

The Unpardonable Sin?

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I would like to begin by reviewing four questions I asked last session and expand on the answer to the fourth question. The questions were:

- 1) **What sins were judged at the Cross?** — The answer is ALL sins of every single person both the lost and the saved. ALL were judged at the Cross and Jesus Christ took our place on the Cross. Our sins were imputed to Him and He was judged instead of us.
- 2) **On what basis are all humans condemned?** — The answer is on the basis of Adam's sin. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor 15:22) We are not condemned because of our personal sins. We are born condemned because of what Adam did.
- 3) **What consequences do our personal sins carry?** — For the believer, the consequences of our personal sins are mainly earthly and temporal. It does NOT cause us to lose our salvation. It separates us from having fellowship with God and causes us to lose the guiding, empowerment, teaching, and filling of the Spirit. And with that, we also lose the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:16; 22-23) while out of fellowship. Recovery is through 1 John 1:9 and the confession of our sins. Furthermore, for the saved and the lost, there is the concept of reaping what we sow. Everything we do, every decision we make, has some consequence either intended or not. Bad decisions usually have bad consequences and good decisions usually have good consequences.
- 4) **Is there an "unpardonable sin"?** — Short answer — Technically, no.

About that answer to #4 ...

Matt 12:31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the **blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.**
³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but **whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven,** either in this age or in the age to come

This passage certainly sounds like there is an unpardonable sin and that would be blaspheming the Holy Spirit. But to rightly divide the Word of

Truth, you must consider the context of a verse along with who is speaking and to whom is he speaking?

In this passage, the speaker is Jesus. He is speaking during his lifetime, which is during the Age of Israel and before the present Church Age. He is speaking to the Pharisees (Jews) as indicated very clearly in V24 and 25. He is not speaking to the Church.

The charge by the Pharisees was, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." And Jesus is addressing that charge. He claims it is by the Spirit of God that He casts out demons and goes on to say, if that is so, then the Kingdom is at hand (V28). The Pharisees were, in effect, blaspheming the Holy Spirit by attributing His works to Satan. Jesus is saying that such a charge by the Pharisees (and Israel in general by way of rejecting Jesus as Messiah), especially if such is persisted in, will result in sinning that cannot be forgiven (V31-32) in that it will incur severe earthly discipline. And Israel did indeed continue in its rejection of the testimony of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was Messiah. Israel was disciplined for it when it was destroyed as a nation 40 years later.

This is indeed an unpardonable sin in the sense that Israel was under a works system that carried the potentially for severe discipline if they failed to meet the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. In this case, if Israel persisted in the corporate sin of rejecting Messiah and, in the process, blaspheming the Holy Spirit's testimony concerning Jesus, it would find no forgiveness under the terms of the covenant.

However...

Hebrews 10:26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

This sounds like there is a sin for which there is no forgiveness. Taken out of context, yes. But the context in Hebrews is this incident, taking place some 30 years after the Cross, there were some born again Jews who were under extreme pressure from their fellow Jews to come back to their Jewish faith and the associated animal sacrifices for forgiveness of sin.

The author of Hebrews is defending the faith and telling them they cannot go back and find forgiveness for sin through the animal sacrifices because the Law and the efficaciousness of the animal sacrifices is no longer valid, having been replaced by the Cross. What they are being called to go back to isn't there anymore. If they attempt to return to the Law and the sacrifices they will not find judicial forgiveness for their sins in those sacrifices. "There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment" (V26-27). They will remain under chastisement for their sins, and the judgment will be entirely temporal for those Jews who attempt to go back to that obsolete system.

It does not say they will lose their salvation. They keep that, but they will find their lives miserable under chastisement for their sinfulness, having "trampled underfoot the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace" (V29).

But ...

1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. **There is sin that leads to death;** I do not say that one should pray for that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. (ESV)

"There is a sin that leads to death." That is from the ESV. The NKJV and the NIV say, "There is sin *leading* to death." That certainly sounds like an unpardonable sin, and some do see this as such. Every sin, even the least sin, is in its own nature mortal or deserving of death; the proper wages of sin is death. But Christ went to the Cross and took that penalty for us. He paid the demanded price, so ... what is this talking about? Is this or isn't this an unforgivable sin?

Let's pick apart that phrase "sin that leads to death". "Sin" is the Greek hamartia *ham·ar·tee·ah* and means an offense, a violation of the divine law in thought or in act. It is usually and correctly translated here as "sin". "Death" is the Greek thanatos *than·at·os* refers to physical death of the body but can carry the idea of future misery in hell. "That leads to" is *pros* and usually means to the advantage of, at, near, to, or towards. "That" in the English is implied by the Greek *pros*. "Sin leading to death" is probably a more accurate translation.

