

The unpardonable sin

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[0 : 00] Now we turn this morning to Matthew chapter 12 and at verse 31. Matthew 12 verse 31.

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, it shall be forgiven him. But whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

I suppose that these are among the most solemn words that have ever proceeded from the mouth of our Lord Jesus.

And in these words he warns that there is a sin that can never be forgiven. It is what we would call an eternal sin.

[1 : 08] Every other kind of sin can be forgiven, but not this one. It's known of course that the blood of Christ hasn't got the efficacy to deal with all sin.

The blood of Christ has got efficacy to deal with all kinds of sin. But we might say that in the all-wise judgment of God, he passes eternal condemnation on this one daring blasphemous sin.

And that is why it can never be forgiven in time nor in eternity. Now this is the kind of sin that has been the cause of a great deal of misery and a great deal of grief.

And it has even caused a great deal of grief to many Christians. Christians who become perhaps at one time or another anxious.

Anxious perhaps as they look back. Anxious as to whether he or she has been guilty of committing this sin.

[2 : 29] And for these people it has meant a degree of distress that's beyond what we can describe.

It has also caused for them great depression of spirit. Because once a man or once a woman begins to think along these lines that he or she has committed the unpardonable sin, it can throw them into the greatest depression of mind that you can think of.

And so in order to come to some understanding as to what is meant by the unpardonable sin, we've got to consider the context in which the warning was given by Jesus.

It tells us that these words were spoken after Jesus had healed a blind and a dumb man who had been possessed by a devil.

Now, there are so many problems in the scriptures that we can't go into all these problems or pretend in any way that we know the answers to them.

[3 : 46] How much the blindness or the dumbness were intertwined with a demon possession. But at any rate, here was this man and he was blind.

And he was dumb. And over and above that he was possessed by a devil. And Jesus took the devil out of this man.

And the effect of the cure that the man underwent, the effect of that cure upon the people was one of real amazement. They had never seen the like before.

They had never seen a man cured in this fashion. And their immediate reaction to what Jesus did was that here was at last the Messiah.

And this is what they said, is not this the son of David? It must be. Surely this is what the son of David would have done. Healed a man like this of his deafness and of his blindness and exercised the demon from him.

[4 : 55] And that was their reaction. One of amazement, astonishment. And indeed one of gratitude we might say. But the attitude you see of the Pharisees was quite different.

They looked at the whole scene. They looked at this situation. And their reaction was this. The man is a devil.

That's what they thought of Christ. This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. That's how he's got this power.

That's how he's able to do this extraordinary thing. The man is demon-possessed. Now, of course, that in itself wasn't the unpardonable sin.

And as Jesus listens to them, he reacts. And he shows to these scribes and Pharisees how ludicrous their reasoning was.

[6:01] Look, he says to them, there is Satan. And he has taken possession of a human life. Do you think for one moment, says Jesus, that Satan is going to leave that man's life?

Do you think for one moment that Satan is going to give up his hold on that man? Of course he is not. Satan is never one to contradict himself.

Satan is never one who is inconsistent with himself. Satan is never divided against himself. And once Satan does a thing, he does it and he holds on to it.

And so it's quite ludicrous to accuse me of being in league with Beelzebub and casting out a demon.

I would never do that if I was in league with Beelzebub. But, says Jesus, this that I have done has been done through me by the Spirit of God.

[7:10] It's by the Spirit of God that devils are cast out. By the power of God through his Spirit.

And for the Pharisees to ascribe that the power that he used or exercised at this time was the power of the devil, was blasphemy of a diabolical kind.

You know, the meaning of blasphemy is abusive or scurrilous language. I was looking up at the dictionary by a famous Princeton theologian called John Davis.

And he says, with regard to blasphemy, that it is defamatory or other wicked language directed against God.

You remember how in the law of Moses, blasphemy was punishable by death. This is what it says in Leviticus 24.

[8:18] He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him.

You remember how that charge of blasphemy was falsely brought against Naboth, who had a vineyard. And it was coveted by King Ahab.

And the king's wife, Jezebel, said to Ahab, you want Naboth's vineyard. You're the king. You're not going to take possession of it.

Well, I'll get it for you. And so, you see, she conspired to get men who were prepared to witness that Naboth had blasphemed God.

And there was nothing for it but for Naboth to be put to death. And when he was put to death, Jezebel was so pleased, he said, there's the vineyard of Naboth for you now.

