

What Is the Unpardonable Sin?

Matthew 12:22-32; Isaiah 1:18

March 18, 2018

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What is the unpardonable sin and who is guilty of committing it? The Lord Jesus discusses this subject not only as a warning to those who might dangerously flirt with this sin, but also as an encouragement to all those who have fled to Christ for His mercy that they have not and cannot commit this sin. Due to unsound teaching on this subject, Christians have been cast into a sense of hopelessness and utter despair believing that they have committed the unpardonable sin. Christians have spent sleepless nights and restless days in torment, not only questioning their salvation, but asking, “Have I committed the unpardonable sin by doubting Christ and His promises, or by having so little success in overcoming this besetting sin in my life?” By God’s grace, let us not only seek to understand what this sin is that can never be forgiven and who it is that is guilty of it, but let us also apply knowledge we receive in such a way that we might be driven by faith alone to the Lord Jesus Christ in whom alone is forgiveness and eternal life.

The main points from our text this Lord’s Day are these: (1) The Wicked Charge Brought against Jesus (Matthew 12:22-24); (2) The Unassailable Defense Offered by Jesus (Matthew 12:25-30); (3) The Judicial Warning Issued by Jesus (Matthew 12:31-32).

I. The Wicked Charge Brought against Jesus (Matthew 12:22-24).

A. The backdrop to this wicked charge against our Lord is that a demon-possessed man was brought to Him (Matthew 12:22). The demons that possessed this man had also brought this man into total darkness (he was blind) and total silence (he could not speak). Christ in all of His mercy and power to help the helpless, cast the demon out of the man and healed him of his blindness and muteness. All those who witnessed this miracle were so amazed that they began to ask the question, “Is not this the Son of David?” (Matthew 12:23). In other words, “Is not this the messianic king prophesied to come, who was to proceed from the house of David in order to destroy His enemies and save His people?” The power of Jesus Christ to set this prisoner free from Satan’s dominion led them to ask that question.

B. However, in response to this earnest question on the part of the people, the Pharisees wickedly responded by falsely charging, “This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (Matthew 12:24). Beelzebub was one of the gods of the Canaanites which over the course of time became associated with Satan—“the prince of the devils”. The specific words which the Pharisees used here are not so difficult in themselves, but the true meaning of this accusation must be further explored. For these words and actions of the Pharisees compelled the Lord subsequently in Matthew 12:31-32 to issue the words concerning the unpardonable sin. What were the Pharisees really saying that would call forth from Christ a warning about a sin that can never be forgiven?

1. They were obstinately denying and deliberately hardening their hearts against the truth that Jesus was the messianic King sent by God to destroy the kingdom of Satan and to build up the kingdom of God. Beyond that, they not only denied that Christ was the Messiah, but even went so far as maliciously to declare that Jesus had entered into a covenant with Satan in order to deceive, mislead, and guide the people ultimately to follow Satan. The Pharisees and the scribes were going on record as saying that the operation of the Holy Spirit that was evident in the ministry of Christ (e.g. His casting out of demons) was in fact the operation of the satanic spirit that was His by means of a covenant He had entered into with Satan. Here was the most blatant, flagrant, obstinate, and serious charge that might be brought against Christ and the Holy Spirit, who was gloriously working in the ministry of Jesus.

2. Furthermore, I would add that this heinous charge was not committed in ignorance, but rather was committed against knowledge and the light of the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees were knowledgeable men when it came to familiarity with the Old Testament Scriptures. They were not unlearned novices, but had been thoroughly schooled in the Scriptures and were leaders among the Jews. They knew of the prophecies concerning Christ that are found in the Old Testament. They had examined the ministry of Christ, having heard for themselves the truth of His doctrine, and having witnessed the power of His miracles, and having observed the mercy of His kind acts for the oppressed and afflicted. It was due to the light they had received from the Holy Spirit and which light they had hated and rejected that these Pharisees wickedly charged the Lord Jesus with being in league with the devil.

3. Finally, this heinous charge of collusion with Satan was a forerunner to the violent persecution that was soon to befall Christ at the hands of the Pharisees. These Pharisees hated Christ, hated what He taught, hated His miracles, and hated His deeds of mercy to such an extent that they conspired to destroy Him (Matthew 12:14). They couldn't silence Him by their accusations nor could they catch Him in His words, for Christ made fools of them every time they sought to do so. Thus, they decided He must be destroyed.

4. O, the danger of turning from the light God gives you concerning Jesus Christ and His truth. Whatever light you do have will be likewise taken from you. To reject the light of the Holy Spirit is to invite the darkness of Satan. Rejoice in the light and reject it not.

II. The Unassailable Defense Offered by Jesus (Matthew 12:25-30).

A. In light of what the Pharisees had just said about Jesus casting out demons because He was in league with Satan, the Lord Jesus defends Himself using three arguments.

1. **The First Argument of the Lord Jesus.** If Satan uses his power to deliver people from his own dominion and to destroy his own kingdom, how can his kingdom stand (Matthew 12:25-26)? It can't. Jesus argues, "How could I be in league with Satan while at the same time destroying the kingdom of Satan." It was for this very reason that Christ was continually casting demons out of those who were possessed: to give a visible and miraculous confirmation that the King was present and no power on earth or in hell could stand against Him (Matthew 12:28). Jesus told demons to be silent and at times they came out with bloodcurdling screams to give proof to His power over them and to prove that they did not willingly vacate those they possessed, but came out because they had to come out (Mark 1:25-26).

