

The Unpardonable Sin

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:105-112

1st Scripture: Mark 3:20-30

2nd Scripture: Matthew 12:22-32

Introduction

Much sleep has been lost and much anxiety has been harvested in the lives of some Christians who have feared that, in some way, they might have committed the “unpardonable sin.” The whole notion that there is a particular sin, which if committed, can actually permanently block someone from accessing the grace of God forever, is truly a terrifying reality! Just processing the thought is enough to send someone into a frantic spiral into a state of terror.

Continuing where we left off in Matthew’s Gospel, I want to address this matter of the “unpardonable sin,” with the hope of getting to the bottom of what it is, as a means of comforting those who wrongly think they may have actually committed it, while putting forth a warning to those who fail to see its proper relevance for our day. To this end, we must first consider the context, which contains the key to unlocking exactly what this sin is.

I. The Context

In context, the Lord had just cast a demon out of a demon-possessed man, and the multitudes, being amazed, had begun to question whether He could actually be the Messiah (“the Son of David”). Attempting to dissuade the multitudes away from embracing the Lord as such, and having to still account for the fact that He had just undeniably exercised supernatural power in casting out a demon, the religious leaders had resorted to accusing the Lord of casting out demons by the power of satan (“beelzebub, the ruler of the demons”). Following this, the Lord had exposed the absolute foolishness of such an accusation, as it would be preposterous to think that satan would turn against his own kingdom to cast out his own, if he really wanted to contend with God. “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.”

That said, the Lord knew very well that their accusation was not sincere or from pure motives. They were intentionally doing whatever they could to discredit the Lord, even in the face of a very obvious proof that the power of God was with and upon Him. Indeed, the fact that Jesus was casting out demons, actually evidenced the fact that the Kingdom of God had arrived, and that He was the true Messiah. It was the plainest evidence of this very reality, and it was the Holy Spirit, who working through the Lord, was testifying to His Messianic authority, and to the arrival of the Kingdom of God. And so, when the religious leaders, again, with ill motives, spoke against the Lord Jesus Christ in this blasphemous way, they were not only blaspheming the Lord Jesus Christ, they were also blaspheming the Holy Spirit, whose primary role was to authenticate the ministry and authority of the Christ. This was a grievous sin and no light matter, which is what leads the Lord to say what He then says in our main text for this morning.

II. The Unpardonable Sin

“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” (vs. 31-32).

The word, “therefore” here, again, clearly points us back to the immediate context. In other words, the Lord is continuing his response to the gross accusation of the religious leaders, who had accused Him of casting out demons by satan. This is also clear in Mark’s account, where we are told, “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, but is subject to eternal condemnation” —*because they said, “He has an unclean spirit”* (Mark 3:28-30).

And so, what is this “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit,” which the Lord declares to be an unpardonable sin; a sin that is beyond the pale of God’s grace and forgiveness? Keeping the context in mind, we find that it is to attribute the glorious working of the Holy Spirit to the working of Satan, which is in essence, to equate the Holy Spirit (the Third Person of our Triune God) with satan. In the case of the religious leaders, by doing this, they had taken the most

evident testimony that was given to affirm and authenticate the Person and ministry of the Christ, and had attributed it to the working of satan.

Now, why then is this particular sin so serious, such that, it is unpardonable? In fact, why is it yet possible to be pardoned for blaspheming the Father and the Son, but not the Holy Spirit? Why is the boundary line of unforgiveness crossed, specifically when sinning in this way against the Spirit? Well, I believe that the issue here is not so much having to do with *offending the Person* of the Holy Spirit, so much as it has to do with *intentionally* opposing and contradicting the particular and necessary work and role of the Holy Spirit (“whoever speaks *against* the Holy Spirit...”). We recall that the role of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin, and to testify to Christ as the Messiah and the only means of salvation. To attribute the evident testimony of the Holy Spirit to the working of satan, is to block the only and ultimate means of receiving the testimony of Christ, which leads to salvation. It is to eliminate the only avenue of obtaining salvation. It is to bar one’s self from the only means of receiving the Gospel. And so, by attributing the powerful testimony of the Holy Spirit in Christ, to satan, the religious leaders had committed this very sin, thereby securing their own eternal condemnation.

Having gotten a general sense of what it means to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, thereby committing the unpardonable sin, let us then move on to consider how to specifically apply this to our generation, where Christ is no longer present in the physical sense.

III. The Unpardonable Sin in Our Generation

From the outset then, we must first answer the question, “Can anyone today even commit the unpardonable sin?” And to be sure, there are some who would say, “No, that was only possible during the time of Christ’s earthly ministry. After all, how can anyone do what the religious leaders had done, if Christ is not here present in the body, performing miracles and casting out demons?”