The translation "sin that leads to death" should be taken literally. It says there is "sin that leads to death," but notice there is no definite article before "sin". It isn't "a sin" or "the sin". It is just "sin," though some translations do add the "a" (but it is a more accurate translation without it).

If it were a specific sin, then surely John would have named it to help us avoid it. He didn't. That is because it isn't "a sin" or "the sin" it is rather a pattern of sinning, and that can include any sin you can think of or combination thereof. There are situations where one single act of sinning can incur this death penalty, as we will see later, but the idea is more focused on habitual sinning or a pattern of sinning.

Does the passage say this is a sin that is unforgivable? No, it doesn't actually say that, although some commentators may infer that it does. Nothing here suggests this is a really awful sin that was not judged at the Cross. It says there is sinning that can ultimately end in the physical death for the one sinning.

Two kinds of death

Two kinds of death are pictured in the Bible, spiritual death and physical death. There is one other "death" called the "Second Death" that is experienced by unbelievers only and after the Gog Revolution at the end of the Millennium. That one is not our concern in this discussion.

We are born spiritually dead; that is, we have no human spirit, which is the vehicle through which we have fellowship with God. Some take the position that we do have a human spirit but it is "dead". Spiritually dead, we are thus separated from God. Depending on your interpretation, the human spirit is either created by the Holy Spirit at the point of faith in Christ—or—our dead human spirit is made alive at the point of faith in

