

SERMON IX.

OF THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

Wherein is shewed,

- I.—WHAT THIS SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST IS?
II.—HOW AND IN WHAT RESPECT THIS SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST IS ABOVE ALL OTHER SINS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN.

PREACHED AT STEPNEY, DECEMBER 29, 1650.

“ 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.

“ And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man shall be forgiven; but whosoever speaketh a word against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”—MATT. XII. 31, 32.

HERE are two great arguments laid before you in these words:

First, The largeness of God's heart in forgiving sins unto the children of men: every sin: “ All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.”

Secondly, You have here the unpardonableness of the sin against the Holy Ghost: “ But the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.”

I would rather choose to speak unto the former argument, but if I should do so at the first, possibly some poor soul would say, Though God's heart be very large in forgiving sins, yet there is one sin that shall never be forgiven, the sin against the Holy Ghost; and I fear I have committed that.

That I may therefore take away this obstruction, and make your way plain and easy to the forgiving mercy of the Lord, I shall at this time speak unto the last of these two arguments; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven. “ Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”

For the opening of which words two questions must be answered.

The first is, Whether these Jews, that our Saviour spake these words unto, did then sin against the Holy Ghost?

I answer, Some think, no; but I rather conceive that these pharisees did sin this sin against the Holy Ghost; for if you look into Mark iii., ye shall find that our Lord and Saviour spake this because of some words that they had spoken against him: he had cast out devils, and they said, "He cast out devils by the prince of devils," verse 22. Whereupon our Saviour reasoned with them, and at last he saith, at verse 28, "Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies: (verse 29) but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven." And the reason of this speech is given at verse 30: "Because they said He hath an unclean spirit." And indeed if these men did not sin the sin against the Holy Ghost, our Lord and Saviour Christ should tell us that there is an unpardonable sin, and not tell us what it is; for unless it be in this scripture, you shall not find, either in the gospel or in the epistles, that the sin against the Holy Ghost is any where mentioned in express words. Now our Lord and Saviour would not tell us that there is an unpardonable sin, and not tell us what it is: but he saith expressly, that "whoever doth blaspheme or speak against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven." And he chargeth those Jews, that they blasphemed and spake against the Spirit of God, or that work which was done by the Spirit; and therefore, without doubt, they did then sin the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost.

But again, Why is it here said, that he that sinneth this sin shall never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come; is there any forgiving of sins in the world to come?

Chrysostom saith, As men are punished in this world, and in the world to come; so they are pardoned in this world, and in the world to come: pardoned in this world, when any temporal affliction for sin is removed. So I also understand that parable in Matt. xviii. at the latter end; and pardoned in this life when a man is justified, Rom. iv., pardoned and forgiven in the world to come. So saith the apostle in Acts

iii. 19, "That your sins may be blotted out in the day of refreshing." Which day of refreshing, compared with the speech which you have in Heb. ii. speaking of the world to come, shews that the day of refreshing is the time of the world to come. But it is an usual phrase with Scripture, noting the eternity of misery; and therefore if you look again into Mark iii., you shall find, that whereas here in Matthew the words run thus: "Shall not be forgiven, either in this world, or in the world to come;" Mark hath it thus, "He shall never be forgiven," that *never* being the explication of this, "not in this world, nor in the world to come."

The words being thus far opened, the doctrine then will presently be this:

That the sin against the Holy Ghost is the unpardonable sin; that whosoever sins against the Holy Ghost, shall never be forgiven, either in this world, or in the world to come.

For the opening of this great truth, which I shall the rather desire you to hearken unto, because as it lies out of the ordinary road, so it makes your way clear to the laying hold of the former words of God's mercy. I say, for the opening of this truth, we must inquire into two things.

First: What this sin against the Holy Ghost is, for people are very ignorant of it.

Secondly: How and in what respect this sin against the Holy Ghost, is above all other sins the unpardonable sin.

First: If you ask, what this sin is?

I answer both negatively and affirmatively.

Negatively. It is not that sin, whereby men do barely deny the personality, or the deity of the Holy Ghost. Possibly a man may deny the personality or the deity of the Holy Ghost, and yet not sin the sin against the Holy Ghost. For as Chrysostom observes,* in his time there were divers heretics, that did deny the personality and the deity of the Holy Ghost, and yet afterwards repented, and were received into the bosom of the church. And ye do not find that these pharisees, who are here charged with this sin, did either deny the personality or the deity of the Holy Ghost. So that plainly then, the sin against the Holy Ghost doth not

* Πολλοι γαρ των ταισα ειρηκοτων επιστευσαν, υστερον δε παντα αυτοις αφεδη.—Chrysostom in Math. x.

consist in this, the mere and bare denying of the personality or the deity of the Holy Ghost.

As it doth not consist therein, so neither doth it consist in every opposition, or in a bare opposition unto the work of the Holy Ghost, as distinct from the Father and the Son. Unto God the Father belongs power; unto the Son, wisdom; unto the Spirit, holiness. The work of the Father is to create; the work of the Son, to redeem; the work of the Spirit, or the Holy Ghost, to sanctify. And hereupon some have thought, that opposition unto holiness is the sin against the Holy Ghost. But you find here it is a blasphemy, therefore not every opposition. And if you look into Acts vii., you find that Stephen speaking of the Jews, saith at verse 51, "Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ear, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost:" yet they did not sin this sin against the Holy Ghost: why? for Stephen prays for them at the last verse, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." But now saith the apostle John, in 1 John v. 16, "There is a sin unto death, I do not say that ye shall pray for it." Had they in Stephen's account sinned this sin unto death, he would not have prayed for them; but he did pray for them. So that this sin against the Holy Ghost, doth not consist in every opposition unto the work of the Holy Ghost, as it is distinct from the Father and the Son.