Well, when we look at the text, we find that the Lord states, “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.*” And so, the fact that the Lord speaks of “this age *or in the age to come,*” would seem to indicate that it is possible to commit

this particular sin beyond the earthly ministry of Christ and into our own time. In other words, I don't believe Christ has to be bodily present in order for this sin to be committed. All that needs to exist, is the possibility of the Holy Spirit powerfully testifying to the glory and work of Christ, for this sin to be potentially committed. And I believe that this reality does exist today, in keeping with what our Lord has stated here, concerning the "age to come."

Well, what then do we make of this unpardonable sin, particularly within our present context? How might someone today actually attribute the work of the Holy Spirit to satan? I believe that Hebrews 6, while not necessarily presenting us with an identical sin, can provide us with insight that can help us unlock this mystery. In Hebrews 6:4-6, the writer provides his audience (which is in danger of apostatizing and turning away from Christ, and back to participating in, and trusting in the Old Covenant, ceremonial sacrifices) with this sober warning:

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4-6).

Now, without getting into a thorough exposition of this text, we do find that there are individuals within the context of the local church, who have enjoyed particular and profound evidences (indeed, have even tasted them, in some sense) of the work of the Holy Spirit and the glory of the Kingdom of God, who then fall away and are incapable of being restored once they fall away. And so, someone can receive a tremendous amount of light, witnessing the work of the Holy Spirit in a powerful way (partaking of Him even, in some sense), and yet, fall away. In other words, someone can be very close to the kingdom; very, very close, without ever actually and truly entering it. And we know that the writer is not being hypothetical here, because he adds these words in verse 9, "But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner." And so, the author clearly indicates that just experiencing the blessings recorded in verses 4-6, does not necessitate true salvation. More than a taste or a partaking of the Holy Spirit is required.

Now, what does this have to do with the blasphemy against the Spirit? We are not told of any verbal blasphemy here in Hebrews, are we? No, but the rejection of the overwhelming

testimony of the Spirit shone here in Hebrews, lines up with the whole concept of rejecting the witness of the only One who can ultimately lead us to Christ, and to salvation in Christ. And so, while these may entail different sins, the same rejection of the ultimate witness to Christ is what leads beyond the boundaries of salvation. Consider the following illustration for a moment. Suppose you are deathly ill, and the only cure for your illness is found on a remote island beyond the mainland. And suppose that the only way to that island (and cure) is by one individual who has a special boat that can bring you there. And, in fact, he is the only one who can properly navigate to the island, because one must pass through dangerous currents with minimal visibility to get there. And everyone on the mainland is telling you about this cure, but you reject their counsel and turn away from them. However, at some point you come across the only individual who is able to actually bring you to the island, because he owns the boat and he alone knows how to navigate to the island. He speaks with you and shows you irrefutable proof that he can bring you to this island, that the cure is indeed there, and that others who have been there have been truly healed of your disease. But, you turn him away, and he leaves. You see, when you rejected every one else's counsel, you still had hope, but once you rejected the only individual who could actually bring you there, you have now sealed your fate, haven't you? In this sense, both Hebrews 6 and the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit share the common thread of sealing one's fate by rejecting the powerful testimony of the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring us to Christ and salvation, in truth.

Well, this then leads to another very important question, doesn't it? What exactly does this blasphemy against the Spirit look like? In what way does one actually commit the unpardonable sin? Let me leave you with several important points, leading us to discover the answer to this very important question:

1) It is important to note that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not to be equated with an unbeliever's general rejection of the Gospel. If that were the case, at some point or another, probably most people would have committed this sin, and virtually no one would be saved. Haven't we all, at some point or another, turned down the free offer of the Gospel, before we were saved? Have any of us really believed the Gospel, the first, second, third or even "nth" time that we heard it? And so, we don't want to ever assume that because someone has rejected

the Gospel, that they have automatically committed the unpardonable sin. In fact, I would be very cautious not to assume that any of us can ever really know when someone has crossed the line of committing the unpardonable sin, and we should always be prepared to give someone the Gospel, as God allows us opportunity. We never want to assume that it is too late. This warning of our Lord's is serious, but it is especially meant to let us know *personally*, that we must never take lightly the offer of the Gospel, because it may just be the last time God offers it to us. The warning is real and must be taken to heart, but it is not meant to give warrant to Christians to determine who has committed the unpardonable sin or not.

