

**Mark 3: 28-30; “Speaking against the Holy Spirit”, Sermon # 17 in the series
“Astonished at His Teachings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
August 3rd, 2014, in the Morning Worship Service.**

This last Sunday I spoke to you on the subject of speaking against the Lord Jesus Christ. The scribes and the Pharisees understood that Jesus was doing miracles and helping many people to be healed. They knew that many were coming by faith to God for the forgiveness of their sins. But the scribes and the Pharisees didn't like this because Jesus would not submit to their false system of religious legalism which they had built around the true one which had been given to them by God through Abraham and his descendants who knew that they were being saved by faith in the promise of God. This morning I want to speak to you about a subject which has been so very difficult for believers to understand correctly over the years; the subject of the sin against the Holy Spirit. What is this sin and who are those who commit it? It is very important that we know how to answer this question because many a person who is thinking about becoming a Christian and even many Christians in the past have wrestled with this question, “Have I committed the unpardonable sin?” I am hoping that our study around the Scriptures at this time, will help to clarify this difficult subject. The way that I would like to approach this subject is to first of all is to show you how very gracious God is through our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive all our sins and even blasphemies, except this sin against the Holy Spirit. Then 2ndly – I would like to try to explain to you why this sin against the Holy Spirit is the unpardonable sin. (verse 30) And then 3rd, as we gather around the Table, I would like us to remember that the Lord Jesus did have the most clean of spirits. (verse 30)

1st of all – Let us consider how gracious is God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to forgive all our sins and even blasphemies against Himself. (Verse 28)

“Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter, but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness.” What a great salvation has been purchased for all believers, that our Lord could make such a statement as this. “All sins and blasphemies will be forgiven”.... It is certainly more than we can comprehend, more than we can take in. If we were even to begin to think of how many sins we have committed over the span of our life; and that the Lord is willing to forgive us and to cleanse us from all of them; by simple faith in Him; it surely seems too good to be true. There may be some here this morning who do not believe that their sins are a very big thing at all, but when they think this way, they only are proving that they do not know themselves or God. They do not see how sin ruins the life which God has given to us. They do not understand that God has anger and wrath, He has disapproval and actual holy hatred against all sins and sinners who hold to their sin and justify their sin in His sight. I think that some people think that they will somehow be able to persuade God on the Day of Judgment that really their sins were not something that bad or that great; great enough to deserve punishment. But I would like to read you a few verses from the Bible and have you think about them with me.

Turn with me to Psalm 5 and we will look at the Holy and righteous character of God for a few moments. “Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation.” “Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I will pray.” “My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up.” “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You.” “The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity.” These are the truths that each of us must consider and remember about our God. If God takes no pleasure in wickedness, then He cannot be pleased with even one sin which we commit. In James 2: 10 it says: “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” This is how God thinks of our sin; if we are guilty of breaking His commandments, we deserve to be punished. If evil shall not dwell

with Him, then how shall we come to live with Him and dwell with Him in heaven without the forgiveness of all our sins, and our heart being radically changed by His grace? We cannot. If He hates all workers of iniquity, then how can He possibly look favorably upon them and love them? Certainly He does not. If God shall destroy those who speak falsehood, does this include all kinds of lies? Yes it does. If the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man, then how can He possibly bring a bloodthirsty and deceitful man; one who wishes to take the life of His people away from them? Only by faith in Jesus Christ is the answer.

But when a person has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he or she can know all of their sins forgiven, and Christ's righteousness imputed to them. This God can do because Christ shed His precious blood for sinners. When we cry out to God in prayer to have mercy upon our soul, because of the Lord Jesus' death and resurrection, we will soon find that all of our sins, the greatest of them as well as the least of them, have all been forgiven. Then we can express ourselves in the words of verse 7, "But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; in fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple." We will be able to say in the words of verse 8, "Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; make Your way straight before my face." And we will find everlasting joy as it says in verse 11, "But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You." Let me ask you this morning if you have found this everlasting joy? Let me ask you dear believer; the one who is trusting in God's mercy in Jesus Christ; whether you live walking in this joy? This salvation is for the vilest of sinners, even those who have blasphemed God's holy name.

