

July 2013

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THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

where the unpardonable sin is discussed.

- 1) The Epistle to the Hebrews
- 2) The Gospels (recorded in parallel accounts)

Now **in the Book of Hebrews** the Apostle **Paul** discussed the unpardonable sin (in several places in this one book) from a very specific point of view. Paul was concerned for the Jews in **the Church** who were in the process of "leaving their first love" (like Revelation 2:4), and who were thus in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. So Paul made no attempt to objectively explain the facts about the unpardonable sin. No, Paul addressed the unpardonable sin from the very subjective perspective of members of God's Church.

Paul did NOT discuss how just anybody might be in danger of committing this sin. Paul ONLY discussed how a converted member of God's Church could commit the unpardonable sin. Paul wasn't concerned about explaining how someone out in the world might commit this sin. His total concern was for people in the Church. Paul wrote this letter to the people who had been in God's Church the longest at that point in time, the Jews in the Church.

To summarize this point: the passages about the unpardonable sin in the Book of Hebrews focus exclusively on the Church. When Paul wrote these verses, he was not in any way thinking of people outside of the Church!

In the gospels (recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke), on the other hand, Jesus Christ was NOT dealing with Church members! Jesus Christ was throughout His ministry dealing with unconverted people! His ministry was to the unconverted! So when Jesus Christ spoke about the unpardonable sin, then He did so from the perspective of how unconverted people might commit this sin!

So before we look at some of those verses, we need to understand these two points:

- 1) Jesus Christ explained how UNCONVERTED people might commit the unpardonable sin. His whole ministry was directed at the unconverted. But at no stage during His ministry did Jesus Christ ever focus specifically on how a converted person might possibly commit the unpardonable sin; Jesus Christ wasn't dealing with converted people. However, in practice the things Jesus Christ said about unconverted people can certainly also apply to people who leave the Church of God. Christ's statements are focused on the unconverted, but they are not restricted to unconverted people.
- 2) The Apostle Paul wrote to CONVERTED Church members. And Paul made no attempt to explain how an unconverted person might commit the unpardonable sin. Paul did his best to explain two ways that a converted person might commit this sin: either by neglect or willfully.

So we need to understand that the statements in the Book of Hebrews and the statements recorded in the gospels are directed at **two completely different audiences**. Mr. Armstrong understood this, as evidenced by the statement that I have quoted. But he didn't thoroughly explain this matter.

Let's briefly look at these two points.

PAUL WRITING TO THE JEWISH CHURCH MEMBERS

Hebrews 2:3 = how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ...

Hebrews 3:8 = don't harden your heart ...

Hebrews 6:4-6 = it is impossible to be renewed if they fall away ...

Hebrews 10:26 = if we sin willfully there remains no more sacrifice ...

Hebrews 12:15 = so guard against ever developing a root of bitterness ...

At no stage in this discussion in the Book of Hebrews do the unconverted people in the world ever enter the picture. This is not an objective expounding of the subject of the unpardonable sin. This is a very subjective and emotionally highly charged appeal by the Apostle Paul to the Jews in the Church to guard against committing the unpardonable sin. So in these verses in the Book of Hebrews the Apostle Paul explained ONLY THOSE THINGS that were in fact applicable to the people to whom he wrote this letter.

Paul was not at all concerned in this letter about whether or not unconverted people might also in certain circumstances be in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. Why should he possibly have written anything at all regarding the dangers some unconverted people might face? Why? The unconverted people in the world weren't going to get this letter; the letter was going to Church members.

JESUS CHRIST SPEAKING TO UNCONVERTED PHARISEES

The occasion in question here is recorded in Matthew 12:22-32 and in Mark 3:22-30 and in Luke 11:14-20.

Jesus Christ was not directing His comments here to converted Church members. Jesus Christ said these things to unconverted people, to people who were plotting to kill Him. As Mr. Armstrong said in the article:

"To these **scribes** and **Pharisees** -- and to the crowds -- Jesus replied: '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 **hath never forgiveness**, but IS IN DANGER OF eternal damnation' (Mark 3:28-29)."

