine to get closer to Him through much fervent prayer and deep, intensive Bible study. Remember to “ASK and it shall be *given* you; SEEK and you shall *find*; KNOCK and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt. 7:7). Christ, your High Priest (Heb. 4:15), tells you that He will not abandon you, because He “was in all points *tempted like as we are*” (same verse).

Resisting Temptation

Christ taught His disciples to understand the pulls of human nature at work within them: “And He said, That which comes out of the man, that defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:20-22).

These same attitudes, pulls of the flesh and wrong patterns of conduct are at work within *everyone*. They leave us fertile for temptation by Satan, the master “tempter” (Matt. 4:3).

Therefore, *many* temptations will be thrown at you throughout life. You must successfully resist them. They will often come when you least expect them, and the devil will try to strike you where you are weakest—most vulnerable—least prepared. You must always be on guard—READY! Do not assume that you are stronger or more prepared than you think. Consider Paul’s warning: “Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (I Cor. 10:12).

The apostle James explained how temptation can turn into sin: “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of *his own lust*, and *enticed*. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death” (1:14-15). Put out wrong thoughts and attitudes. Do not ease up or assume victory before these feelings are gone!

Peter added, “Be SOBER, be VIGILANT; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour” (I Pet. 5:8). He continued, “Whom *resist steadfast* in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (vs. 9). And James added, “*Submit* yourselves therefore to God. *Resist* the devil, and he will flee from you” (4:7). (Our booklet *Who Is the Devil?* explains more about this adversary.)

The second part of this verse offers encouragement: You are not alone in your struggle to overcome sin. All human beings face the same problems. Understand! “*All* have sinned” (Rom. 3:23) and “sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4). *All* have broken God’s Law. But God promises that “sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom. 6:14).

Remember how Paul explained forces at work within him: “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I...For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:15, 19).

This pictures what we all face. When you feel like this, *battle!* RESIST! Use God’s power within you. Call out to Him for help and always remember that you must “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (Jms. 4:8).

Certainly, fulfilling this verse in your own life is not an overnight process. It takes much time and effort.

Seek God through earnest, regular, believing prayer. Commune with Him daily. Pray without ceasing (I Thes. 5:17-18). Study your Bible (Matt. 4:4). Drink it in as God’s Word spoken to you—as though God were talking to you *personally*, in the same way you talk to Him through prayer!

Above all, do not get discouraged and give up when the temptation is severe and appears unrelenting. Never forget that “There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13).

This is God’s sure promise to all who strive to overcome!

But What If One Sins?

We have seen that all human beings sin. The newly-begotten Christian must expect this to continue after baptism. Perfection is not achieved overnight by a “profession of faith,” or by repentance and baptism alone. There is one lengthy series of verses that is very helpful on the subject of forgiveness and related matters.

The following passage bears instruction—but only after first reading *all* of it: “...and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ...that your joy may be full. This then is the message...that God is

light, and in Him is no darkness at all. *If* we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But *if* we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. *If* we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. *If* we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. *If* we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And He is the propitiation for our sins” (I John 1:3-2:2).

This is important instruction. Examine it verse by verse with an open Bible.

Verse 3: John, the last living apostle in the Bible, speaking on behalf of all the apostles (“we”), explains that a Christian’s true fellowship is on the spiritual plane with Christ and the Father. It is through God that Christians have real, true fellowship with one another, within His Church.

Verse 4: John’s purpose was to show people the source of real, permanent fullness of joy.

Verse 5: The true God represents light—He “is light”—and there is nothing dark about what He does or who He is. The person who fellowships with the true God of the Bible wants to come to the light and come out of all the darkness of this world—and sin!

Verse 6: This is the first of five verses beginning with the word “if.” The use of this word always indicates conditions—in this case, conditions involving free moral agency. Many people claim to “know” God, to fellowship with Him, but they neither know nor practice His truth in their lives. He says this makes them plain liars.

Verse 7: Christ’s blood continues to cover all the sins—the errors, mistakes, weaknesses and flaws—of the person who is striving to walk in God’s truth, and in fellowship with other true Christians. Though they usually do not mean to, Christians slip, and have to get back on track.

Verse 8: This verse is very important. Christians need to acknowledge that they sin. It has been my experience that self-deceit (Jer. 17:9) is the single biggest reason *why* most people do not grow and overcome as they should. *Self-deceit*, lying to yourself, is still deceit. There is no place for the truth to dwell in such a person! Remember, sin carries its own deceit (Heb. 3:13).

Verses 9-10: To those who acknowledge and confess their sins, these verses are self-evident. Christ is there to wash—to clean up—the true Christian when he has momentarily strayed from the light of living by God’s word and law. A Christian must *learn* to overcome. Like learning to play the piano or paint a beautiful picture, this does not happen overnight! The Greek word for “cleanses” (vs. 9), *katharizo*, is written in the present progressive tense, not the past tense. Cleansing is a process that always requires forgiveness from God.

