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The Unpardonable Sin and the Three Witnesses

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Abstract: This article evaluates the Three Witnesses' lives in respect to Paul's words on the unpardonable sin (Hebrews 6:4-6). Smith declares that the Three Witnesses did not commit the unpardonable sin as described by Paul. He maintains that "it surely was the purpose of God that they should go the road they had traveled."

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“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”—ISAIAH viii, 20.

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THE UNPARDONABLE SIN AND THE THREE WITNESSES.

BY APOSTLE J. H. SMITH.

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THE following is a synopsis of a discourse by Apostle J. H. Smith, preached in the large Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday, February 12, 1888:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

And have tasted the good word of God, and the power of the world to come,

If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (Heb. vi, 4—6).

Elder Smith said he had been led to reflect seriously recently upon these words he had read from the writings of St. Paul, and upon the condition of those there referred to. His mind had been led in this direction from recently hearing of the death of the last of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and had caused him to reflect upon the experiences of those men to whom had been given the privilege of gazing upon the sacred records that have come to the people as the Book of Mormon. These witnesses were possessed of information such as few

men receive; and of privileges that few men enjoy; chosen of God as special witnesses for the purpose; permitted to gaze on the records as they were when originally secreted; they had the privilege of hearing the voice of heavenly beings, and communing with those who had gone before to the eternal worlds. The thought of all this caused the speaker to reflect on the fate of those who denied the truth, as spoken of by Paul. The human family are liable to form and cling to opinions that are not always proper, and sometimes put a too limited construction on the language of those who spake by the Holy Ghost. Through this they imagine that many are under the condemnation spoken of when they really are not; they may be in a position of doubt, never having fully comprehended the import of the obligations they have taken upon themselves, yet they are in a far different position to those who fully realized the importance of the step they were taking.

There are probably many who have fallen away, who have never received

the testimony of the truth, because their conduct was not such as to entitle them to that testimony; they may have lacked that faith necessary to receive those witnesses, and to establish them on the rock of truth, although their reason had been convinced; they may have received the right to the blessings of the Holy Ghost, and yet never have seen or heard the gifts of that Spirit, and known the divinity of the source; or not have received the dreams and the visions that were characteristic of the work of God; they have received of the ordinances, but have not heard the voice of revelation. Going on in this careless way something has come to turn them aside; they remain aloof for a number of years, possessed of no animus toward their former friends, and are even kind and considerate to them. By and by there comes a change in their position; they are awakened from their stupor, and the Spirit of the Lord begins to work upon them, and they start out anew to receive the witness that seemingly had been denied them. Finally, through the faith they manifest they receive the testimony of the Holy Ghost. Others may have been severed from the Church for a failure to comply with requirements made of them, yet the spirit of which they partook remained with them, in a degree, and they do not become embittered against the truth. It cannot be said that these come fully under the conditions stated by Paul, for experience has shown that it is not impossible for them to repent and turn again to the truth.

There are others who have received the heavenly visions, who have turned aside and have found themselves shorn of the Holy Spirit, and become enemies to that faith which was formerly dearer than their lives, and which they subsequently sought to overthrow. For these the Father holds in his own hands a righteous judgment. In considering this matter there is the example and fate of him who betrayed his Master; a chosen one whose heart became so embittered that for a few pence he sold his Master's life, and showed himself at heart a murderer. In this age there are men who have denounced the Gospel, yet who have

humbly turned to make amends for the wrongs of which they were guilty; but there are others who, like Judas, go to their deaths in the bonds of bitterness, rejoicing in the sufferings of those whom they once loved, and in the warfare against truth.