As it doth not consist therein, so it is not necessary that every man that sins the sin against the Holy Ghost, should be an universal apostate, backsliding from the profession of the gospel, and the power thereof. I know it is ordinarily thought so; but I say, it is not necessary that whosoever doth sin the sin against the Holy Ghost, should be a gospel apostate, backsliding from the gospel, and the power thereof, once professed: for these pharisees, who sinned against the Holy Ghost, never professed the gospel, neither do we read of any backsliding in them, from the power of the gospel once professed; and yet they sinned against the Holy Ghost. Surely, therefore, such a gospel apostacy is not of the essence of the sin against the Holy Ghost. Only here I must distinguish concerning the word apostacy. A man may be said to be an apostate two ways: either because he doth decline and fall away from the profession of the truth, and power of godliness, once professed; or else because he doth rebel

against truth revealed, and the will of God manifested, and will go no further. I will express it thus: five or six men go a great journey, suppose to Wales, or into the north, to Scotland; when they come about the middle of the way, two or three of them say, These ways are dirty, and longer than we intended, and therefore we will go no further; but say the other, Let the way be as dirty, and as long as it may be, we will go on; and on they go: which of these men do depart one from the other; do those that go on depart from them that stay? No; those that will go no further depart, they are the forsakers. So in the way to heaven, professors set out together, and some find the way long, further than they thought of, We will go no further, say they, and we will have no more light; but say the other, God willing, we will on; and on they go. Which of these two sorts are the apostates? Those that will go no further: they think not so, but the Lord knows the truth, that those that will go no further are they that leave and forsake the other. I will give you one scripture for it, it is in Numb. xiv.; there were certain spies went into the land of Canaan, and they brought an ill report upon the good land, "and the children of Israel murmured against Moses," verse 2; whereupon Moses speaks unto them, and saith at verse 9, "Only rebel not against the Lord." The words in the Septuagint, which greek the New Testament follows, are, "Only be not apostates against the Lord." So that in Septuagintal language, those that rebel against light revealed, and will go no further, are called apostates. Now, indeed, this kind of apostacy always goes with the sin against the Holy Ghost, but not the former, always; for we do not find that the pharisees were guilty of the former, for they did not profess the gospel. So that the essence of this sin doth not consist in apostatizing or backsliding from the profession of the gospel and the power thereof.

Some think that this sin doth consist in final unbelief and impenitency; but final impenitency and unbelief is not the sin against the Holy Ghost, for by final unbelief and impenitency, they either understand that impenitency and unbelief which a man lives and dies in, or that which he purposeth to continue in to the last. The latter cannot be the sin against the Holy Ghost, for many have purposed to continue in their unbelief to their death, and yet have been converted and par-

done.* And the first cannot be the sin against the Holy Ghost, for, 1. The Jews whom Christ spake unto did then commit this sin, and yet they had not continued in it to their death. 2. Final unbelief is rather a sin against the Son; but the sin against the Holy Ghost is distinguished from that. 3. Our Saviour saith, Those that commit this sin shall not be forgiven in this world nor in the world to come. Not in this world. If therefore final unbelief or impenitency be this sin, then Christ should threaten that he that dies in his sin shall not be forgiven whilst he lives. 4. If a man sin against the Father or Son, and die impenitently in that sin, he shall not be forgiven either in this life or in the life to come: but herein the sin against the Holy Ghost is worse than the sins against the Father or the Son, and therefore it cannot consist therein. 5. The apostle saith, 1 John v. 16, "There is a sin unto death, I say not that you pray for it." Doth he say that we must not pray for a man, and for the forgiveness of his sin when he is dead? 6. It is that sin for which there lies no remission, but a man may sin such a sin whilst he lives: for if any man sin wilfully, there remaineth no sacrifice for sin, and wilfully a man may sin before his death. 7. It is such a sin as a man may know another man is guilty of whilst he lives, for saith the apostle, "There is a sin unto death, I say not that you pray for it:" but final unbelief and impenitency is not known till death. 8. Our Saviour saith, "He that speaketh a word against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven." But a word may be spoken against the Spirit long before a man dies, and therefore surely this sin against the Holy Ghost doth not consist in final impenitency and unbelief; final unbelief and impenitency is not this sin against the Holy Ghost. 9. For then all wicked men living under the gospel, and dying impenitently, should sin the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is false.*

* *Altissiodorensis*, lib. ii. Tract. 30, in Sentent.

Desperatissimos convertit Deus.—Augustin.

Sic homo potest penitere de finali impenitentia.—*Altissiodorensis*, ib.

† *Blasphemia in Spiritum Sanctum ea esse videtur qua quis destinata malitia contra proprium animi sui sensum Spiritus Sancti gratiam et virtutem dei que gloriam oppugnat.*—Luc. Brugen. in Matt. xii.

* *Ὅς ἀν εἶπη λόγον κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφεθήσεται, ὅς δὲ ἀν εἶπη κατὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος οὐκ ἐπι δίδασκεν ὅτι τοῦτο γινόμενον ὑμῖν ἐστὶ καὶ πρὸς τὰ δῆλα ἐναιχυντεῖε.*—Chrysostom in Math. xii.

You will say, then, What is this sin against the Holy Ghost, and wherein doth it consist?

Affirmatively. It is that wilful sinning against God, whereby a man doth maliciously oppose and blaspheme the proper and peculiar work of the Holy Ghost, and that after he hath been convinced thereof by the Holy Ghost.

I say, It is a wilful sinning against God; and so the apostle speaks, saying, "If any man sin wilfully, after he hath received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin," Heb. x. 26. So that the sin for which there is no sacrifice, and of which there is no remission, is a wilful sin. Now a man is said to sin wittingly, willingly, and wilfully: wittingly, in opposition to ignorance; willingly, in opposition to force and constraint; wilfully, in opposition to light, knowledge and reason; and so he that sins against the Holy Ghost doth sin; for says the apostle, "If any man sin wilfully, after he hath received the knowledge of the truth," or after the acknowledgment, *την επιγνωσιν*, &c.