Many worry that God will only forgive them once or a few times. Yet Christ told the disciples that they should forgive others “seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:21-22). That is many times! If God tells human beings to be willing to forgive others *that* many times, and that His willingness to forgive us is based upon this principle (Matt. 6:12), then how could He be willing to do less?

Of course, God would never hold Himself to a lower standard than He requires of His human servants. He *will* forgive many times, if necessary, as long as the person continues in his struggle against sin.

Chapter 2, Verses 1-2: John uses the endearing term, “My little children,” because this is how God looks at His begotten sons and daughters. We are all *little children* in His sight. He knows that He needs to watch over us like human parents watch over their own small children. It is God’s intention that we not sin, yet, when we do, Christ stands before the Father as our “Advocate.” As our High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16), Jesus literally “roots” for His younger brothers and sisters in the presence of the Father. He understands what it is like to battle with and overcome sin, and He offers strength and forgiveness to those who acknowledge that they need both.

The first six verses in I John 2 describe the obedient Christian as one who keeps God’s Law and strives to walk and live the same life that Jesus did (vs. 6). He is one who “keeps His [God’s] word,” striving not to compromise. He always seeks to do what is right.

When you stumble, and occasionally *fall down*, remember the words of David in Psalm 37:23-24: “The steps of a good man are ordered [established] by the LORD... Though he *fall*, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD *upholds him with His hand.*” Like a parent lifting or steadying a child, God regularly picks up and upholds His children. Let God’s wonderful promise encourage you when you feel discouraged because you have fallen.

On the Path

The converted person has *set* his mind on the road to salvation. He has made his *life’s goal* the pursuit of ETERNAL LIFE. He knows he is properly equipped by God to succeed. He is determined to utilize the tools of Christian growth, recognizing that these, coupled with the in-dwelling of God’s Holy Spirit, are sufficient to keep him on the right path. His whole heart, mind, soul and being wants to please God, submit to Him and actively practice the way of *giving, sharing, serving* and *love* as a WAY OF LIFE!

He recognizes that he will periodically sin. He may overdrink, lose his temper, tell a lie, or otherwise transgress God’s Law in some clear incident of sin. But his desire is to repent and seek God. While he committed the sin KNOWINGLY—and WILLINGLY—it never became WILLFUL. He determines to use more of God’s Spirit and be more watchful—and he wants to stay on the path to eternal life!

The critical factor is that he continues to ask for forgiveness and for more of God’s Spirit, to help him grow and overcome—for *the remainder of his life!*

Explaining the Unpardonable Sin

Now we are ready to describe exactly what the unpardonable sin is.

The book of Hebrews contains several admonitions—WARNINGS—about this sin. They leave little room for misunderstanding.

Sometimes people make the deliberate decision to *change* their overall LIFE’S GOAL! Hebrews 6:4-6 demonstrates that they become UNABLE TO REPENT (Hebrews 12:17 shows that this was the case with Esau). They once had God’s Spirit, but let it completely *slip away*. Paul paints a sobering picture: “For *it is impossible* for those who were *once enlightened*, and have *tasted of the heavenly gift*, and were made *partakers of the Holy Spirit*, and have *tasted the good word of God*, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall *fall away*, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.” For such “there remains no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26).

I have known many who once “tasted the good word of God,” and had been “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” who ceased to be “enlightened.” They fell away from God *and salvation*. In verse 4, Paul states that “it is impossible” for these people to recover!

This is because, in the process of falling away, a person loses all *desire* to repent and change. Some *decide* to return to the world and to practice carnal-minded thoughts. They once had God’s Spirit actively working in them, but they made a determined, willful decision to *turn* from God and His way. These people no longer strive to respond to God’s Spirit, but rather have CHOSEN a whole new direction of life—back to the ways of human nature and the world! (I am not talking about one who, as some believe, made a *single* mistake causing God to throw him aside though he still desired to seek and obey Him.)

Now read another *express warning* about how some can *unwittingly choose* to commit the unpardonable sin: “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: *Looking diligently* lest any man *fall of the grace of God* [forgiveness is no longer available]; lest any ROOT OF BITTERNESS springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled” (12:14-15).

When you feel thoughts of resentment, you are in grave danger. Never allow them to remain. Many times I have seen this deadly poison destroy people. Resentment can easily well up in those who feel they are *victims* of injustice. Sometimes a very small “grievance” can be amplified into something much bigger. It has been my sad experience that human nature will only too readily cause people to believe themselves VICTIMS. Many times, this happens when a minister corrects one over issues that do not *seem* or *feel* right to the one corrected. Angry rebellion, leading directly to bitterness, can result.