Reflection on the position in which the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon placed themselves, causes wonderment as to how our Father will deal with them. His voice had declared to them precious things, and He gave to them great privileges. Amidst the hatred of their fellowmen they wandered from the path in which they started to move. They remained away from the work of God, and became personally enraged against the Prophet, who was the first witness, and whom they looked upon as not giving sufficient honor unto them. They turned and became silent in proclaiming the Gospel, and hedged up the way of the Prophet as far as they could. Yet they turned not aside from their witness to the Book of Mormon, and stood as monuments of truth, faithful unto death to that testimony. There seemed a purpose in the withdrawal of these men personally from the association of the Church, and in their becoming silent in the labor of spreading the Gospel. That purpose was to leave the human family without excuse, and destroy all ground for the charge of collusion to deceive. These witnesses became alienated from and jealous of him who had received the confidence of the Saints; yet they maintained their testimony, whenever it was necessary, to the Book of Mormon.

When the prophet sealed his testimony by the sacrifice of his own life, and the people started west, one of them desired to occupy a humble place among them. Returning to get his family to share the exile of the Saints, he died, bearing his testimony with his latest breath firm as a rock regarding his witness of the Book of Mormon and the renewal of the covenant of the Gospel. Thus did Oliver Cowdery end his days; returning to the fold from which he had turned for a season in coldness. The next witness, in the last days of his life, came among the Saints broken in

health and nearing his mortal end, yet he bore the same testimony unflinching to the death; he clasped to his breast the sacred record, the divine origin of which had been made known to him by the Lord, and yielded up his life. Whenever he was spoken to on the subject, his reply would come in such a manner that his honesty, fidelity and faithfulness could not be doubted. He was a stranger to the Church for years; yet in that estrangement he was steadfast to his original testimony.

Last of the three was David Whitmer, who was esteemed by his acquaintances as a man of integrity and honor; in his last moments he reasserted his testimony regarding the book. The only one of the special witnesses who stood aloof from the great Gospel work, and dying without the fold, yet in life and death he was faithful to his special testimony.

Will the rule of the apostle apply to these men? Will they, in the midst of God's judgment, be banished from the door. There surely will be a special dispensation for such men. It surely was the purpose of God that they should go the road they had traveled, true to their testimony, firmly fixed as the earth itself, showing to the world that there was no deceit, and leaving all without excuse. God held them there, and required that their testimony should go forth as firm as the rock of ages. The remark of the apostle must be considered more broadly than fixing its application to these men.

When a man is filled with hatred and becomes a murderer in his heart, then he is in the condition described by the apostle, and is fit only to be cast out.

The speaker was thankful that the Saints are not alone dependent on the testimony of these witnesses now dead. Instead of but a few witnesses to the Book of Mormon, they are now numbered by thousands.

Elder Smith knew the great work of the last days to be of God, and to be true, and that it would accomplish the mission He had designed for it.

May the Saints walk in the path of life eternal, that they may have the welcome plaudit—"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord."

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PRESIDENT ANGUS M CANNON

said he desired to bear his testimony to the truth of Brother Smith's remarks. When he was ten years of age, he had himself heard the testimony of Patriarch Hyrum Smith, one of the eight witnesses, to the divinity of the Book of Mormon; he had also heard the testimony of the Prophet Joseph in Nauvoo. In the autumn of 1857, at the Kirtland Temple, Martin Harris bore testimony to him regarding the truth of the sacred record of the ancient inhabitants of America. On the seventh of last month (Jan. 1888), Brother Cannon called on David Whitmer, to hear his testimony. The old gentleman was then eighty-three years of age, and very feeble. He raised his hand and said: "My friend, if God ever uttered a truth, I tell the truth now." He then went on and told how he saw the glory of the Lord and heard the voice of the angel. His words were accompanied by the power of God. Brother Cannon closed his remarks by exhorting the Saints to show by their example their unflinching faith in God.

IF MAN CAN DO SO MUCH, WHAT MAY NOT GOD DO?

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THOMAS A. Edison is one of the most remarkable inventors of the age. His achievements seem marvelous. He is called a wizard, because of his remarkable success in various directions. The latest invention with which he is credited promises to effect a wonderful and a complete change of

the letter writing of the world. It is said that he has commenced the manufacture of the phonograph in such an improved form that it can be used for commercial purposes. This is an invention that he has had in hand for about ten years past. Ten years ago it was thought to be a very interest-