Turn with me over to 1 Timothy Chapter 1 and you will see the Apostle Paul's joy and his thankfulness. In verse 12 it says, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." "And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." The Lord Jesus forgave all of Paul's blasphemies against God, and against Him. Blasphemy is "The malignant attempt in words, to lessen men's reverence of the true God, and by vilifying His perfections, to prevent their placing confidence in Him." (J. Newton Brown's Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge. P. 249) Blasphemy in general, is when people speak evil of God, and particularly His perfections, or speaking evil of His way of salvation. The Apostle Paul found mercy with God. God forgave all of the times of his being a persecutor which are mentioned in Acts 26, where he says in verse 9 and following, "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." "This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them, and I punished them often, in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities." He was forgiven of all of these many and aggravated sins against Christ and against men because God is so very gracious. Will you not take heart from this, dear Christian? You who believe that there are some sins from your past that the Lord cannot forgive you of. It says here that unless you have committed the sin unto death, all of your sins can be forgiven you for Jesus sake. Will you not apply to Him for the remission of all of your sins? Even Paul, as wicked as he was before conversion, was forgiven of all of his sins. Those of you who will partake of the Lord's Supper this morning, remember the willingness of God the Father to forgive all of your sins and blasphemies for Jesus' sake.

Now 2ndly- I would like to try to explain to you why this sin against the Holy Spirit is the unpardonable sin. (Verse 30)

Verse 29 says: “But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation – because they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit’.” We have just seen an example in the life of the Apostle Paul, before he was converted, in which he was forgiven of all of his persecuting, blasphemous sins. And one of the reasons that Paul received this mercy was that he committed these sins, “ignorantly in unbelief”. If Paul had committed these sins knowingly and willfully in unbelief, he would not have received mercy. Sometimes, you and I believe that murderous, persecuting wicked men cannot be forgiven. But it is not true. Paul is the pattern for all who come after him who were blasphemous persecutors. He did not commit the sin unto death. The sin unto death is not a sin committed in ignorance; it is a sin committed with knowledge of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. There was real malice in Paul’s mind against those whom he persecuted. But there was also ignorance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Some people think that since they have resisted the Holy Spirit, have resisted Him strenuously, resisted him for a long time, that they have committed this sin, and thus they believe that they cannot be forgiven. But it is possible to resist the ministry of the Holy Spirit and yet not to sin the sin unto death.

Since we need to see this truth from the Scriptures, I would like you to turn with me to Acts Chapter 6 verse 8. Stephen, one of the first deacons in the New Testament Church is described for us here. “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.” “Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.” “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.” (This was the ministry of the Holy Spirit through his words.) “Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’” “And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him seized him and brought him to the council.” “They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law....’” Then in Chapter 7 we have recorded for us, Stephen’s defense. After relating the history of Israel from the perspective of God’s goodness to them, and realizing that those whom he was preaching to were not receiving his testimony, he says this to them in verse 51, “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!” “You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.”

Now you would think that having heard these words, that these men were committing the sin unto death by resisting the Holy Spirit in this way. They were going to kill Stephen, they hated him so much for his words. But look at the prayer of Stephen as he is dying. It is recorded for us in verses 59 and 60. “And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” “Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord do not charge them with this sin.” “And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” This is proof of the fact that their resisting the Holy Spirit was not the sin unto death; the fact that Stephen prayed for them that the Lord would not hold this sin against them. Now turn over with me to 1 John 5, verse 16. John is speaking about what believers should pray for and what they should not pray for. “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.” “There is sin leading to death.” “I do not say that he should pray about that.” There is the proof that at least some of those who Stephen prayed for had not committed the sin leading to death. The proof is his prayer. If there were not at least some, who had not committed the sin unto death, then surely the Lord Jesus who Stephen was seeing at that very time standing at the right hand of the majesty on high, would have restrained Stephen from praying for those who he never intended to pardon, ever. As it was, the Apostle Paul was one of those who was standing by approving of his death and holding the cloaks of those who were stoning Stephen. It is a mistake to think that the sin of all

of these men who were stoning Stephen was the sin against the Holy Spirit which could not be pardoned.

But the sin of these scribes and Pharisees in the text that we are reading from in Mark 3, was that they had plainly spoken against the Holy Spirit. And we have already seen that it was not just their speaking against the Spirit in a general sense. It was speaking against the Spirit in a particular way, saying that Jesus had an unclean spirit; therefore the Holy Spirit was an unclean spirit. This is the blasphemy which cannot be forgiven. I want you to turn over to Matthew 12, verse 31, with me; and you will see a little different wording coming from the lips of the Lord Jesus in this situation. This is why we have four gospels. They comment upon one another and they build upon one another. They do not contradict each other. Here it says, "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men." "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." The sin against the Holy Spirit which can never be forgiven is a speaking sin. It is the terrible sin of blasphemy perpetrated against the Holy Spirit by saying that He is unclean and unholy. Jesus, as the Son of Man, was being blasphemed by these men, but those blasphemies against His holy person and human nature could be forgiven. But the blasphemy done against the Holy Spirit, that holy and divine Person of the Trinity, through whom Jesus did all His miracles, this dishonoring of ministry of the Holy Spirit by saying that it was the ministry of the Devil; this could not be forgiven. It could not be forgiven in that day; and it cannot be forgiven in the day in which we live.