He that commits this sin doth also oppose and blaspheme the proper and peculiar work of the Holy Ghost; for it is called here, a blasphemy, and a blaspheming of the Spirit, as distinct from the Father and the Son. Now the work of the Father is to create, the work of the Son to redeem, the work of the Holy Ghost to sanctify; and therefore he that sins this sin, doth oppose and blaspheme holiness and goodness; and so these Jews did: for when our Saviour Christ did cast out the devil, that unclean spirit, they said, he did it by the power of the devil, calling the work done, a work of the devil, and did oppose him therein.* Yet this is not all, for,

It is that sin, whereby a man doth maliciously oppose, and blaspheme; and so the word *εκοσιως*, Heb. x. 26, is used by the Septuagint, Exod. xxi. 13, 14. And thus did those pharisees sin, for the Evangelist tells us, that when Christ saw their thoughts, verse 25, "He said unto them," &c. So that it was not a bare opposing or blaspheming, but a malicious opposing and blaspheming of this great work of the Holy Ghost, which made them so deeply guilty.†

* Dicere verbum contra spiritum sanctum est verbis impugnare Deum sanctificantem. Cajet. in Matt. vii. vide sixth Senens. in locum.

† Peccatum in spiritum sanctum dicitur illud ex carta malitia sit quod solent

But how can a man sin, *ex malitia*, or maliciously, seeing that, *voluntas temper ferter in bonum, et omnis peccans est ignorans*. Now if the will be always carried out upon what is good, and every man that sins, doth sin ignorantly, how any can man be said to sin maliciously, or *ex malitia*?

Yes, very well: for although the will be always carried out upon that which is good; yet that good, is either morally good, called, *bonum honestum*, honest good; or naturally good, called, *bonum utile, or jucundum*, profitable, or delightful good. Now the will is not always carried out upon that which is honestly good in appearance; for *voluntas est appetitus universalis*, the will is an universal appetite. And if the will should be always carried out upon that which is honestly good in appearance, then, as Suarez reasons well, every thief and adulterer, should be an heretic, which no man will say. And if the will may be carried out sometimes upon that which is pleasantly, or delightfully, or naturally good; then it may hate that which is morally, and spiritually, and honestly good; for, *amor odii causa*, love is the cause of hatred; the will doth naturally hate that which is contrary to the thing loved; and if the will may hate that which is honestly and spiritually good, then it may oppose and blaspheme the same, and that out of hatred and malice; for every man speaks evil of and opposes what he hates.

If this be a reason why a man cannot sin maliciously, or *ex malitia*, because the will is always carried out upon what is good; then the devils and damned in hell, do not sin maliciously, or *ex malitia*; for they have wills in hell, as well as men on earth; but I presume it will not be said that the devils and damned in hell do not sin maliciously; for then if they sin upon some mistake, and *ex ignorantia*, they should have some excuse for their sin.*

distingui tria genera peccatorum, peccatum in patrem ex infirmitate humana, peccatum in filium ex ignorantia, quod patri appropriatur potentia filio sapientia, peccatum in spiritum sanctum, ex malitia quia bonitas attribuitur spiritui sancto. Altissidorens. Lib. 2. Tract. 30. in Sent. Scot. in Sent. Lib. 2. Ques. 2.

* Non existimo absolute necessarium ad operandum malum per voluntatem ut præcedat defectus erroris in iudicio intellectus vel speculativo vel pratico. Suar. Metaphys. disp. de necess. et conting. Eff. Sect 7.

Prima Propositio.—Cum perfecta scientia et consideratione vel habituali vel naturali potest esse peccatum et defectus in voluntate, est communis sententia et certa de fide.

Though every man that sins doth sin ignorantly, yet he doth not sin *ex ignorantia*, out of ignorance; ignorance is sometimes the cause of the sin, and so the man sins out of ignorance: sometimes ignorance is the companion and consequent of the sin, and then he sins ignorantly. Now it is granted, that every man that sins doth sin ignorantly, there is always a darkness and obscuration of the mind, which goeth along with every sin; but every man that sins, doth not sin *ex ignorantia*, out of ignorance: I say, it is not true, that every sin doth arise from some precedent error, or ignorance in the understanding, as the cause thereof: For then,

Why should the Holy Ghost make so great and vast a difference between him that sins ignorantly, and him that sins presumptuously? Num. xv. If any sinned through ignorance, there was a sacrifice for him, verse 27, 28, but if any man sinned presumptuously, there was no sacrifice for him, verse 30, 31. Now if every sin do arise *ex ignorantia*, from some precedent error and ignorance in the understanding, as the cause thereof; then presumptuous sins also should arise from this cause, and so there would be no such distinction between them, as the Holy Ghost makes.*

If every sin in the will, should arise from some error or ignorance in the understanding; then the will should be

Secunda Propositio.—Non est necesse præcedere in intellectu aliquem errorem speculationum qui sit quasi origo ad peccandum.

Tertia Propositio.—Ad peccandem non est necessarium ut præcedat inconsideratio speculativa tanquam origo peccandi.

Quarta Propositio.—Etiam ad peccandum non est necessarius error practicus qui peccatum antecedit et sit quasi origo ejus.

Quinta Propositio.—Moraliter loquendo semper in omni peccato occurrit aliqua inconsideratio practica vel pravitatis objecti vel actus licet si absolutam voluntatis potentiam consideremus neque iste defectus intellectus simpliciter videtur necessarius ad peccandum.

Sexta Propositio.—Licet cum actu peccati semper sit conjunctus ille defectus intellectus nou tamen ille est prima origo peccandi sed potius illa reducitur in defectum voluntatis.

Septima Propositio.—Voluntatem posse peccare est defectus quidam naturalis ipsius voluntatis.

Suarez de Causis propriis et interior. peccatorum Disputat. 5. Sect. 1.

* Quod aliquis ignoret illud quod scire debet contingit tripliciter: Uno ex impotentia qua scire non potes: Alio ex nescientia qua quis nescit quod scire debet: Alio ex voluntate quando quis renuit scire quod debet, illa ignorantia est peccatum mortale, quod est effectus voluntatis, quod est in potestate voluntatis ignorare vel non ignorare. Holcot de imputabilitate peccati.

always carried out upon *bonum honestum*, honest good, at least in appearance; but the will is an universal appetite, and the wills of the devils and damned in hell, are not carried out upon that which is apparently honest.