[9:29] He's no longer going to be an obstacle to you. He's dead. Because I saw to it that he was charged with blaspheming God. And then you remember Stephen.

This was the accusation that was levelled against Stephen, that he was guilty of blaspheming God and they stoned him to death. And this is the accusation, you see, that was levelled against our Lord, that he was a blasphemer because he identified himself with God.

And Jesus tells us here that all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.

So what Jesus is saying is this, that whatever sins a man may commit, be it sins of idolatry, now you may look at your life and you may say, well, I have been an idolater.

I've been an idolater in this respect or in that respect. Well, I can say this to you, that sin can be forgiven. Sins of malevolence.

[10:45] Now they're terrible sins. What am I talking about when I talk about sins of malevolence? I'm talking about the heart of man which reacts to other people in the form of hatred.

And it's a terrible thing, you see, when a man begins to hate another man. You remember how John in one of his epistles says that if I hate my brother, I become a murderer.

So the sin of malevolence is a terrible sin. But that sin can be forgiven. Or again, we may take the sins of impurity.

And here are men who may look back upon their lives and they can remember the impurities. Oh, not the practical impurities only.

Not the sins that you do outwardly. But there are people who can look back and they can remember the sins that they've committed inwardly. The impure thoughts.

[11 : 58] Well, these sins can be forgiven. And then there are, you see, the sins of intemperance.

Intemperance of one kind or another. We may think of intemperance in terms of intoxication. But there are other intemperate sins. Can we be forgiven?

Of course we can. Thank God for that. The blood of Jesus Christ. It can cleanse from all sin and it can purify us.

And blasphemies, it says, blasphemies wherewithsoever men shall blaspheme shall be forgiven. But, to speak against the Holy Ghost is a different matter.

And Mark records for us very emphatically the words of our Lord in this connection where Jesus, according to Mark's record of it, Jesus says, but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness but is in danger of eternal damnation.

[13 : 26] And so here we are face to face with this grave sin for which there is no forgiveness but eternal misery and eternal woe.

It is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And it makes one a more heinous sinner than one who blasphemes Christ.

You know, it's one thing to blaspheme Christ. It's another thing to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. You remember Paul the Apostle, he calls himself the chief of sinners and also he calls himself a blasphemer but he obtained forgiveness.

He says, I was before, he says, a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly and in unbelief.

And so we are given a clue as to what constitutes the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. It is not a sin committed in blind ignorance and unbelief like blasphemy, the blasphemy of Paul.

[14 : 52] This sin is a sin which is committed in the light of knowledge and in the light of understanding because you see here were these Pharisees and they saw God's Spirit.

They saw the power of God's Spirit working through the Savior. They saw the demons being exercised by that power.

They saw people being healed and made whole by that power. They saw the kingdom of heaven opened by that power. and instead of these men acknowledging that this was the working of God what they did was they attributed it to the power of the devil.

That's a terrible thing. The power of God the gifts of God these are the activities of God's Holy Spirit and to ascribe these to the devil is to make light darkness and darkness light.

It's to create confusion in the eternal realm. It is to deny it is to reject the truth it is to prefer a lie.

[16 : 27] As Bishop Ryle puts it it appears to be the sin of deliberately rejecting God's truth with the heart while truth is clearly known with the head.

Or as John Calvin puts it it is no light or ordinary offence but an atrocious crime knowingly and willingly to pour contempt on the Spirit of God.

God and I know that people have been troubled by this and I remember being asked to go up to Craig to Nain to see a young man.

He had become what our island friends call a follower and in his own home he had gone to the means of grace regularly and he also went further and attended the prayer meeting and island people know what that means when you start attending the prayer meeting and you see he left his home went south became involved in things like the occult returned home felt a darkness over his spirit and that is why he arrived in the hospital in Inverness and his great concern was that he had sinned against the Holy Spirit and looking at the word of

God with him it was always Hebrews chapter 6 that if one has willingly turned one's back there is no further hope for that person and this is how you see this poor man argued and went on arguing it was very difficult to convince him otherwise what is the sin against the Holy Spirit well it brings an utter deadness and an utter hardness and an utter insensibility of the heart towards God and the things of God you know for any person who may be troubled about this I would certainly advise you to read that little book by William Guthrie saving interest in Christ it's been republished by the banner of truth society and the old covenanting preacher of