Not only did Jesus Christ direct these comments to the unconverted scribes and Pharisees, but He also directed these comments to **the crowds that followed Him!** That is Mr. Armstrong's point here! I'm simply quoting Mr. Armstrong's article.

So HOW were the unconverted people who are addressed here in danger of committing the unpardonable sin? For them this was not a case of "neglecting" something because they were not yet in the Church. Neither was it a case of them sinning willfully after having previously turned their backs on the world's sinful ways, because these people had never yet stopped sinning; they had never yet come out of the world.

So the two ways in which Paul explained Church members could perhaps commit the unpardonable sin

(i.e. neglect or sinning willfully) did not apply to this group of people. So how were these unconverted people in danger of committing the unpardonable sin?

The situation in Matthew 12 was as follows: Jesus Christ had cast out a demon. He did this by the power of God. The perverse Pharisees then accused Jesus Christ of casting out demons by Satan's power. **THE PHARISEES KNEW THIS WAS NOT TRUE!** They in effect knowingly attributed something that was done by the power of God to Satan. And in response to this Jesus Christ said:

"Wherefore I say unto you, **All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven** unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy* Ghost **shall not be forgiven** unto men." (Matthew 12:31)

All kinds of sins and of blasphemies can be forgiven! It is not blasphemies per se that are the problem here. It is really **a very specific kind of blasphemy** that is the real problem here. As the next verse says:

"And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, **it shall be forgiven** him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, **it shall not be forgiven** him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come." (Matthew 12:32)

It is not that people speak "against the Holy Spirit", as if the Holy Spirit was an individual. What this expression means is this: the Holy Spirit is THE POWER that flows out of both God the Father and Jesus Christ (see Revelation 22:1). So "speaking against the Holy Spirit" simply means: **ATTRIBUTING ACTIONS PERFORMED BY THE VERY POWER OF GOD TO SATAN!**

And it is not talking about making some statement ignorantly. It is talking about ascribing works done by the power of God to Satan, knowing better!

When the Pharisees accused Jesus Christ of casting out demons by the power of Satan, they knew better. They actually knew they were insulting the very power of God, which Jesus Christ utilized to heal sick and infirm people. And Jesus Christ in response warned these Pharisees that they were very, very close to committing the unpardonable sin, the sin that will not be forgiven in this age nor in the age to come.

Matthew 12 proves irrefutably that unconverted people are capable of committing the unpardonable sin. And Mr. Armstrong himself pointed this out in his article. But unconverted people have to go a step further than converted people in order to become guilty of the unpardonable sin. So note these **three steps**.

Step one in committing the unpardonable sin is neglect. This step applies almost exclusively to converted people. (Below I will discuss an exception to this rule.)

Step two in committing the unpardonable sin is sinning willfully. This also applies almost exclusively to converted people.

Step three in committing the unpardonable sin is deliberately, knowingly insulting God by ascribing the very power of God to Satan. Potentially this applies to anybody and everybody, the converted and the unconverted alike!

Steps one and two were explained by Paul in Hebrews. Step three was explained by Jesus Christ in Matthew 12. And these two sections of Scripture are directed at different audiences.

So much for Mr. Armstrong's article. In order to come to a clearer understanding of this subject let's

now ask a question that should have been asked and answered in the article, but unfortunately wasn't really addressed.

WHY ARE SOME SINS UNPARDONABLE?

This is really the most important question on this topic of the unpardonable sin. There is a reason for everything God does. So exactly what is it about these sins that makes them unpardonable? HOW are these sins different from other sins? WHY are they unpardonable?

Let's consider all three of the possibilities we have mentioned.

1) **NEGLECT:** Once we have positively responded to God opening our minds to understanding some of His truth, THEN **WE BECOME ACCOUNTABLE FOR THAT TRUTH!** God is not playing games with anyone. Once we have come to really understand that there is a God who created us and who has set in motion a plan to make immortal life in His presence a real possibility for us, THEN we are required by God to put forth the necessary effort to show that we really WANT to have a part in that future eternity that God is offering to us.