The age in which Jesus fulfilled His ministry was the end of the age of the Old Covenant and Testament. This covenantal transition was being made by Jesus Himself as He was the fulfillment of the promises made to the Fathers. He was about to inaugurate the New Covenant and the New age by His going to the cross and rising again, and ascending to rule on high, at the right hand of God. The age in which we now live is the age of the Spirit. It is that age that began on the day of Pentecost and which will continue to the return of our Lord when He will bring it to an end by His coming and judge the World in righteousness. In this age we taste of the powers of the age to come, as it says in Hebrews chapter 6. A person who commits this sin of speaking against the Holy Spirit, whether they were committing it that day or this, cuts themselves off from all possibility of being saved. This is because all salvation of persons, whether it was in that day or this, is done by the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Jesus. You can see why this sin was unpardonable in that time, and you can see why it is unpardonable now in this age and time of the ministry of the Holy Spirit if you will turn over to Hebrews Chapter 10.

In verse 26 it says this. "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries." "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace." "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." "And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.'" "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We see from these words that this sin is a sin which has some knowledge of the truth. In that day, it was the knowledge that Jesus was doing miracles and claiming that He was the Son of God. In this day it is the knowledge that Jesus does the miracles of giving a New Heart, and that by His power, He changes and transforms our lives. If a person deliberately and willfully choose to state in the presence of witnesses that this power is the power of the devil, they are committing the sin unto death; they are blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

If a person counts the blood of the covenant by which they are sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit, an unclean thing or a common thing, this is blaspheming the Holy Spirit. If a person insults the Spirit of Grace by their deliberately chosen words, I think that you can now better understand why they can never be forgiven of this sin. It is because this blasphemy is a willful and particular form of blasphemy that God Himself has decided cannot be forgiven. All people need to receive the warning against committing it. May no one here be idle with their words or careless with their words, but as we come down now to observe the Lord's Supper, may we be speaking in our hearts, our praise and adoration for the blessed Holy Spirit; He who has come to our hearts and opened them to give us the knowledge of this great salvation which our Lord Jesus died to purchase; this grace which leads us to holiness.

Now 3rd - Let us remember that the Lord Jesus had a clean spirit. (verse 30)

....“Because they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’ But you and I know who have believed in Him, that the Lord Jesus did not have an unclean spirit. He had the cleanest, most pure, and perfect, and holy of spirits. Indeed, when you and I came to the Lord Jesus for salvation, we were coming to be forgiven and cleansed of all of our filthy sins. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ; we have come here to remember our Savior's death and resurrection. Will you not remember with me now, what Christ has accomplished for you; in His having suffered for you? Let His blood and righteous speak to you now in and through the emblems of this Supper. He is saying to you, based on these sufferings of His, that you should not let the sins and blasphemies which you may have committed in the past, keep you from seeking for the cleansing of them by His precious blood. He was mocked for you. He was scourged for you. He was nailed to the cruel cross for you. With His stripes you were healed. Do not confuse the sins and blasphemies which you truly have felt sorrow over having committed, lead you to think that you have committed the sin unto death; the sin against the Holy Spirit. The very fact that you are in an agony of grief and repentance, over having committed such sins, shows that you have not committed the unpardonable sin. A person guilty of that sin does not have a tender conscience. They do not mourn over their sins.

But you, dear Christian, have learned by the working and power of the Holy Spirit, to mourn over your sins. “Blessed are they that mourn,” Jesus says, “for they shall be comforted”. Only the true Christian has those kind of sincere regrets. Only a true Christian mourns over his sins and his failings, still desiring communion with Christ. And he does so because the Holy Spirit is working in his life. And as regards those great and gross sins which you may have committed since you were saved, remember the prayer of David in Psalm 51, verse 10 – “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” If you are worried that you have committed the unpardonable sin; this itself is an evidence that you have not committed that sin. Only a tender conscience being worked on by the Spirit is led to those kind of “deepest tenderest fears”. Only a tender conscience worries about having committed this sin. May any person here who worries that they have committed some sin which cannot be forgiven, come to Christ now confessing your sins. He has many tender and merciful thoughts which He exercises toward you. He will most certainly be faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

Footnote – The Experience of John Bunyan regarding his thinking that he had committed the sin against the Holy Spirit:

There are some persons who are greatly troubled by the temptations of Satan coming to their mind and heart to deny Christ and even to part with Christ; to exchange Him for the things of this life, for anything. This was the case of dear John Bunyan. He was very young in his faith and he had a difficult time discerning what was coming to him from God and what was coming

from the devil. I would like to read you some of his words to show you how troubled he was, that perhaps he had committed this unpardonable sin that we are discussing.