If every sin should suppose such a precedent error and ignorance in the understanding, then the will cannot fall off from, or *resilire* from the ultimate dictate of the understanding, but must necessarily and continually follow the same; and so the liberty will be formally, and not radically, in the understanding, and not the will; then the will cannot move, and apply the understanding to consider a thing, nor be the cause of ignorance in the understanding; yea, then there shall be no sin in the will, because it follows the understanding, as God hath set a law upon it to do; but where grace is, there is sin also.

If the will doth always pre-suppose such an error and ignorance in the understanding, and doth necessarily follow such an act of the understanding, presenting some truth, or honest good, either real, or apparent, then the created and defiled will of man, cannot tend unto any object upon any reason, upon which the divine will of God cannot tend unto its object; for the divine will can tend, and be carried out upon any good, being abstracted from all deformity: and although the created will be carried out, and tend unto that which is apparently good, and the divine will is always carried out upon that which is really good, yet the reason why the created will is carried out upon that which is apparently good, is because it appears to be real, and so the divine will, shall be carried out upon its object, upon no other reason than the created will of man, yea, than the wills of devils, and the damned in Hell, which I suppose none will affirm.*

It is confessed by all that there is a sin of malice, and a sin of ignorance. Now if there be a sin of malice, as Ocham reasons, then he that sins out of malice, hath either an universal, or particular knowledge, or both; if both, then as he

* *Utrum voluntas creata possit peccare ex malitia volendo aliquod non ostensum sibi sub ratione boni veri, boni simpliciter vel boni apparentis et secundem quid, &c.*

Si non potest tunc videtur quod voluntas creata non possit tendere in objectum sub aliqua ratione sub qua non possit tendere voluntas Divina, voluntas enim divina potest tendere in omne bonum substractum illi deformitati. Scotus lib. 2 Sent. Dist. 44. Quest. 2.

saith, *habetur propositum*, viz., every sin doth not pre-suppose an error, or ignorance in the understanding. If he that sins out of malice, hath an universal knowledge only, then he that sins ignorantly shall have equal knowledge with him that doth sin maliciously; for he that sins ignorantly hath an universal knowledge that every just thing is to be done, and that every good thing that pleaseth God is to be done; but he that sins out of ignorance, hath not equal knowledge with him that sins out of malice; and therefore he that sins out of malice, must have both an universal and a particular knowledge; and if so, then every sin doth not pre-suppose an error and ignorance in the understanding as the cause thereof.* But,

Suppose that some ignorance in the understanding be the remote cause of the sin, yet malice may be the next and chief cause. As for example: suppose that a man hath taken up some prejudice against another, through a mistake and error; yet now he hates him, and out of hatred kills him; shall not this murderer be said to kill him out of malice, because the malice was founded upon a mistake or error? Yes, surely. But why is he said to kill him out of malice? Because malice was the next cause of this murder. So that though ignorance be the remote cause of a sin, yet malice may be the next cause thereof; and being so, he shall be said truly to sin *ex malitia*, though with some precedent ignorance, as the remote cause thereof.*

Yet if you ask, how it can be that the will should be

* *Secundum omnes theologos aliquid est peccatum ex malitia.*—Ocham. Lib. 3. in Sent. Quest. 12.

Quid est peccatum ex malitia? est communis sententia patrum et Theologorum.—Suarez de pecca. ex. pass. ignor. malitia Disput. 4. Sect. 1.

Peccatum ex malitia communiter dici peccatum ex certa scientia.—Vasquez 12. Tom. 1. Q. 78. act.

Tunc quero an peccans ex malitia habet notitiam tam universalem quam particularem aut tam universalem, si primo habitur propositum, quod habens notitiam tam universalem quam particularem potest ex malitia facere contra utramque, si ducenti ita peccans ex ignorantia habet notitiam universalem sicut peccans ex malitia, quis peccans ex ignorantia scit tales majores, omne justum est faciendum, omne bonum est faciendum quod Deo placet, &c. sed ignorat minores puta hoc est justum, hoc est Deo placitum, &c. si ergo peccans ex ignorantia non tunc plus sciret æqualem scientiam haberet peccans ex malitia et ignorantia.—Ocham in Sent. Lib. 3. Q. 12.

* Quo ex malitia? an eoque amentie prosilire queant homines ut Dei gloriam oppugnare scientes et volentes non dubitent? Resp. audacium istam prodire

always carried out upon what is good, and yet a man sin maliciously? Plainly thus: from what hath been said, the will of man is an universal appetite, willing that which is naturally good, as well as that which is honestly good: if it be carried out upon that which is naturally good, it will hate all that spiritual good which is contrary to the obtainment of it, and the man will oppose and blaspheme what the will hates. Now because the hatred and malice of the will, is the cause of that blasphemy and opposition, the man is truly said to oppose and blaspheme out of malice, though the will be carried on upon that which is naturally good at the same time; which was the case of these pharisees: for they sought their own honour and greatness; Christ and the truth opposing, they did hate him and the truth; and because they hated him, the truth, and that light which reprov'd their sins, they did oppose and blaspheme, and that out of malice, and so the sin against the Holy Ghost is a malicious sin, or that sin whereby a man doth oppose and blaspheme the proper and peculiar work of the Spirit out of malice. Yet this is not all. But,

It is that sin against God, whereby a man doth maliciously oppose and blaspheme the peculiar work of the Holy Ghost, after he hath been convinced thereof by the Holy Ghost; for possibly a man may oppose and blaspheme, even maliciously, the work of the Holy Ghost, and yet not be convinced of it by the Holy Ghost, but otherwise; but those that sin this sin, are such as are enlightened, and made partakers of the Holy Ghost in the gifts and common graces of it, Heb. vi. And so these pharisees were convinced, by the Spirit which did work that great work before them; and yet after such a convincement wrought by the Spirit, they did maliciously oppose and blaspheme this work of the Spirit. So that I say, the sin against the Holy Ghost, is that wilful sinning against God, whereby a man doth maliciously oppose and blaspheme the proper and peculiar work of the Holy Ghost, and that after he hath been convinced thereof by the Holy Ghost. Or if you will, thus: it is that deliberate sinning against God, whereby men do oppose the work of God, which their own conscience and conviction tells them is

quidem ex cordis cæcitate sed in qua malitia exsuperet, ut clarum est hoc loco de Pharisæis — Lucas Brugensis in Matt. 12.

wrought by the Spirit and finger of God, in order to man's salvation, yet out of malice do blaspheme the same.*

Secondly, But why is this sin, above all other sins, unpardonable?