2. **The Second Argument of Jesus.** If the Pharisees wickedly accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan, by whose power do those who are fellow Jews ("your children") cast them out (Matthew 12:27)? Jesus was either speaking here of His own apostles or others who did so in the name and power of Jesus Christ or other gifted men (the apostles—Matthew 10:8; the seventy—Luke 10:17; other gifted believers in Christ—Luke 9:49). In other words, it reveals their extreme hatred of Christ that they accuse Him of being in league with Satan in casting out Satan, but do not do so with fellow Jews who do the same in His name. Therefore, their "children" will condemn the Pharisees.

3. **The Third Argument of the Lord.** Jesus is not an inferior to Satan, but is rather mightier than Satan and has victoriously invaded Satan's kingdom and has bound Satan so that He might spoil Satan of his goods (i.e. of those he has enslaved, Matthew 12:28-29). Christ's power to set free those who were in bondage to Satan argues that Christ is Lord and is diametrically hostile to Satan's kingdom and that He is the Son of God who has come to rescue sinners from the dominion of sin and Satan.

B. Please understand that it is not just those possessed with demons that are in bondage to Satan, but all of us in our unregenerate state were held captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:25-26). It is simply the delusion of the devil to whisper in your ear that you are free in your sin to choose or to refuse Jesus Christ. It is a lie. We are all enslaved and dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:4-5). None of us were free to

choose Christ or to believe in Christ before we were miraculously set free and raised by Christ and graciously given faith to believe in Him (John 8:36 [you are not free until the Son makes you free]; Ephesians 2:8-9).

III. The Judicial Warning Issued by Jesus (Matthew 12:31-32).

A. Here is the conclusion drawn from what the Lord Jesus has said in His own defense against the wicked charge of the Pharisees. Those who continue steadfastly in this course of hatred and persecution against Jesus Christ, after having received light and even conviction by the Holy Spirit, are guilty of the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

B. How is it that blasphemy against the Son can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven? Is the Holy Spirit more important than or superior to the Son? Absolutely not!

1. There is one essential nature to the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity, so that one Person of the Trinity cannot be offended without offending all, nor glorified without glorifying all.

2. It is the operation of the Holy Spirit within the Divine economy of the Covenant of Grace that is specifically in view. For just as the Father sends His Son to save His people, and just as the Son is sent into the world to save His people by accomplishing their redemption, so the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to reprove and convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Felix, the Roman governor, trembled under conviction of the judgment to come (Acts 24:25); and King Agrippa declared to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Thus, it is the Holy Spirit through His operations that are blasphemed by the sin of the Pharisees. To turn from the knowledge and truth of Jesus Christ with absolute hatred for His work and to habitually call His work the work of the devil after having been convicted and shown light by the Holy Spirit, and to embark upon a mission to destroy Jesus Christ and His testimony, is to be cast into utter hopelessness.

a. Hebrews 6:4-6 likewise speaks of the same unpardonable sin. Here we see certain operations and influences of the Holy Spirit by way of knowledge and understanding (which fall short of actual salvation) that are manifested in those who commit the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin is a sin of hatred and even violence against the light the Holy Spirit shed upon those who even at one time professed Jesus Christ. If they could, they hate Christ so much that they would crucify Him afresh. Note that those who commit this sin never desire or never come to repent, confess their sin, nor seek the forgiveness of God. They do not care about this at all, because of their hatred for Christ and His truth. If you have been troubled in your life as to whether you have committed the unpardonable sin, your being troubled and concerned is an evidence that you have not committed it.

b. Those who commit this unpardonable sin have never been made alive by Christ through the Holy Spirit, for we are assured that all those who come to Christ in saving faith shall never be lost (John 6:37,39; John 10:27-29).

C. Consider what the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit **IS NOT**.

1. **IT IS NOT** mere unbelief, hardness of heart, rebellion, or living in unrepentant sin. These sins can be forgiven by the Lord (the thief on the cross).

2. **IT IS NOT** mere paganism or atheism. These sins can be forgiven by Jesus (Philippian jailer).

3. **IT IS NOT** mere immorality of the grossest sort or total disregard of the life and well-being of others. These sins can be forgiven by God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

4. **IT IS NOT** mere blasphemy or cursing God. These sins can be forgiven by Christ (Peter).

5. **IT IS NOT** mere apostasy or falling away from the Lord Jesus or mere betrayal or denial of Christ. These sins can be forgiven by God (Peter fell away and denied the Lord Jesus three times with curses, lying that he even knew the Lord Jesus).

6. **IT IS NOT** mere persecution of those who embrace the truth of Christ. This sin can be forgiven by Jesus Christ (Paul).

7. **IT IS NOT** any one single sin, no matter how heinous that sin may be. All of these sins are heinous and aggravated sins, but they are all sins that Jesus Christ bore on behalf of His elect. These are sins for which you should pray that the Lord Jesus would deliver you and others from.

D. What **IS** the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

1. **IT IS** a deliberate, obstinate, and habitual turning from the light of the Spirit in one's life (the knowledge of the truth, the love of Jesus Christ, and the conviction of sin and error), so as to live a life of hatred against Christ and His truth with all one's heart, so as to trample upon the blood of Christ, so as to despise Jesus Christ and the Christian faith to such a degree that if one had the power he would bring Christ down from heaven and crucify Him again and would eradicate the true Christian faith and those who embrace it from the face of the earth.

2. This was the nature of the sin that Jesus warned the Pharisees that they had either committed or were close to committing.

E. I would, however, have you note that in addressing this one sin as unforgivable, the Lord declares every other sin as forgivable (Matthew 12:31).

Dear ones, the power of God's grace and love in forgiving the worst of the worst of sinners (even the chief of sinners) is declared in the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that no matter what your past looks like, if you fall upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus seeking His forgiveness for your sin, you will be forgiven all your sin (Isaiah 1:18). Your sin qualifies you to be forgiven in Christ Jesus, whereas your self-righteousness qualifies you to remain unforgiven (Isaiah 55:1). Come without money and fall upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus right now.

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