IF in that situation we are not even motivated enough to seek continuous contact with God, by regular prayer and Bible Study, etc., THEN God isn't interested in having us in His immortal Family. God has no intention to give eternal life to "casual Christians"! Neglect is something that indicates to God that OTHER THINGS are actually more important to us right now, that there are other things that we really "love more", the principle of Matthew 10:37. Neglect indicates to God a real lack of commitment on our part. Narrow is the way which leads to eternal life, and only a few people really find it (see Matthew 7:14).

2) **SINNING WILLFULLY:** This is not talking about giving in to some or other temptation on impulse. This is not talking about King David being tempted to commit adultery, or anyone else giving in to some or other temptation. This refers to people very deliberately setting their minds to follow a path contrary to God's laws, regardless of consequences.

Now both the Apostle Paul and Mr. Armstrong applied this point only to church members, to people who have at some point had God's Spirit. However, you need to understand something, and that is this:

BEFORE GOD WE ARE ALWAYS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE THINGS WE KNOW AND UNDERSTAND!

God is not playing games with me or with you or with anyone else! It is always THE HUMAN MIND that God is testing! And **the criterion is NOT whether or not a person has at some point had the Holy Spirit!** The Apostle Paul was writing to people who had God's Spirit, and Mr. Armstrong took that same approach in his article. Mr. Armstrong's motivation was to be able to interpret the facts in favor of clemency for those who didn't have God's Spirit.

So let me explain **something that has never been explained before** in this context of the unpardonable sin:

In this context of sinning willfully, the criterion for the unpardonable sin is NOT whether or not the person involved has ever had God's Holy Spirit. The real criterion in this specific situation is **THE KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PERSON HAD!**

The importance of the knowledge people have transcends the importance of whether or not they had God's Spirit! (i.e. in the context of the unpardonable sin)

It is always a case of: what do people do with the things they have? As Jesus Christ put it, "to whom much is given, of him shall much be required" (see Luke 12:48). What did they do with the knowledge they had, never mind whether or not they had God's Spirit? I don't mean something they understood vaguely in a roundabout way, or something they fleetingly heard in some sermon. I mean clear, unambiguous knowledge and understanding that they had acquired.

In the past we have sometimes had some unbaptized people attend Church who had a lot more understanding than some of the baptized members of the Church. And those people were surely accountable for the understanding they had. Similarly, we now have quite a number of people who have grown up in the Church, and who now have a reasonably good understanding of many things; but they have never desired to be baptized.

Now someone like that who is not baptized **is just as accountable** for the knowledge he or she has, as is some other person who also grew up in the Church and then was baptized. The difference in accountability before God between two such hypothetical people is NOT that one is baptized and the other one is not baptized. The difference in accountability before God between two such people depends on their level of understanding; he who understands more is more accountable, and he who understands less is less accountable. Now for someone with a reasonably good understanding as a result of growing up in the Church **not being baptized is obviously a problem before God**, because it should be abundantly clear to anyone "with a reasonably good understanding" that baptism is commanded by God.

Now why do I say that in judging people the level of knowledge people have transcends whether or not they are baptized?

First of all we have the principle of James 4:17, which says that "to him that KNOWS to do good, and does it not, TO HIM it is sin". James 4:17 is not limited to converted members of God's Church; James 4:17 is a principle that God applies to all people, because how people respond to the understanding they have shows God something about the character of those people.

Secondly, it is quite clear that THIS IS THE PRINCIPLE (James 4:17) which Jesus Christ was applying to the Pharisees. They were guilty of insulting God when they accused Jesus Christ of using the power of Satan to cast out demons, because THEY KNEW BETTER! The fact that those Pharisees were totally unrepentant and obviously didn't have God's Spirit didn't enter the equation one way or the other.

The knowledge they had about all the miracles Jesus Christ had performed made them accountable. Even Nicodemus had said "WE KNOW THAT YOU ARE A TEACHER COME FROM GOD BECAUSE NO MAN CAN DO THESE MIRACLES ..." (John 3:2). The evidence that Jesus Christ was at the very least a very powerful servant of God was simply irrefutable.