Not in regard of difficulty only, or because it is hardly pardoned, as some would; for many sins are hardly pardoned, and yet are not the sins against the Holy Ghost; for, as Zanchy doth well observe, if this sin were only unpardonable, because it is hardly pardoned, then a man might pray for those that sin this sin: but the apostle saith, "There is a sin unto death, I do not say that ye shall pray for it," 1 John v. 16. Therefore the unpardonableness of it, doth not lie here.†

Neither is it unpardonable only in regard of event, because in event it shall never be pardoned; for there are many sins which in event shall never be pardoned, which yet are not the sins against the Holy Ghost. There is many a wicked man that goes to hell, whose sins in event are not pardoned, and yet he did never sin against the Holy Ghost. So that this sin is not unpardonable only in regard of event.

Neither is it unpardonable because it is so great as doth exceed the power and mercy of God; for God's mercy and power, in forgiving sins, is like himself, infinite. If that be a good argument that David useth, "Forgive my sin, for it is wondrous great;" then the greatness of the sin cannot be the only reason of the unpardonableness of it. There is nothing greater than that which is infinite, but God's mercy is infinite.

Neither is it unpardonable because it is against the means of pardon; for then the sin against the free love of the Father, and the sin against the Son, should be unpardonable.

Neither is it unpardonable because a man doth not repent thereof; for then all sins unrepented of, should be sins against the Holy Ghost. It is true, that those who commit this sin cannot repent, as the apostle speaks, It is impossible

* Tunc aliquis maxime peccat in spiritum sanctum quando contra divinitatis opera stupenda ordinata ad nostram salutem aliquis convitia jactat cum proposito perseverandi in illo peccato usque ad mortem, abjectis procul spe et timore Dei Domini.—Bannes, 22. Q. 14. Art. 1.

† Peccatum dicitur irremissibile septem de causis. Altissidorens. Lib. 2. Tract. 30. in Sent.

that they should be renewed to repentance, Heb. vi., because God doth give them up to impenitency : but we do not find in Scripture, that their not repenting is made the reason of the unpardonableness of this sin.*

But the sin is unpardonable because there is no sacrifice laid out by God's appointment for it ; "If any man sin wilfully, there remaineth no more sacrifice," Heb. x., and without blood and sacrifice there is no remission. He that sinned ignorantly, Numb. xv., was pardoned ; why ? because there was a sacrifice laid out for him ; but if any man sinned *כיד רמה* with a high hand, he was to bear his own sin ; why ? because there was no sacrifice laid out for him. But why was there no sacrifice for that sin ? Not because the man did not repent after it ; but because that in the committing of that sin, he did despise the commandment of God. So now, God hath declared that every sin and blasphemy against the Father and Son, may be forgiven ; but if men come to that height of sin, as maliciously to oppose and blaspheme that very way and work of God's Spirit, which they have been convinced of by the Spirit, then there shall be no sacrifice for that, and so no remission and pardon.*

And thus now ye have seen what the sin against the Holy Ghost is ; in what respects it is not, and in what respects it is unpardonable ; and so the doctrine cleared and proved, That the sin against the Holy Ghost, is the unpardonable sin, which shall never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

The application follows :

If the sin against the Holy Ghost be the unpardonable sin, then surely the Holy Ghost is God, very God, true God, as the Father is : for can it be a greater evil, or more dangerous, to sin against a creature, than against God the Father ? It is God that is sinned against, now the Holy Ghost

* *Nunquam remittetur, quod intellige regulariter, nam nec divina potentia nec divina misericordia alligata est ad non remittendum, spiritus blasphemiam, sed secundum regularem cursum eveniet non remissio quod comitem semper habet obstinationem.*—Cajetan. in Matt. 12.

Dupliciter dicitur peccatum irremissibile, dicitur uno quod nunquam remittetur, alio dicitur irremissibile quod remitti non potest et sic non sequitur iste est similiter impenitens ergo habet peccatum irremissibile.—Holcot de imputabilitate peccati.

is sinned against; yea, the unpardonable sin is against the Holy Ghost. The Socinians say, That if he be a person, he must needs be God, true God: but ye see by this scripture, that he is joined with the other person of the Son; so also he is joined with the Father and the Son, in Matt. xxviii. in whose name we are to baptize. He who hath a name, and in whose name something is to be done, must needs be a person. And I pray you, what is proper and peculiar to a person? Is not understanding, willing, and speaking? these are all given to the Spirit. 1 Cor. ii. 11; 1 Cor. xii. 11; Rom. viii. 26, 27; Acts xiii. 2; and xx. 28. But I need go no further than this text; here the Spirit is joined with the Son, and the sin against the Holy Spirit is made the unpardonable sin. Surely, therefore, he is verily and truly God as the Father is.

If this doctrine be true, then what a necessity is there upon us all, to know and understand what this sin against the Holy Ghost is; for if a man have sinned this sin, we are to forbear praying for him, 1 John v. 16. Therefore we may know what this sin is, and we may know that another hath committed the same; for how can we forbear prayer for him, if we do not know and understand what this sin is? The not knowing what this sin is, makes many men fall into it before they are aware. When the laws of a nation are written in an unknown tongue, the people break them before they are aware, because they do not know them. So the not knowing what this sin is, makes many a poor soul to fall into it; yea, the not knowing what this sin is, breeds many scruples, doubts, and fears in new converts. Oh, saith one, I have sinned that great sin against the Holy Ghost; and I, saith another, have sinned the unpardonable sin: and why? but because the man doth not know what this sin is! Oh, what a necessity, therefore, is there upon us all, to know and understand what this sin is, and wherein it doth consist.

If the sin against the Holy Ghost be the unpardonable sin, what mercy and what grace is it, that the Lord hath kept us from this great sin; that though ye have fallen into great and heinous sins, and the Lord hath suffered you to fall into such sins that you may be humbled; yet that the Lord should keep you from this sin, this unpardonable sin, for

which there is no sacrifice, nor no remission ; oh, what mercy and what grace is this.