2) No Christian could ever commit the unpardonable sin. If you have come to Christ in truth, and if you are walking with Him, striving to put sin to death by the Spirit, trusting in Christ alone for your hope of salvation, then that is a testimony of the fact that you have not blasphemed against the Spirit. In fact, you have welcomed the testimony of the Spirit, and He resides in you. And so, even if you have sinful or intrusive thoughts that speak against the Spirit in some way, especially because you know that such a thing as the blasphemy against the Spirit exists, that does not mean that you have committed the unpardonable sin. Many Christians have feared this reality, or that maybe they committed the unpardonable sin in the past, before they were saved, and that the whole time they believed they were saved, they may have just been deceived. This is not possible, which leads me to the next point.

3) If you are worried or concerned about whether or not you might have ever committed the unpardonable sin, that is probably an indication that you have not done so. Like the religious leaders of our Lord's day, one who commits the unpardonable sin is unconcerned about having committed it. In other words, it would be unnatural for someone who has blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, to ever desire to know and serve Christ. One who has blasphemed against the Holy Spirit has no desire to follow Christ. He/she is hardened beyond repair and continues to reject Christ for the entire duration of his/her life without remorse. And so, if today, you desire to follow Christ, and you would be terrified of the very possibility of being outside of Christ, then you have no need to look back to examine your life to see if you have ever committed this sin. You could not have done so. You would have absolutely no interest in Christ today if you had done so.

4) Finally, what then does the unpardonable sin look like? This would involve an intentional rejection of a profound testimony of the Holy Spirit, to the extent of actually attributing that profound work of the Spirit to satan. This is a very blatant and intentional rejection of the truth, when the Spirit brings that truth to you in a very powerful way. Again, I don't think that this sin is something that can necessarily be identified by someone on the outside looking in, but it can happen, and the warning is to individuals to be particularly cautious about taking especially unique and powerful testimonies of the Holy Spirit for granted. Sometimes, God provides a bright light to unbelievers, powerfully testifying to the glory of Christ and the Gospel, and yet, they still reject it. And they do so, intentionally, because even though the truth is profoundly evident to them, they want nothing to do with it. And so, rather than subject themselves to that which is obvious, they blaspheme against the very witness itself, calling what is clearly good, evil. They go to extreme measures to contradict and deny what has been made beyond evident to their own souls.

This is what the religious leaders had done, when they had intentionally hardened their own hearts, and had attributed the miracles of Christ, not to the power of God, but to the power of satan.

IV. Concluding Thoughts

Now, certainly the whole concept and reality of an "unpardonable sin," is a most terrifying reality to even consider. But, there is also great news here as well, friends, and we don't want to miss this. And the great news is this: There is only *one* unpardonable sin, which means that, if you are outside of Christ this morning, and if you think that you have sinned your way beyond the reach of His grace, then look again, and see that there is hope for you, right now. Don't put it off. Don't delay any longer, because you don't know what a day will bring forth. But, see here the blessed open door, presented to all, no matter how sinful you have been, to come to Christ and to be washed and forgiven for all of your sins:

"Therefore I say to you, *every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men*, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men." Did you hear that, friends? "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men..." What is our Lord saying here? He is saying that whatever

sin you have committed, whatever blasphemies you have spoken, you can yet, be forgiven today. There is hope for you right now, if you will seek Christ before it is too late. And so, the encouraging thing is to know that you still have hope, at this very moment, unless you have actually committed the unpardonable sin. But, the warning is, don't take God's grace for granted for another moment, because that hope can run out... especially if you die. And friends, death is not that far from each one of us. You don't know when your time is up. And if you have not had dealings with God; if you have not been united to Christ by faith, in His death and resurrection, then you will suffer forever under the full weight of God's fiery wrath.

Just one week ago (last Sunday night), I had heard about an event that had taken place in San Diego, California. A very successful, young woman (29 years old, one week away from turning 30) was killed in perhaps the most unexpected way imaginable. She was walking with her boyfriend at a parking garage, while another man was hanging six stories above, preparing to commit suicide. And the man jumped, unintentionally landing on the woman, killing them both. Her name was Taylor Kahle... you can look it up. The woman was enjoying her second date with a man she had met online, just taking a walk (perhaps back to their car), after they had enjoyed time at the zoo and just had dinner together, and she didn't even know what hit her. One moment, a woman with a thriving career, perhaps having found the man of her dreams, and the next moment, standing before God. No warning, no time to think through things in life... just immediately sent into the afterlife. I don't know what her spiritual condition was, friends, but let me ask you this morning, are you ready to die, even unexpectedly, if God ordains your end this very day? If not, don't walk away from the glorious opportunity that is presented to you here this morning, to get right with God, through His Son, Jesus Christ! [The Gospel!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25