It is very simplistic for us to say: since certain people were not baptized (or had never repented even if they were baptized), THEREFORE they are less accountable before God. Yes, baptism most certainly brings a considerable responsibility before God with it! Therefore we really need to count the cost. However, that is where this analogy stops!

When we want to buy a car which costs \$20,000 and we only have \$10,000, then after we have "counted the cost" WE CAN WALK AWAY FROM THAT \$20,000 CAR! But we can't do that with God's truth ... WE CANNOT WALK AWAY FROM IT AND SAY "THE PRICE IS MORE THAN I CAN AFFORD".

The only people who can "walk away from it" are those who never get as far as realizing that there is a

cost attached. The only ones who can walk away are those who are the seeds that fell by the way side (Matthew 13:19). But anyone who gets as far as understanding that there is a real cost is at the very least "on stony ground" or "amongst thorns" (Matthew 13:5-7). Hopefully such a person is "on good ground" (Matthew 13:8).

We need to understand that none of these last three categories can walk away from what is on offer; all of them have already proceeded too far down that road to be able to then turn back. For them it is a case of already having put their hands to the plow, and therefore it is too late to withdraw their hands. As Jesus Christ said:

No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62)

People who were the seeds on stony ground or amongst thorns ARE ACCOUNTABLE for whatever knowledge and understanding they had before leaving the Church. And to whom much is given, of him shall much be required. Every human being is always accountable for everything we do. Jesus Christ really meant it when He said:

"But I say unto you, That **every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof** in the day of judgment." (Matthew 12:36)

What does that sound like to you ... like some people get a free pass because they weren't converted? As already stated, Jesus Christ said these things to the unconverted masses.

Yes, there will be a second resurrection for the overwhelming majority of people who have lived after the flood. But we have been very quick to assign our own loved ones who have left God's Church to that second resurrection. We've done that because that is at least somewhat comforting. We've done that because the alternative is very scary to contemplate (i.e. the lake of fire).

Do we still believe that it is **only the truth** that really sets us free (John 8:32)?

So let me state something very plainly by means of a hypothetical analogy.

Suppose we have two people who both grow up in the Church of God. Both are very responsive individuals, and from conversations it is clear that both have a fairly good grasp of God's truth. Both clearly understand that it is God's intention to build a Family of immortal spirit beings. They understand that this plan involves the first resurrection for 144,000 people to spirit life, the much later second resurrection for most others who have lived and died, and then later still the third resurrection for the incorrigible wicked who will be blotted out in the lake of fire. They understand that God wants us human beings to repent and to live our lives in full submission to His laws.

When these two hypothetical individuals come into their early 20's one of them is baptized while the other one is not baptized, though the unbaptized person continues to attend services and maintain a regular contact with the Church in other areas as well. For all practical purposes the unbaptized individual lives his life just like any other member of the Church. Then a few years later both of them leave the Church for some unspecified reason. And neither one ever returns to the Church.

Now some people would want to claim that the one who had been baptized was in danger of the unpardonable sin, while the unbaptized individual would still be heading for the second resurrection.

BUT THAT IS NOT CORRECT!

The truth is that both are in the identical serious danger of committing the unpardonable sin. The key is not that one of them was baptized while the other one was not baptized. The key is that both had an equally good understanding of God's truth and God's plan, so both are accountable to God for the understanding they had.

It is not a case of the baptized one being unlucky that he was baptized, or the unbaptized one being lucky that he never asked for baptism. Before God both are equally accountable for the understanding they had. That is why I say that once people have come to a certain level of understanding, THEN they no longer have the option to walk away after deciding that the cost is too high.

GOD IS NOT PLAYING GAMES THAT HINGE ON CERTAIN TECHNICALITIES!