But I am afraid I have sinned this sin, and the truth is I have often feared it ; and my reason was and is, because my sins are so great, so exceeding great.

Great, say ye ; how great, man ? I have sinned against my light, I have sinned against my knowledge, I have sinned against my conviction ; and therefore I fear I have sinned the unpardonable sin. But I pray, for answer, did not Adam sin against light, when he eat the forbidden fruit ? Did he not sin against his knowledge, and against conscience ? Yet he sinned not against the Holy Ghost, though he brought all the world under condemnation by his sin ; for the Lord himself came and preached mercy to him, “ The seed of the woman shall break the serpent’s head.” And I pray did not Jonah, when he run away from God, sin against his light ; and did he not sin against his conviction, and against his knowledge ? yet he did not sin against the Holy Ghost, for the Lord pardoned him and wonderfully delivered him. Possibly this therefore may be, and yet not a sin against the Holy Ghost. It is true indeed, that those who sin against the Holy Ghost, do sin against their light, knowledge, and conscience ; but whoever sins against light and knowledge, though he sins greatly, doth not sin against the Holy Ghost.

Oh, but I fear that I have sinned this sin, for I have fallen foully into gross sins.

That is ill. But I pray did not David sin so ; were they not great and gross and foul sins that David fell into, such as one of your civil, moral men would abhor ? yet he did not sin against the Holy Ghost, for the Lord pardoned him, and Nathan said from the Lord, “ The Lord hath forgiven thee.”

Oh, but yet I fear that I have sinned this great sin, for I am much declined, I have lost my former acquaintance and communion with God ; I have lost my former heat and affections to good, and in duty ; and I fear upon this account that I have sinned this great sin.

Be it so : yet did not the church of Ephesus lose her first love ? yet this church of Ephesus did not sin the sin against the Holy Ghost : why ? for the Lord saith unto her, “ Repent and do thy first works.” She could not have repented thus, if she had sinned this sin.

Oh, but yet I fear that I have sinned this great sin, because that I have sinned directly against the Spirit; I have quenched, I have grieved, I have resisted the Spirit: the Spirit of the Lord hath come and fallen upon my heart in preaching, and I resisted and grieved it; the Spirit of the Lord hath fallen upon my heart in prayer, and I have grieved that; therefore I fear I have sinned this great sin, that shall never be pardoned.

This is ill too; but those that you read of in Acts vii., resisted the Holy Ghost, yet they did not sin the sin against the Holy Ghost, for then Stephen would not have prayed for them. And indeed, beloved, if every resisting of the breathings of the Spirit, and grieving of the Holy Ghost, were the unpardonable sin, what godly man would be free? A godly man is more properly said to grieve the Spirit, than a wicked man. If an enemy strike you, you are angry; if your friend strike you, ye are grieved. If a wicked man strike at God, he is angry with him; if a godly man strike at God, God is angry, and his Spirit is grieved, because he is a friend. "Grieve not the Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." So that thus far, possibly a man may go, and yet not sin this unpardonable sin.

But I am afraid that I have sinned this great sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, because I have not owned but denied the truth. The work of the Spirit is to enlighten and to lead into truth, and I have not owned but denied the truth rather, therefore I fear that I have sinned this great sin against the Holy Ghost.

This is evil, very evil. I remember a speech of Godteschalclus,* worthy to be written in letters of gold: I am afraid, said he, to deny the truth, lest I should be for ever denied by the truth, that is, Christ. But I pray, did not Peter deny the truth when he denied Christ; and did he not do it again and again, and did he not do it openly, with scandal; and did he not do it after admonition; and did he not do it with cursing and swearing? and yet he did not sin against the Holy Ghost, for the Lord pardoned, and took him into his bosom, and made him a blessed instrument in the church. Thus far yet a man may go possibly, and yet not sin this sin.

* *Timeo veritate negare quia metuo a veritate negari.*

Oh, but I am afraid yet that I have sinned it, for I have been an opposer of goodness, I have been an opposer of the people of God, and I have been a blasphemer; therefore I fear I have sinned this sin.

This is ill indeed. But, I pray, tell me, was not Paul an opposer and blasphemer of the saints and ways of God; and yet he did not sin against the Holy Ghost; for I did it ignorantly, saith he: "I was a blasphemer and a persecutor, but I obtained mercy, for I did it ignorantly."

Oh, but I have sinned, and I have done it maliciously, and therefore I fear I have sinned this same dreadful sin.

This is yet worse: but what mean you by that word maliciously? A man may be said to sin *ex malitia* or maliciously three ways, saith Aureolus:* Either because he sins from some evil habit, and so all wicked men sin; yet they do not all sin against the Holy Ghost? or, because a man sins out of anger, passion, or evil will against another; so Paul sinned when he persecuted the church of God, he was carried out with a malicious spirit against the saints and people of God; yet he did not sin against the Holy Ghost: or else, because a man is moved to sin, not out of any evil habit, passion, or ignorance, but merely from the liberty of his own will, because it pleaseth him, and because he doth hate that which his own conviction tells him is right and good. Now have you sinned thus? Surely no; for then you would not be troubled about it, but be well pleased with it.

Oh, but yet I fear I have sinned this great sin, for I have forsaken God, and God hath forsaken me; God is gone, Christ is gone. and mercy is gone. Oh, what freedom once I had, but now God is departed from me, God hath forsaken me: and I fear it is upon this account, because I have sinned this great sin.