Now understand! The Bible reveals that there are TWO DISTINCT WAYS in which the unforgivable sin may be committed. Hebrews describes them both, and we have just identified the FIRST WAY.

In summary, the first way that the unpardonable sin is committed is by a DELIBERATE CHOICE to depart from God. (Sometimes this can be the *choice* to harbor bitterness.)

Paul also described those who would live the Christian way in a *negligent* manner! This is the SECOND WAY that the unpardonable sin can be committed by a Christian. Paul wrote, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them SLIP [Greek: to run out of a leaking vessel]. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we NEGLECT so great salvation...?” (Heb. 2:1-3).

Be careful! This is a caution to all. Salvation is not easy—not *automatic*. Some can *neglect* their conversion. As a result, it can *slip away*, because important understanding and continual need for action was allowed to slowly “leak” from their lives.

This is serious! The ministers of this world teach that people are *under grace*—that they are *already saved* in this life—that they cannot fall away or abort because of misconduct, sin. How wrong this is!

Never overly focus on pleasure, material pursuits and the cares of this world. They will choke you into slowly *neglecting* all the things that Christians must do.

Here is what Paul wrote the Colossians: “If you then be risen with Christ, *seek those things which are above*, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. *Set your affection on things above*, not on things on the earth” (3:1-2). This is God’s formula for being certain that you never drift into neglecting your salvation—and into the unpardonable sin. Christ said that no one can “serve two masters.” You cannot serve God while also desiring to be part of the world.

Remember that Christ said, “But he that *endures* unto the *end*, the same shall be *saved*” (Matt. 24:13; 10:22). Christianity is an ENDURANCE TEST! There is nothing easy about it. A true Christian can abort in this lifetime, if he does not continue in the right path. No one is permanently saved at conversion. Christ said (twice) that His servants must “endure to the end” of their lives. Now ask: What is the point of this statement if salvation is automatic upon accepting Christ? You must still be seeking God at the end of your life—or at the time of Christ’s Return—whichever comes first!

The Bible does not teach “once saved, always saved.” Do not be confused by soothing words of deceit from those who claim to represent Christ. God has standards. They must be met. James 4:17 states, “Therefore to him that KNOWS to do good, and does it not, to him it is SIN.” The key is *knowledge*!

These are the plain words of the Bible. Each verse cited here is critical and must be carefully read to even begin recognizing the obligations that

God places on His servants. Do not be like so many who easily dismiss them, falsely trusting that they are saved because they have “Jesus in their heart.”

This world’s professing “Christian” ministers teach an unscriptural, false “salvation” of going to heaven, instead of the truth—that this life is to prepare us for **RULERSHIP**. They ignore the verses that we have just examined, because they do not want to be responsible for having to *do* anything. The destiny of all God’s Spirit-led sons is to be **BORN** into His kingdom—to become Spirit-composed, having eternal life inherent within them in the Family of God.

How does “already saved” fit with a life of suffering, growing, obedience to God (Psa. 34:19), and sometimes intense *persecution* (John 15:20; II Tim. 3:12)?

Do not fall for the siren song of “just believe.” It is the greatest single deception that spiritually blind “Christian” theologians have foisted upon an unsuspecting world!

Never Give Up!

Now you understand that the unpardonable sin involves willful, deliberate, premeditated sin, based on a clear and *final* decision to commit ANY kind of sin and to *remain* in it. The key—the core—attitude is **WILLFUL**. Yes, many do sin *willingly*—but you have seen that this is far different from sinning *willfully*.

Every time a person sins, they are, of course, *willing* to do what they did, but they were usually overcome by some kind of temptation or circumstance that allowed them to slip. They were soon very sorry for what they had done. While this does not ever lessen the seriousness of sin, if one is sorry about his actions and wants to change—wants to repent and be forgiven—and this is accompanied by the determination to do better the next time, then he is far from having committed the unpardonable sin. God is merciful and even *eager* to forgive you, upon your repentance! He wants you, and *all* those that He calls, to succeed (II Pet. 3:9; I Tim. 2:4). God does not want *anyone* to fail!

Again, I have spent many hours in my ministry counseling people who thought that they had committed the unpardonable sin. There is not sufficient space in this booklet to tell you about them. Some have even sought to get me to tell them that they had committed this sin, when they had not. This was because they had grown tired of struggling with the pulls of their flesh. Performing good works and obedience to God had left them “weary” (Gal. 6:9; II Thes. 3:13). These were the people who were most difficult to convince. While they had not yet committed it—because they were, in fact, still concerned about it—they *were growing close* because they wanted me to hand them a license to give up. They wanted to be told there was no hope for them, so that they could shed the last vestige of guilt that they were feeling—and continue in sin!

Sometimes I was able to help these people and sometimes I was not. In the end, obedience to God always remained their choice. It is the same with **YOU**!