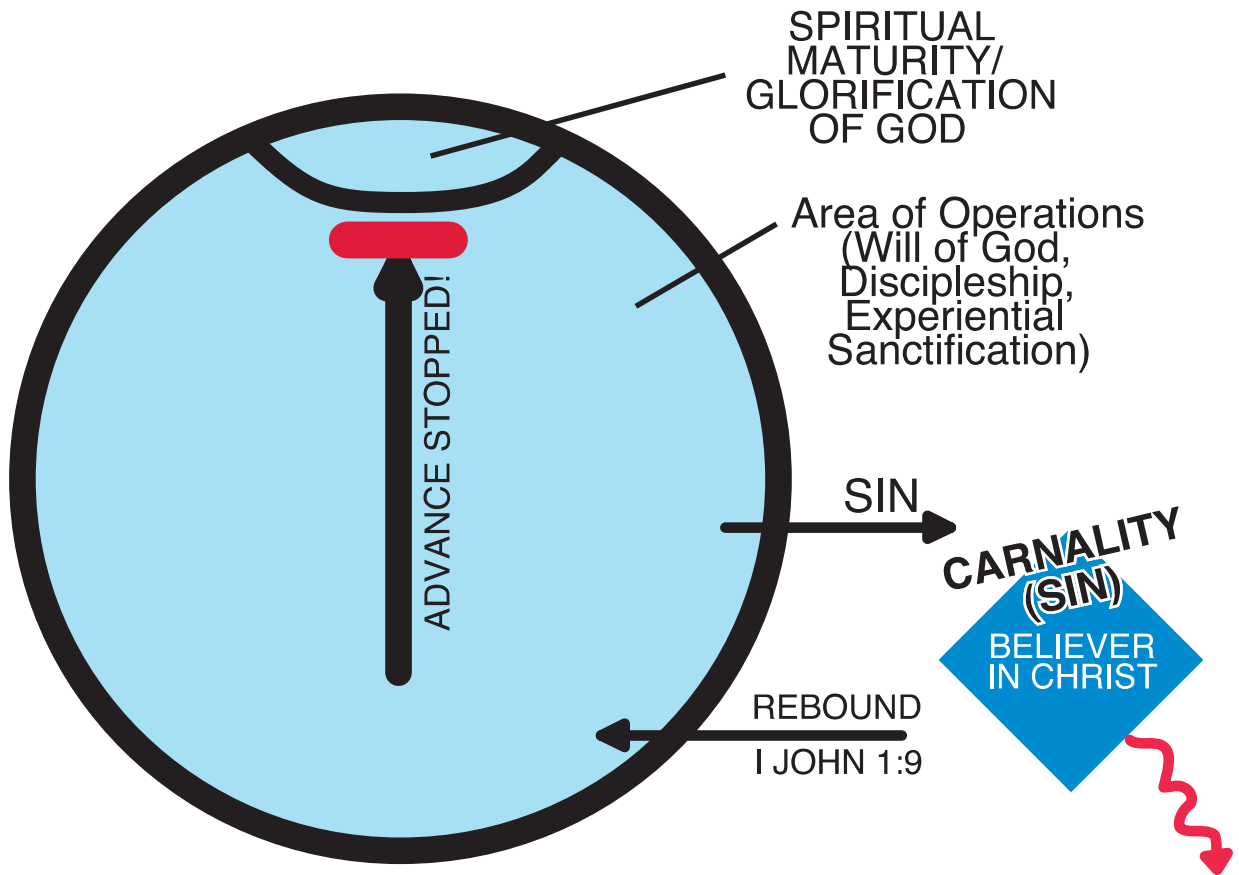
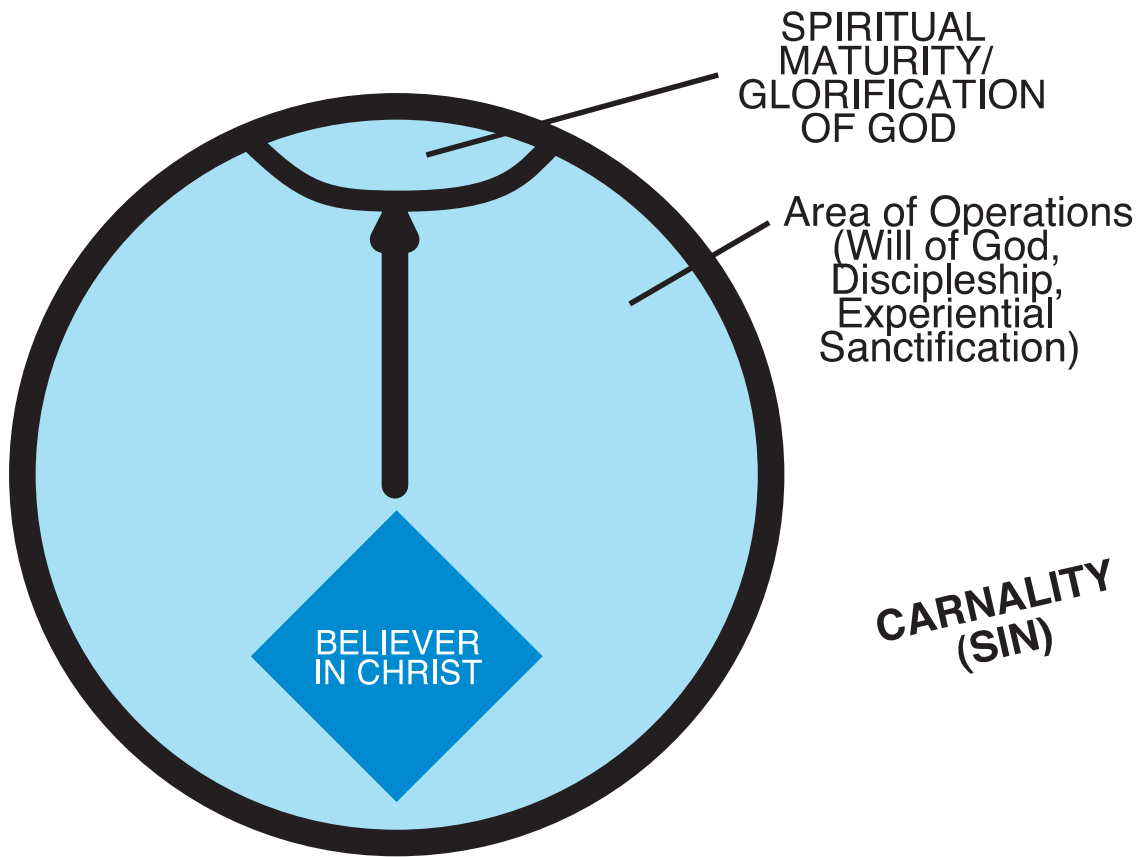
Christ—either way the results are the same. We are born again (literally “the birth from above”).

Both believers and nonbelievers ultimately experience physical death with the exception of those believers who are alive at the Rapture and are “translated” into their resurrection bodies without experiencing physical death.

The 1 John 5:16 and following passages that reference “death” are referring to physical death. There is no suggestion that the “deceased” loses their salvation to experience some form of eternal spiritual death. They die a physical death.

Believers do experience a form of “spiritual deadness” that results from unconfessed sin in our lives. This deadness damages our relationship with God, which can be restored through the use of 1 John 1:9.

Let’s look at the following illustration.



What you are seeing here are two separate illustrations of two different conditions a believer can find himself in. The top illustration is the ideal status for a believer. The bottom is NOT ideal!