Frankly, for any adult who has a good understanding of God's plan and purposes to deliberately avoid baptism is a case of "neglecting so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:3), and such a person "shall not escape"! It is wrong before God for someone with a good understanding to deliberately refuse to seek baptism. It is wrong before God because it is a clear refusal to submit to a clear command. Anyone with a reasonably good understanding knows the answer to "men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

While the process may certainly take more time for some people than for others, there is no excuse for any adult with a good understanding to **deliberately** not seek baptism. Such individuals have come to see that great treasure hidden in a field, but **they make no effort** to acquire the field (see Matthew 13:44). That's bad!

To get back to our subject of wanting to assign all our loved ones who have left the Church to the second resurrection:

Let's not give in to the temptation to interpret the Bible in the way that fits in the most with our own personal desires. Let's seek to understand the Bible OBJECTIVELY, without our own wishes clouding our understanding.

When people attend the Church of God for an extended period of time, whether or not they ever repent and receive God's Spirit, they typically learn a lot of things, though there are also certainly exceptions to this. They come to understand certain requirements that God has for us human beings, whether they agree with those requirements or not. And **they become accountable** for the things they have come to understand.

Let me try to state this very plainly:

In Revelation 3:16 Jesus Christ says to a group of people who have NEVER had God's Spirit "I will spew you out of My mouth". Their "vessels" had never contained any "oil" (see Matthew 25:1-4). Having or not having God's Spirit will not be the criterion! The real criterion will be that **they will have been lukewarm with the understanding that they had!** And the reason Jesus Christ will "spew people out of His mouth" is because they will have committed sins that will not be forgiven.

"Willful sinning" implies a level of understanding, independent of whether or not the person had previously proceeded all the way to repentance and baptism. Understanding always brings with it accountability for that understanding.

So **sinning through continued neglect** leads to the unpardonable sin because it amounts to despising the incredible opportunity for immortal life that God has offered us. If we don't appreciate the value of what God is offering us, then God doesn't want us in His Family.

And **sinning willfully** by setting our minds to disregard God's laws and wishes is the unpardonable sin because it is a rejection of God's power and authority over our lives. God will not have individuals in His Family who reject His authority over their lives.

So let's now come to the third category.

WHY DOES GOD HOLD UNCONVERTED PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE?

So let's come to the Pharisees, who were certainly not repentant. WHY will all manner of sin and blasphemy be forgiven, but speaking against the Holy Spirit will NEVER be forgiven (Matthew 12:31-32). WHY?

Exactly what is it that makes this particular sin so serious?

What makes this particular sin so serious is KNOWLEDGE! It is UNDERSTANDING that makes it so serious! This is totally independent of whether or not the individuals involved had ever had God's Spirit. It's got nothing to do with whether they had previously repented or not.

IT HAS TO DO WITH INTEGRITY!!

A lack of repentance or never having had God's Spirit is never a justification for a lack of integrity! Integrity of character is independent of conversion.

Note that I said that "it has to do with integrity". I did not say, and I certainly don't mean, that unrepentant people are required to have integrity of character in every area of life, because that is not the case.

But in one specific area God requires even unrepentant people to have at least a minimum level of integrity. And that area is when they are faced with irrefutable evidence of the power of God.

In plain language:

When people are faced with irrefutable evidence of the power of God (e.g. Jesus Christ healing a man who had been blind and dumb, Matthew 12:22; healing a man who had been born blind, John 9:1-7; etc.) IT IS NOT THE UNPARDONABLE SIN if they refuse to accept this evidence of God's power. Even if they don't accept such evidence, they have still not committed the unpardonable sin.

However, if in addition to not accepting this irrefutable evidence they then **INSULT GOD BY ATTRIBUTING THIS POWER TO SATAN, THEN THEY HAVE GONE TOO FAR!**

Nobody who deliberately and **knowingly insults God** will ever be in God's Family. God will not have people in His Family who deliberately insult Him!

Understand the principle Paul explained about converted Christians deliberately going back into the world.

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 10:28-29)

As I have tried to explain, Paul was addressing his comments exclusively to converted Christians, doing everything he could do to prevent those people from committing the unpardonable sin. Unconverted people in the world didn't enter Paul's thinking.

However, THE PRINCIPLE of these two verses applies equally to unconverted people in the world! You need to understand this!