But doth not David say, "How long, O Lord, wilt thou forget me, forsake me?" and our Saviour himself saith, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" There is a

* Peccatum ex malitia quandoque dicitur peccatum ex habitu, puta quando ex malo habitu, quis est intemperatus vel gulosus et sic non loquimur in proposito, alio modo dicitur quod procedit ex passione tamen deliberate et scienter puta si quis invidet, &c, nec sic loquimur in proposito; sed vocatur peccatum ex malitia proprie quando movetur quis non ex habitu nec passione nec ignorantia sed ex mera libertate voluntatis Sc. quod sic placet et hoc modo dicitur peccatum in spiritum sanctum.—Aureol. in lib. ii. Sent. Dist. 43, Art. 1.

gradual forsaking, and there is a total. As with a man that goes from his house; possibly he goes a voyage, or is from home a quarter, half a year, or a year; but he doth not leave his house; for his wife, his children and goods are there still: but another man goes from his house, the house is let, and he carries away all his goods: this is a total departure, the other gradual. So now it is with the Lord: he doth sometimes forsake his own children for a time; but he doth not pull down his hangings, or carry away his goods; he doth not go away, but returns again; this is gradual. But there is a total forsaking of a man, and then he gives him up to his sin. Now this is not the burden that you lie under; for if God had thus forsaken you, you would be given up to your sins, and you would give up yourselves unto all uncleanness.

Oh, but I am afraid, yet, that I am under the worst forsaking, and that therefore I have sinned this great sin; for I do lie despairing, saying, God is gone, and mercy gone; I am in the dark. Oh, I despair, I despair, and upon this account I fear I have sinned this great sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost.

You know what Heman said, "I remember God and am troubled; O Lord (saith he), all thy waves are gone over my head." The waves of thy wrath are gone over my head, and yet a penman of Scripture. Aretius tells us of a certain man in his time: It is no feigned story, saith he, but I saw the man with my own eyes, one that had been a most vile and desperate sinner, a drunkard, a swearer, a wanton, a gamester, and so he continued to his grey hairs; but at the last it pleased God to set his sins in order before him, and the man was so troubled in conscience, that he threw himself down upon the ground, calling unto Satan to take him away, provoking Satan to take him away; Devil, take thy own; I am thy own, take thy own. Whereupon, saith Aretius, prayer was made for him; christians prayed, they fasted and prayed, they prayed night and day; and, it pleased God, at last this poor man revived, converted to God, lived a godly life, and died comfortably. So that it is not an easy thing, saith he, to pronounce what the sin against the Holy Ghost is. But, now, whosoever you are that have laboured under this fear, as indeed this fear I know hath oppressed many, give me leave to ask you four or five short questions.

The first is, Whether canst thou not find in thy heart to forgive men that do trespass against thee? Do not you find a disposition in your own heart to forgive others? Yes, I praise the Lord that I do. Now if you can find in your heart to forgive others, I am sure God can find in his heart to forgive you, and therefore you have not sinned this great sin, which is unpardonable.

Secondly, Whether, aye or no, have you ever opposed the ways of God, the people of God, and that out of malice? No: I confess I have opposed them, but the Lord knows I did it ignorantly, it was not out of malice; then remember the description of this sin.

Thirdly, Whether, aye or no, do not you desire to be humbled for every sin, though it be never so small? Yes, for though I know that my greatest humiliation cannot, *placere Deum*, make an atonement for my sin; yet I know that the least humiliation in truth doth, *placere Deo*, please God, and it is my duty to be humbled for every sin; for the least sin is a great evil; and he that commands humiliation for the one, commands it for the other also; and through grace I desire to be humbled for every sin: why then you cannot have sinned against the Holy Ghost, for it is impossible that they that sin this sin should be renewed to repentance.

Fourthly, Whether, aye or no, do not you desire above all things the breathings of the Spirit of God upon your heart? Yes: oh that God would come and breathe upon my poor soul in duty. But those that sin against the Holy Ghost, do despite to the Spirit of grace. Heb. x.

Fifthly, Where do you find in all the Bible, that those that sin this sin against the Holy Ghost, are afraid that they have sinned it? Those that sin against the Holy Ghost, are never afraid that they have sinned against the Holy Ghost. This alone satisfied Mistress Drake, a woman much troubled in conscience; she was afraid she had sinned against the Holy Ghost; Mr. Dod, of blessed memory, came to her, and told her, that therefore she had not sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost, because she feared she had sinned it; for those that sin the sin against the Holy Ghost are never afraid that they have sinned it; and she acknowledged it did satisfy her, and she was thereupon comforted. Now, therefore, where is the man or woman that hath laboured under such a fear as

this? Oh, I have sinned this unpardonable sin! Art thou one that fearest thou hast sinned it? I tell thee from the Lord thou art free from it, and thou mayest go home and say thus: Though I have sinned much, for which the Lord humble me, yet I bless God I am kept from this great sin. And oh, my beloved, what a mercy is it, that among all the sins that we have committed, that yet we should be kept from this great sin! The greater the evil is, the greater is the mercy to be kept from it. Now, I pray, what is the misery of this sin? Is it not a great misery to be past prayer, to be thrown out of the prayers of the saints? "For such an one pray not," saith the apostle. Is it not a great misery for a man to be beyond the line of mercy? A man that hath sinned this sin against the Holy Ghost, is worse, spiritually, than a man that is sick of the plague outwardly; for if a man be sick of the plague, ye pray for him, and say, Lord, have mercy upon him; but if a man have sinned this sin, he is past prayer and past pardon, he is past sacrifice: the truth is this man is in the devil's case: the devil, you know, is reserved in chains unto the great day, and he cannot get out; so, if a man hath sinned this sin, though he live ten years, twenty years, or thirty years, he is reserved in chains, and he shall never be pardoned, he is upon the devil's ground, Oh, what a misery is it to commit this sin! Oh, what a mercy is it, then, to be kept from it! Now here is hope for the greatest sinner in the congregation upon this account. Saith our Saviour, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." Hast thou, therefore, been a great sinner? Hast thou been a drunkard? Hast thou been a wanton? Hast thou been a swearer? Hast thou been an opposer of the people of the Lord; and hath the Lord kept thee from this great transgression? Man or woman, here is hope yet. Who would not then turn to God? Come drunkard, swearer, wanton, here is yet hope for thy soul. Who would not come in to Christ?

And oh, what comfort is here for believers that are in Christ? If thou beest in Christ, and a believer, thou canst not sin this sin: that look as it is with a man that hath sinned this sin, he cannot be pardoned; so if a man be the child of God, a believer in Christ, he cannot sin this sin; for "he that is born of God sinneth not, neither can he,

for the seed of God abides in him." Oh, you that are believers, comfort yourselves with this truth. Here is comfort for all the people of the Lord from this doctrine.