Top Circle

- **The darker blue diamond** inside the larger lighter blue circle is a born again believer. I used a diamond shape to imply his value to God.
- **The large lighter blue circle** represents what I am calling the believer's "area of operations" (AO), to steal a military term. That circle represents the will of God for this particular believer. It is where he has maximum fellowship with God. It is his place of discipleship and experiential sanctification, where he is being set apart as God's own (sanctified) through spiritual development and "fruit" production. It is where he is growing in grace and knowledge, "walking by means of the Spirit" with his sin nature under control through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16), Christ formed in him as the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). It is the place where he will find full application of his spiritual gifts for a spiritual life that delivers the maximum glorification of God. Your AO may look similar to another person's yet still be very different because your abilities, calling, spiritual gifts, and circumstances will be different from any other believer. But the AOs for all believers have the overarching theme that whatever is inside that circle represents the will of God for that believer.
- **The black arrow** pointing up represents the believer's advance to spiritual maturity through study and training by the Holy Spirit.
- **The oval shape at the top** end of the larger circle represents the goal of the believer—spiritual maturity and all the implications for the Kingdom that represents, which includes maximum glorification of God and fruit production.
- **Outside the large circle to the lower right** you will see a reference to "Carnality/Sin," which is really anyplace outside that AO (will of God) for the believer. It is the place you do not want to be nor does God want you there.

Bottom Circle

- All of the elements described above still apply in this lower illustration—except ...
- **The believer's blue diamond** is outside the circle now and involved in carnality. Using his free will, he has rejected the empowerment and leading by the indwelling Holy Spirit and chosen some path God does

not want him to follow. That could be some moral failure (sin) or disobedience to the guiding of the Spirit (also a sin). The Spirit said, “You need to go here and do this.” The believer said, “Nope. I wanna go there and do that.” The end result of that decision is that the believer is outside his AO, his advance to Spiritual maturity ceases (Red Bar), his fellowship with God is damaged, and God’s interaction with him is pretty much limited to chastisement. (Some translations use the word “discipline” instead of “chastise” but the pressure applied to the sinning believer is not merely punitive, it has the objective of correcting his behavior.) And notice he is still a “blue diamond,” meaning his eternal status has not changed.

- **Recovery from sin** is possible through the application of 1 John 1:9 “if we confess our sins He is faithful and just in forgiving our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.” I used an old term I learned 40 years ago to describe this recovery process, “Rebound”. I think “rebound” captures the idea rather well.
- **The rebounded believer** is immediately back in fellowship with God. His advance to spiritual maturity resumes along with fellowship with God. All of the assets we saw in the top circle illustration now apply again.

About that **Squiggly Red Arrow** ...

That squiggly red arrow attached to the believer’s diamond in the bottom illustration represents “sin that leads to death”.

A believer has two ways to go once outside the will of God and in Carnality. He can use 1 John 1:9 and return to where he is supposed to be, or he can dig the hole deeper and find himself so deep in carnality that he does not recover because he chooses not to recover from it. He likes it outside his AO circle whether consciously or unconsciously. He may even convince himself he is in the will of God for his life. He gets himself into a pattern of sinning that builds upon itself. And he “spirals out of control” like a plane headed for a crash.

During this death spiral, God increases the chastisement pressure on him. Its purpose is not punitive; it is to get him to wake up and recover. The longer he resists that chastisement the further down he spirals, and the more painful the chastisement becomes. If there is no recovery, the carnal believer becomes a poor witness for God and even a threat to God’s plan. When that happens God will remove him under the penalty of “sinning that leads to death”. The believer in carnality is already experiencing a form of

spiritual deadness as a result of the unconfessed sin but now he faces physical death. Once saved, always saved, but that does not preclude severe chastisement even to the point of physical death.

There are examples of this sinning leading to death in the Bible. Lets examine a few.

King David

PS 118:17 I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. ¹⁸ The Lord has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death...

This is a Psalm of David, and he is praising the Lord for His goodness in his life. At verse 17 he suddenly says he will not die but will live. In verse 18, he says he has been disciplined very severely, but not given over to death. David is recounting the period in his life when he took Bathsheba, impregnated her, tried to deceive her husband Uriah into thinking the child was his and, when that didn't work, he arranged to have Uriah murdered.

If you were ever a smoker, you probably at some time "chain-smoked". You lit a new cigarette using the lit butt of a cigarette you had just finished. What David did is what some call "chain-sinning". As one cigarette led to another, each lit by the previous, the same is with sinning. One sin lead to another. One bad decision lead to another bad decision. For David this went on for maybe a year until we see David's prophet Nathan very pointedly convict David of his sins. This passage demonstrates that David knew he faced the death penalty because of his pattern of sinning and being outside the will of God. He did recover.