Now there are obviously differences. Unconverted, worldly people are not treading under foot "the sacrifice of Jesus Christ", because they have never yet met the requirements that God requires of them BEFORE that sacrifice can apply to them. That is, they have never yet come to repentance.

So the principle here is NOT of treading something under foot. **Here** the principle is one of **DESPISING THE POWER OF GOD**, by contemptuously ascribing that power to Satan! It is the attitude of despising and of contempt that is common to both situations. Both cases reveal the same lack of respect for God and for what God has done for us human beings. It is Jesus Christ's statement in Matthew 12:31-32 that makes clear that knowingly and deliberately trying to discredit the working of God's power is JUST AS SERIOUS as Paul's explanation regarding a converted Christian going back on his commitment to God, and going back into the world.

We need to understand that Matthew 12:31-32 and Hebrews 10:28-29 talk about EXACTLY THE SAME PENALTY for two different groups of people. The one thing that both groups have in common is an attitude of contempt for the things of God. The unconverted in Matthew 12:31-32 reveal their wrong attitude **more offensively** than the previously repentant individuals in Hebrews 10. But both have essentially the same wrong attitude towards God. And so both groups face the same penalty, which is annihilation in the lake of fire.

Nobody ever insults God and gets away with it. Actively insulting God is simply going too far! So that is something God will not forgive. Here we are not talking about someone impulsively cursing God's name, which, while it incurs a guilt which will be punished (Exodus 20:7), is something that can be forgiven upon real repentance. This impulsive type of sin very regrettably happens millions of times every single day around the world. No, here we are talking about people who knowingly and deliberately say and do things that are extremely offensive to God; we are talking about people who know that their actions are going to be punished, but **they just don't care**. They simply don't care what God expects from us.

Let's now look at two unconverted individuals who will end up in the lake of fire, even though they have never at any time had God's Spirit.

THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET

Let's look at the story of these two individuals who are identified in the Book of Revelation.

The individual identified as "**the beast**" will be the supreme commander of the armies that will fight against Jesus Christ at His second coming. He will be in overall charge of those rebellious human armies, directing their actions against the returning Jesus Christ at the time of the first resurrection. The individual identified as "**the false prophet**" will be the most powerful religious leader on Earth at that time. He will endorse the position of "the beast" as God's supposed chosen leader to fight against the supposed invasion from outer space (i.e. against Jesus Christ and those who will be with Christ).

Revelation 16 describes the seven last plagues that will be poured out upon this Earth in the presence of Jesus Christ and those in the first resurrection. The beast and the false prophet feature prominently in

plague number six. Notice:

And I saw **three unclean spirits** like frogs *come* out of the mouth of **the dragon**, and out of the mouth of **the beast**, and out of the mouth of **the false prophet**. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, *which* go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. (Revelation 16:13-14)

This verse shows that the rebellious armies that fight against the returning Jesus Christ will be stirred up and gathered by three particularly evil demons. Besides these three demons, this verse identifies three other individuals: "**the dragon**" is a name for Satan, "**the beast**" is the political / military human leader of those that oppose Jesus Christ, and "**the false prophet**" is the human spiritual leader who provides the religious support for this military leader.

A little later the Book of Revelation shows **all three of these individuals**, one a spirit being and the other two human beings, being **thrown into the exact same lake of fire**, though at different times. The beast and the false prophet are thrown into that localized lake of fire in Revelation 19:20, and Satan is thrown into that same lake of fire 1000 years later in Revelation 20:10.

Getting back to Revelation 16:13-14, the three demons "coming out of the mouth" of these three individuals means the following:

The beast and the false prophet will both be demon-possessed. So **the beast's demon** and **the false prophet's demon** will be joined by **a third demon sent directly by Satan** himself, to gather this huge army to fight against Jesus Christ. Outwardly that event will look like the beast and the false prophet are extremely charismatic and inspirational leaders, at whose instigation a worldwide army will gather in the Middle East. It will be those three demons that will provide the charisma and the inspiration. The job of those three demons is to make sure humanity worldwide will be receptive to the beast's agenda, and will gather to fight against Jesus Christ.