Speaking of his faith in Christ first, he says, "And now I found, as I thought, that I loved Christ dearly; oh! me thought my soul cleaved unto Him as hot as fire; and now, as Job said, 'I thought I should die in my nest; but I did quickly find that my great love was but little, and that I, who had, as I thought, such burning love to Jesus Christ, could let him go again for a very trifle; God can tell how to abuse us, and can hide pride from man.'" "Quickly after this my love was tried to purpose." ... "And the temptation was, to sell and part with this most blessed Christ, to exchange Him for the things of this life, for anything." "The temptation lay upon me for the space of a year, and did follow me so continually that I was not rid of it one day in a month, no, not sometimes one hour in many days together, unless, when I was asleep." "One morning, as I did lie in my bed, I was, as at other times, most fiercely assaulted with this temptation, sell and part with Christ; the wicked suggestion still running in my mind, 'Sell Him, sell Him, sell Him, sell Him,' as fast as a man could speak; against which also, in my mind, as at other times, I answered, 'No, No, not for thousands, thousands of worlds.'" "But at last, after much striving, even until I was almost out of breath, I felt this thought pass through my heart, 'Let Him go, if he will!'" "And I thought also, that I felt my heart freely consent thereto." "Oh the diligence of Satan!" "Oh the desperateness of a man's heart!" He thought that he had committed the unpardonable sin. He says, "And withal, that scripture did seize upon my soul, 'Or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright; for ye know, how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.'" "Now was I bound, I felt myself shut up unto the judgment to come; nothing now for two years together would abide with me, but damnation, and an expectation of damnation; I say, nothing now would abide with me but this, save some few moments for relief, as in the sequel you shall see."

He says a little later in the narrative, "I feared therefore that this wicked sin of mine, might be that sin unpardonable, of which he there thus speaketh." "But he that shall blaspheme the Holy Ghost never has forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." ... "And now began I to labor to call again time that was past; wishing a thousand times twice told, that the day was yet to come, when I should be tempted to such a sin, concluding with great indignation, both against my own heart, and all assaults, how I would rather have been torn in pieces, than found consenting to this sin of letting Christ go." "But alas, these thoughts, and wishings, and resolvings, were now too late to help me; the thought had passed my heart, God hath let me go, and I am fallen." The narrative continues for some pages, but it is some time before Bunyan was able to realize that he had not committed the sin unto death. The way that he figured it out was to go back to some particular Scripture verses. The light first began to dawn upon him through the good promises of Christ. "This Scripture did also most sweetly visit my soul, 'And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.'" (John 6: 37) "Oh the comfort that I have had from this word, 'in no wise!' ..." as who should say, by no means, for nothing, whatever he hath done."

"But Satan would greatly labor to pull this promise from me, telling of me that Christ did not mean me, and such as I, but sinners of lower rank, that had not done as I had done." "But I should answer him again, Satan, here is in this word is no such exception; but 'him that comes,' him, any him; 'him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.'" ... "If ever Satan and I did strive for any word of God in all my life, it was for this good word of Christ; he at one end and I at the other." "Oh what a work did we make!" He also received much help from Hebrews 13: 5, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." What was Bunyan's problem here? He was confusing his "selling" his hold on Christ with the sin unto death. He thought that if he once gave up Christ in this way that there no longer remained any sacrifice for sins for him. But the Lord being

merciful and faithful to him, he began looking more closely at the Scriptures which were troubling him, and then he was released from this torment. This is something that we must always do if we are to avoid thinking that we have fallen into this sin when we have not. Bunyan took a closer look at the passages of Scripture which were troubling him, and he found that he did not fall under the category of those who were being described. He says, "First I came to the sixth of Hebrews, yet trembling for fear it should strike me; which when I had considered, I found that the falling there intended was a falling quite away; that is, as I conceived, a falling from, and an absolute denial of the gospel of remission of sins by Christ; for from them the apostle begins his argument in verses 1-3."

"Secondly, I found that this falling away must be openly, even in the view of the world, even as "to put Christ to an open shame." "Thirdly, I found that those he there intended were forever shut up of God, both in blindness, and hardness, and impenitency: it is impossible they should be renewed again unto repentance." "By all these particulars, I found, to God's everlasting praise, my sin was not the sin in this place intended." "First," he says, "I confessed I was fallen, but not fallen away, that is, from the profession of faith in Jesus unto eternal life." "Secondly, I confessed that I had put Jesus Christ to shame by my sin, but not to open shame." "I did not deny Him before men, nor condemn him as a fruitless one before the world." "Thirdly; nor did I find that God had shut me up, or denied me to come, though I found it hard work indeed to come to Him by sorrow and repentance." "Blessed be God for His unsearchable grace."