Psalm 51 is David's prayer for forgiveness. Notice in Ps 51:11, David asks, "Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me." That is not a prayer we can pray today. In previous ages, Holy Spirit indwelling was temporary and given to only a few such as artisans building the tabernacle, the temple, and making articles for worship, plus people like prophets, the patriarchs, and a few kings like David. This is called "induement". There was no universal and permanent indwelling of believers then. During this Church Age, born again believers do experience permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Those abusing the Lord's Table in Corinth

1 Cor 11:27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why **many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.** ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

There were some in the church in Corinth who were partaking of the Lord's Table in an "unworthy manner". The two words come from the Greek *anaxios* /an·ax·ee·oce/ and simply means unworthy or not deserving. Those **guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord** were those who disrespected poorer members by utter disregard for their needs (11:21–22). Furthermore, the meal, which was like a pot-luck without the sharing had degenerated into a celebration resembling gluttony and even drunkenness for some of the members, while the poorer members went with very little or nothing to eat. All this had produced disunity and alienation within the church! Paul is saying those doing wrong need to **examine** (*dokimazetō*, "test to approve," (1 Cor. 11:28) themselves and they would see that they lacked God's approval (*dokimoi*, v. 19) in this behavior. Simply put it was sin! Coming to the Lord's Supper with unconfessed sin on the soul brought **judgment** on the guilty participants. What that **judgment** entailed was it had brought sickness and even death on some. The solution was self-examination and confession (rebound) before the Lord. Make sure you have no unconfessed sin on your soul before you partake of the communion elements!

Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 5:1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart

to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” ⁹ But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

What happened to these two is probably the most famous and the most obvious example of sin leading to death. This couple, Ananias and Sapphira sold some land and held back some of the proceeds while making a big deal of claiming they gave all of the sale proceeds to the church. They chose to lie about it. That was likely prompted by the actions of one member named Joseph and others in the church who had sold property and gave the proceeds of the sale to the church —“... laid it at the apostles feet” (Acts 5:32-37). This was a common practice in the early church. It appears that those who had made these donations were well thought of as a result. Our two pilgrims wanted some of that adoration. Peter, in questioning Ananias, charged him with lying to the Holy Spirit (V2 and V4). In verse 5, when Ananias heard this he fell down and died.

Some three hours later Sapphira shows up and is oblivious to what has transpired with her husband. She is also questioned by Peter and lied like her husband. In verse 9 Peter accuses of her of “testing the Spirit of the Lord”. And she falls down and dies on the spot.

This is a classic example of “sin leading to death”. What was so terrible about what they did that it deserved immediate death? This was probably not the first rodeo for these two. There was likely a history here, and this was the final act. But even if it wasn’t, we should understand the church

was very young at this point and, for sin to be condoned within the church body, especially one that is seen as lying to the Holy Spirit, could not be tolerated.

There are other examples in Scripture that could be argued are depicting “sin leading to death,” but these three are the most obvious. The Corinthian Lord’s Table incident and the Ananias and Sapphira incident are pretty easy for us to understand and relate to. Those guilty come off as someone we might immediately peg as “bad people”. David, however, is the most enlightening of the three examples. I have said a Christian can commit any sin an unbeliever can commit AND do it habitually. The very fact that there is a penalty of death for that tells us it is a very real possibility. David was “a man after God’s own heart” and a believer since childhood, yet his sinning took him to the brink of the final act of “sinning leading to death”.

Hebrews 12:5 My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

That word translated “discipline” is our word *paideia pahee·di·ah* and is often translated “chastise”. Strong’s defines it as the whole training and education of children. It also includes the training and care of the body, and in adults, it also cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing passions. It is instruction which aims at increasing virtue.

We are chastised because “later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (V11).

Is there an “unpardonable sin”? — Technically, no. In practice, yes.

All sin was judged at the Cross, but what do we call rejecting the free gift of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone? Blasphemy against the testimony of the Holy Spirit—saying His testimony is a lie? That act does result in eternal damnation but calling it an “unpardonable sin”...? I contend that the person was born condemned already because of Adam’s sin, and the later rejection of the witness of the Holy Spirit, while blasphemous, did not result in condemnation but only sealed it. The blasphemer was going to hell before the act of blaspheming and is still going to hell after. But how many of us rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our own lives before we came to be born again? Did we commit an unpardonable sin those X number of times we were presented the Gospel?

In the Scripture examples we looked at, the sin of blasphemy (potentially or actually) incurred only the temporal penalty of physical death with no indication it involved eternal condemnation. There was no indication of loss of salvation (real or potential) in the example of David or even Ananias and Supphira. I don’t see it as some sin that was not judged at the Cross.