Without going into too many details, it is quite clear that these two unconverted and thoroughly demon-possessed human beings will know quite clearly that "the god" they are serving is Satan, and that the God they will fight against will be the returning Jesus Christ ... because the two witnesses will have been telling them and the whole world for over three years that this will happen, that Jesus Christ will return in power. These two will know with absolute certainty that they are fighting against God.

So let's come to Revelation 19:20.

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. **These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.** (Revelation 19:20)

That will be their final death. They will instantly cease to exist! That lake of fire will permanently blot out their existence, and **they will not come up in the third resurrection**, which is for everyone else whose existence will be permanently blotted out by fire at that point in time. For them the first death and the second death will be one and the same event. That's why God has them thrown into a lake of fire!

So note the parallel:

Jesus Christ was the first one resurrected into the Family of God, **pioneering the way** in which those in the first resurrection will 2000 years later join the Family of God. And the beast and the false prophet have their existence permanently blotted out in a lake of fire at Christ's second coming, likewise **pioneering the way** in which all the others who knowingly reject God's ways will have their

existence permanently blotted out about 1100 years later. Can you see how God has provided "a forerunner" for both of these events that represent the ultimate fate for all human beings?

At any rate, here are two individuals who have never had God's Spirit and who have never been a part of God's Church; and both of them will commit the unpardonable sin. And therefore God destroys both of them in a lake of fire.

Revelation 19:20 is one more clear proof that the unpardonable sin is not restricted to people who at some point had God's Spirit. Their actions in knowingly fighting against God are simply not pardonable.

IN CONCLUSION

We have examined the only article Mr. Armstrong ever wrote on the subject of the unpardonable sin. We saw that most of that article is a discussion of what true Christianity is all about. We also noted Mr. Armstrong's great concern in wanting to believe that the one individual who had left the Church had never really been converted, with the assumption that therefore that individual could not possibly have committed the unpardonable sin.

I mentioned that while Mr. Armstrong explained the unpardonable sin correctly, he did not explain it clearly. His own perspective on this issue was influenced by wanting to see a person close to him still have the opportunity to come up in the second resurrection.

However, Mr. Armstrong overlooked the fact that the main criterion before God for establishing responsibility and accountability is not whether someone is baptized or not, but how much knowledge and understanding a person has. When an unrepentant person understands just as much as a repentant person, then that unrepentant person is also just as accountable before God as is the repentant person. The principle here is: to him that knows to do good and does it not

We need to clearly understand that the two places which discuss the unpardonable sin are directed at two different audiences.

1) In the Book of Hebrews the unpardonable sin is discussed by the Apostle Paul from the perspective of how Christians may be in danger of committing this sin. Paul explained two ways in which true Christians may become guilty of this sin: by neglect and by sinning willfully.

2) In the gospel accounts the unpardonable sin is discussed by Jesus Christ from the perspective of how unconverted people in the world may be in danger of committing this sin. Jesus Christ explained one way that anybody, converted or unconverted, may become guilty of this sin: by knowingly insulting God by attributing the indisputable power of God to Satan.

All three of these points were mentioned by Mr. Armstrong. Specifically, we took note of Mr. Armstrong's statement that "this sin was committed by unconverted men". That is why I said that Mr. Armstrong explained this subject correctly.

It was unfortunate that after Mr. Armstrong had mentioned "unconverted men" in this one sentence he never explained this further. After that one sentence he dropped this aspect (how unrepentant men may commit the unpardonable sin). And thus many church people never got this, even though they read this booklet.

We also need to understand that not only will the unrepentant beast and false prophet commit the

unpardonable sin, but there will also be some unrepentant Laodiceans who will be guilty of this sin, and whom Jesus Christ will therefore spit out of His mouth.

We need to recognize that Satan would want to tempt any and all of us to commit this sin, because if we do so, then he will have destroyed us. So let's be sure that we resist the devil and draw near to God (James 4:7-8).

Frank W Nelte