

Harvest Christian Fellowship
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Theology @ 9 Handout
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UNPARDONABLE SIN

Only Impenitence Cannot Be Forgiven

Mark 3:28-30

***28** I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. **29** But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." **30** He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."*

When Jesus warned the Pharisees that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was unpardonable both in this world and in the next, it was because they were saying that he exorcised demons by being in league with Satan. His warning revealed his view of their spiritual state.

He could, and later did, pray for the forgiveness of those whose blasphemy against himself was the fruit of ignorance: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). But that was not how he saw the Pharisees.

It is possible for people to be enlightened to the point of knowing inwardly that Jesus is the divine Savior he claims to be, and still not be willing to admit it publicly, because of all the behavioral changes that such an admission would make necessary. It is possible to try to make oneself feel good about one's own moral dishonesty by inventing reasons, no matter how absurd, for not treating Jesus as worthy of one's allegiance. Jesus evidently perceived that in calling him Satan's servant the Pharisees were doing exactly that. They were not ignorant; they were stifling conviction and smothering real if unwelcome knowledge; they were resolutely shutting their eyes to the light and callousing their conscience by calling it darkness. The madness that Jesus exposed in what they were saying was an index of the pressure of conviction that they were feeling; irrational reasoning is a regular sign of conviction being resisted.

Matthew 12:22-32

***22** Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. **23** All*

the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"
24 *But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."*

25 *Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. 30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. 31 And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.*

By attributing exorcisms wrought through the Holy Spirit to Satanic power, the Pharisees were blaspheming (speaking impiously) against the Spirit. Such a sin *would become unforgivable* when the conscience had been so calloused by calling good evil that all sense of the moral glory of Jesus' mighty works was destroyed. This hardening of heart against Jesus would preclude any remorse at any stage for having thus blasphemed. But nonexistence of remorse makes repentance impossible, and nonexistence of repentance makes forgiveness impossible.

Callousing one's conscience by dishonest reasoning so as to justify denial of God's power in Christ and rejection of his claims upon one is, then, the formula of the unpardonable sin. Another version of it, this time in professed Christians who fall away from Christ is described in Hebrews 6:4-8.

Hebrews 6:4-8

4 *It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance,*

because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

7 *Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. **8** But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.*

Christians who fear that they may have committed the unpardonable sin show by their very anxiety that they have not done so. Persons who have committed it are unremorseful and unconcerned; indeed they are ordinarily unaware of what they have done and to what fate they have sentenced themselves. Jesus saw that the Pharisees were getting close to committing this sin, and he spoke as he did in hope of holding them back from fully lapsing into it.

A couple of other passages that are generally thought to refer to this sin are:

Hebrews 10:26-27

26 *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, **27** but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*

1 John 5:16

16 *If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.*

Louis Berkhof, in his "Systematic Theology", lists some "Unwarranted opinions respecting this sin."

- 1) Some in church history have thought that this was a sin that could only be committed during Christ's sojourn on earth, and held that it was committed by those who were convinced in their hearts that Christ performed His miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit, but in spite of their conviction refused to recognize these miracles as such and ascribed them to the operation of Satan. However, this limitation is entirely unwarranted, as the passages in Hebrews (6:4-6, 10:26-27) and 1 John (5:16) would seem to prove.

- 2) Some conceived of it as impenitence persisted in to the end. A related view is that expressed by some in our own day, that it consists in continued unbelief, a refusal up to the very end to accept Jesus Christ by faith. But on this supposition it would follow that every one who died in a state of impenitence and unbelief had committed this sin, while according to Scripture it must be something of a very specific nature.
- 3) Some have taught that only regenerate people could commit this sin. This belief however is unscriptural and can only be embraced by those who deny the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (See last week's lesson).

So there is something very specific about this sin in that it is evidently a sin committed during the present life, which makes conversion and pardon impossible. The sin consists in the conscious, malicious, and willful rejection and slandering, against evidence and conviction, of the testimony of the Holy Spirit respecting the grace of God in Christ, attributing it out of hatred and enmity to the prince of darkness.

It is nothing less than a decided slandering of the Holy Spirit, an audacious declaration that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the abyss, that the truth is the lie, and that Christ is Satan.

The root of this sin is the conscious and deliberate hatred of God and of all that is recognized as divine. It is unpardonable, not because its guilt transcends the merits of Christ, or because the sinner is beyond the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, but because there are also in the world of sin certain laws and ordinances, established by God and maintained by Him. And the law in the case of this particular sin is, that it excludes all repentance, sears the conscience, hardens the sinner, and thus renders the sin unpardonable.

In those who have committed this sin we may therefore expect to find a pronounced hatred to God, a defiant attitude to Him and all that is divine, delight in ridiculing and slandering that which is holy, and absolute unconcern respecting the welfare of their soul and the future life.

In view of the fact that this sin is not followed by repentance, we may be reasonably sure that they who fear that they have committed it and worry about this, and who desire the prayers of others for them, have not committed it.

**All of the foregoing material was taken from "Concise Theology" by J.I. Packer and "Systematic Theology" by Louis Berkhof.