So, if you are **CONCERNED** that you have committed the unpardonable sin, then you still *care* and, therefore, have *not* committed it! If you have *not*

willfully, deliberately, turned from Christ, then you have *not* committed the unpardonable sin! If you have yielded to temptation, and broken one or more of God’s laws, acknowledge and confess it to Him. You can still repent, change and continue on the path to eternal life in the kingdom of God!

Do not give up! Do not quit! Solomon wrote, “If you *faint* in the day of adversity, *your strength is small*” (Prov. 24:10), and “For a just man *falls* seven [here, the Hebrew word means *many*] times, and *rises up again*: but the wicked shall fall into mischief” (vs. 16). Do not ever “draw back” (Heb. 10:38-39) from continuing to serve God.

Never forget that Christ said, “But he that shall ENDURE unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13). You are *not* automatically saved at baptism and conversion. If you fall down, get up—seek God, repent and go on! *God* will continue to uphold you, if *you* continue to ENDURE!

Personal Counsel

If God is calling you to repentance and conversion (and our article “Are You Being Called?” will clear up any uncertainty), The Restored Church of God can have one of God’s representatives contact you to discuss this matter either in person or on the phone. But they will never contact you unless you request that they do.

They are available to help you with questions about the Bible, repentance, baptism and conversion. But contacting us is a decision YOU must make.

Willful Sin Explained

To conclude his booklet *What Do You Mean – “The Unpardonable Sin”?* Herbert W. Armstrong wrote this under the subhead “Sinning Willfully”:

“Now, finally notice the two passages in the book of Hebrews, speaking of sinning WILLFULLY, and being IMPOSSIBLE to repent...

“Notice: ‘For if we sin WILLFULLY after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, *who hath trodden under foot* the Son of GOD, *and hath counted the blood* of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, *an unholy thing*, and HATH DONE DESPITE UNTO *THE SPIRIT* of grace?’ (Hebrews 10:26-29.)

“I have fully explained in this booklet the meaning of WILLFUL sinning. This passage refers only to those who have become truly converted—received God’s Holy Spirit. The ‘WE’ refers to converted Christians. None can, in fact, come to the real ‘KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH,’ until they have received the Holy Spirit to open their minds to that spiritual TRUTH (I Cor. 2:9-11, 14).

“But notice, this sinning WILLFULLY is connected with doing ‘despite to the SPIRIT of grace’—certainly dangerously close to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

“However, as explained above, most sins committed by begotten children of God are NOT in this category!

“The other passage is this:

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift—the Holy Spirit—‘and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, IF they shall *fall away*, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame’ (Heb. 6:4-6).

“Actually, if you understand one phrase here, it is self-explanatory. That is this: ‘For it is IMPOSSIBLE...IF they shall *fall away*, TO RENEW THEM AGAIN UNTO REPENTANCE.’

“Now there may be *degrees* toward ‘falling away.’ How shall we know how far is here meant? By the next words: whenever it becomes IMPOSSIBLE to renew one to repentance—well, he has ‘fallen away’—completely!

“Remember, God *grants* repentance (Acts 11:18; 5:31). Yet of course God never *forces* repentance on one. When one has come to the place where he WON’T—can’t—has totally, completely, lost all desire to repent—is UNABLE to repent—he has ‘fallen away.’

“And of course this is NOT speaking of UNCONVERTED people—those who never had been converted—but only those who had been.

“The TEST is this: IF and WHEN one really does DESIRE to repent—*does* feel completely disgusted and abhorrent of himself—does DESIRE to repent and get back into God’s grace—*HE CAN!*

“What about the ‘backslider’—as some phrase it? If he at any time becomes *willing* to repent—comes to DESIRE to repent and return to God’s WAY, the gracious, merciful, all-loving GOD *will* forgive—and *will grant* full repentance.

“God inspired James to close his book with this important admonition:

“My brothers, if anyone of *you* goes astray from the truth and someone brings him back, understand that he who brings a sinner back from the error of his way saves the man’s soul from death and hides a host of his own sins’ (James 5:19-20—*Moffatt* translation).

“That’s the final answer. If he’s committed the unpardonable sin, he won’t want to. If he *wants* to—if he does REPENT, and WANTS the contact reestablished with God—*HE CAN!*

“And how about one never yet truly converted—or one who *thought* he was, but had only a false ‘conversion’ and backslid? Well, *whenever* he is willing to really REPENT, and WANTS to find Christ—*HE CAN*—if he just WILL!

“HOW WONDERFUL are the ways of GOD!”

The following literature expands on topics discussed in this booklet:

- Did God Create Human Nature?
- Just What *Is* Salvation?
- What Do You *Mean* “Water Baptism”?
- What Is *True* Conversion?
- Who Is the Devil?
- “Are You Being Called?”

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