[19 : 26] Scotland of 350 years ago you know some of these men their works still linger with us the man's been dead 350 years there are men who are writing Christian books today they will be dead soon and their books will be forgotten but here is a man who has been dead all these number of

years and his book hasn't been forgotten and he gives to us a chapter of the sin against the Holy Ghost and he puts it like this what it is not and he says blaspheming God under bodily tortures that's not the sin against the Holy Ghost Paul punished the Lord's people before conversion so he wasn't guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost and he says it's not hating good in others and he goes on to give a third reason what it is not he says it's not the heart rising at thriving of others in the work and way of

God in other words if it was that you see here is Jonah he would have been guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost because he refused to go to Nineveh to preach the gospel to the Ninevites he saw God was going to work with these people and so as William Guthrie puts it is not the heart rising at the thriving of others in the work and way of God and he also goes on to say this that he is not sinning after light of truth has come into our hearts he gives the example you see of Peter he had the light the saving light of truth and after having the saving light of truth he sinned but he wasn't guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost and he also gives this reason grieving and vexing the spirit of

God by many sinful ways grieving and vexing the spirit of God by many sinful ways there was Peter's sin denying Christ before the ungodly cursing saying I know not the man that's not the sin against the Holy Ghost grieving and vexing the spirit of God by many sinful ways and says William Guthrie it's not attempts at self murder or murder even of others it's not the attempt at suicide or even suicide itself it's not murdering other people that is the sin against the Holy Ghost there was the Philippian jailer he tried to kill himself he received pardon there was

Paul who punished persecuted put to death many of the Lord's people among them Stephen he wasn't guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost and then William Guthrie goes on to ask what the sin what is the sin what sin the sin is and he lists these things he says it is refusal of God's way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ it is refusal of God's way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ and secondly he says it is the rejection of salvation which we know to be true which we are convinced is true which in a measure we have experienced to be true we have tasted the good word of God and the power of the world to come so it's this rejection of salvation says William Guthrie which we know to be true this is the sin against the Holy Ghost and he says thirdly it is opposition to Christ of such bitterness opposition to Christ of such bitterness as to call him Beelzebub and fourthly he says it is the public avowal of disclaiming Christ and doing so maliciously disclaiming Christ and doing so maliciously and fifthly he says this is the sin that induces within us hopeless fear oh he says much more than that but very often people who have read

[24 : 58] William Guthrie on this sin against the Holy Ghost have received great benefit and comfort and so the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost would appear to be open rejection of the truth of God as that truth is demonstrated and proved by the Holy Spirit and not only open rejection of it but of attributing the demonstration of that truth by the Holy Spirit to the work of the devil it is departure from the faith it is what Paul says to Timothy giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils it is speaking lies and hypocrisy it is having the conscience seared with the hot iron and so when anyone has committed the unpardonable sin I say when anyone has committed the unpardonable sin he is incapable of true penitence he is utterly opposed to the spirit of

God now as we draw to our close if this is something that causes concern and grief to someone here if it's causing real distress then let me say to you there is comfort in that condition do you know that if you are sitting here and you are worried you're concerned you're asking yourself over and over again have I committed this blasphemy against the Holy Ghost then be thankful that you are in such a condition because what is the function of the Spirit of God the function of the Holy Spirit is to reprove of sin of righteousness and of judgment to come and when the Holy Spirit has been blasphemed what does he do he withdraws and he leaves that guilty person in his hardened state where that person is beyond the feelings of guilt and beyond the feeling of misery so if you are concerned about having committed the unpardonable sin then be thankful that you are concerned because that concern is the evidence of a conscience that is still sensitive and tender and for that conscience the gospel holds out the greatest consolation if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness that's a wonderful thing to be still tender in conscience about these things and having had to speak to people from time to time about this very sin that causes them a great deal of despondency bordering on despair

I say to you if you've got that despondency if you've got that despair if you're worried about having committed the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost for which there is no forgiveness in this life or the

life to come then be thankful that you are like that and that God is still speaking to you and saying come to me let us reason together and though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow though they be as crimson they shall be as wool I hope these few remarks have been perhaps helpful to someone here today let us pray our gracious God we draw near to thee we thank thee that thy

Holy Spirit has not been taken from us otherwise we wouldn't be here today but we still have a conscience we still realize that there is a great need in us and because of that it has brought us here to worship our God and to seek to know more about the saving work of God in Christ O Lord may we not sin away the privilege but may we respond to the overtures of thy grace may we make our calling and our election sure and forbid that we end our lives by committing the sin for which there is no forgiveness neither here nor in eternity in Jesus name we ask it
Amen