But again, If the sin against the Holy Ghost be indeed the unpardonable sin, what cause have we all to look to our steps, to our words, to our actions? Beloved, this sin against the Holy Ghost, is the professor's sin; a man less than a professor cannot sin this sin against the Holy Ghost; this sin against the Holy Ghost is the knowing man's sin, a man less than a knowing man cannot sin the sin against the Holy Ghost: and, as I said before, a man may possibly go very far in sin, and yet not commit this great unpardonable sin: so now on the other side, I say, possibly a man may go very far in religion, and yet he may sin this sin. These pharisees that committed it, had the key of knowledge: knowing they were, and very knowing in the Scriptures; as for zeal, they travelled sea and land to make a proselyte; for their practice, they fasted twice a week, exceeding strict in observing the Sabbath day; the lights of the church, and the eyes of all the people were upon them for their guides; and yet these men sinned this sin against the Holy Ghost. Oh, what care should there be in all our souls; how had we all need to look to our ways! The more truth revealed, the more danger of sinning this sin, the more great works of God are done by the very Spirit and finger of God; if men do oppose and blaspheme, the more danger of sinning this great sin. Now I will appeal to you, when was there ever more light revealed than in these days of ours; yet when more opposing and blaspheming of it? When were there ever such great works done by the very Spirit and finger of God; and yet when more opposing and blaspheming? Are there not some that have been convinced that the Spirit of God breathed upon their hearts in such and such ordinances, and such and such ways, and yet now oppose and blaspheme those very ways of God, wherein they said heretofore they had the Spirit of God? Are there not some that are convinced that in these times great things are done by the very finger, by the power and arm of God among us, and that in order to our salvation; and yet how do men speak against them, and blaspheme? I will not say that these men do it out of malice, and therefore I do not

charge this sin against the Holy Ghost upon them; but, beloved in the Lord, this is certain, that in knowing times, times when God is doing great things by his own finger, then is this sin stirring most. The times of Christ, and of the apostles, were times of great light, when God wrought by his own finger, then was this sin committed. Now in these times, there is much breaking forth of light, and great things done by the very finger of God; therefore, I say, there is great danger if men do now blaspheme; wherefore I say again, take heed to your souls, you that are professors, look to your steps in these days of ours.

But you will say, We grant indeed that this sin against the Holy Ghost, is the unpardonable sin, and woe be to them that do fall into it, and it cannot be committed but by a knowing man; but what shall we do that we may be kept from this great transgression; that whatsoever sin we do fall into, yet we may be kept from this great evil, and this unpardonable sin?

I would that you would mind and consider the description which you have heard, and think of it. But I will tell you what David did; saith David, "O Lord, keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins, so shall I be free from the great transgression:" It seems then that presumptuous sinning makes way to this great transgression. When is a man said to sin presumptuously? When a man sins upon this score, that God will shew mercy to him, saying: I know, indeed, it is not good for me to go to such a wicked company, it is a sin so to do; but I will venture, and repent afterwards, for God will shew mercy. To venture upon a sin, presuming that God will shew mercy, and that a man shall repent afterwards, is presumption, and presumptuous sinning makes way to this great transgression; therefore would you be kept from this great transgression? go to God with David, and say, "O Lord, keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins, so shall I be free from the great transgression."

Again: Be always humbled for lesser sins: he shall never fall into the greatest, that is always humbled for the least; he shall never fall into the worst, that is always humbled for the smallest.

Besides, fear is the keeper of innocency; *Timor innocen-*

tie custos, fear is the guard of innocency: if you always fear to commit it, you shall never commit the same.

In case that you do at any time fall into sin, say, Well, but through the grace of God, though I commit what is evil, I will never oppose what is good; by the grace of God I will carry this rule along with me: Though I commit what is evil, I will never oppose what is good.

In case any great work be done before you, that lies beyond your reach and beyond your fathom, say, though I do not understand this work, I will admire; and though I cannot reach it, yet I will not blaspheme and speak against it.

And if heretofore, christian, thou hast found God breathing upon thy heart in any ordinance, public or private, or in any way of God, take heed, as for thy life, that thou dost never speak evil or blaspheme that way of God wherein thou hast found the Spirit of God breathing. This sin is always accompanied with *invidentia fratrum*, with the envy of the saints, and therefore some have thought the sin against the Holy Ghost did consist in it, in the envying of the saints; but though that be not it, yet that accompanies it. Canst thou not find thy own heart rise to those heights of graces that others do? take heed you never envy the saints lest you fall from envying those that are good, to oppose goodness itself, which is the proper work of the Holy Ghost.*

And if, indeed, you would be kept from this great transgression, then take heed of all declinings, and the steps thereof. There are three steps, as in our conversion to God, so in our apostacy, declining, and going out from God. Three steps in our coming in to God: first, a man's affection is taken with that which is good; then his judgment is convinced; and then his will strikes in, and he resolves with all his heart and soul to cleave to the Lord for ever. So in a man's declining and going out from God: first, a man's affection declines; then his judgment alters: I thought so and so indeed before, but now I am of another mind; and then it comes to his will, and he will go on, and let parents say, and ministers say, and friends say what they will, yet he will go on, and that because he will. Now saith the apostle, "If any

* Hinc discimus quantopere nobis ab odio fratrum, cavendum est, quandoquidem eo fit, ut quandoque odio hominis in ipsam Dei veritatem feramur precipites. Cartwrighti Harm. p. 357.

man sin wilfully, after he hath received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." Therefore as you desire to be kept from this great transgression: doth your affections decline? take heed your judgment do not alter; doth your judgment alter? take heed that your will be not perverse: oh, take heed of all declinings, and the steps thereof.

But finally, Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some have been; but as heretofore provoke one another to love and good works; and so much the more as you see the day approaching; and what I say to you, I say to all, and to mine own soul, Let us breathe after the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, "for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." Oh, let us pray to God for his keeping grace, it is he alone that keeps us; and the Lord keep all our souls from this great transgression.