

- Suppose a middle school student punches another student in class. What happens? The student is given a detention.
- Suppose during the detention, this boy punches the teacher.
- What happens? The student gets suspended from school.
- Suppose on the way home, the same boy punches a policeman on the nose. What happens? He finds himself in jail.
- Suppose some years later, the very same boy is in a crowd waiting to see the President of the United States. As the President passes by, the boy lunges forward to punch the President. What happens? He is shot dead by the secret service.

In every case the crime is precisely the same... but the severity of the crime is measured by the one against whom it is committed. The importance that we ascribe to the one the crime is committed against... determines the severity of the crime... and the gravity of the punishment that is needed. Sin against God... is more severe than sin against the president of the United States. ... Should we expect stricter penalty...?

But God is so loving... and He is so forgiving. Does He expect payment from us when sin against Him...? ... Why? ... Why can't God automatically forgive the debt of sin? If our Creator was truly generous... couldn't he just move on without repayment? Live and let live?

Consider with me what Joshua Ryan Butler wrote in his book... The Pursuing God.

Here's the problem: someone always eats the cost of sin. As a simple example, let's say your neighbor crashes his car through your fence. When you discover the shambles, you forgive him: "Don't worry about the fence! All is forgiven." But forgiving your neighbor doesn't do away with the bill or dissolve the damage; it means you eat the cost.

Now consider a more complex example. During the U.S. housing crisis, shoddy banking practices, fat-cat executives, and corporate corruption threw a sledgehammer into the global economy. Now, imagine Jesus is installed in the aftermath as the new CEO of one of the massive corporations guilty for the crisis. The old CEO is out the door; a new boss is in town. Jesus is personally innocent: he wasn't behind the wheel when the ship got steered into the rocks. But there's still a huge debt. Bank of America alone owed people \$17 billion.

Someone has to pay the costs. Here's what actually happened: in the aftermath of the housing crisis, the banks were deemed "too big to fail," and the government forgave the debt, covering the most expensive bailout of human history. Though the banking industry had caused massive damage, the debt was forgiven. But the debt didn't go away. Someone else covered it—in this case, the American people. Someone always eats the cost.

At the Cross, God was eating the cost of our sin. Why can't God just forgive the debt? This is what is happening at the Cross: God is just(ly) forgiving the debt—by personally covering the cost. I misspoke earlier when I said the White House gave Wall Street the most expensive bailout of human history. Actually, the most expensive bailout was when the Father established his incarnate Son as the new CEO of a corrupt corporation called Humanity Inc. and together, in the power of their Spirit, they took upon themselves the most outrageous debt-forgiveness plan the world has ever known.

O.K. ... But does God forgive **all** sin...? Is there **any** sin that God will **never** forgive...? ... Yes... It is “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” which is also called the “Unpardonable sin” ... This morning... our passage discusses it.

Many believers get hung-up with the concept that there is an unforgivable sin. “Have I committed it?” “Am I guilty and therefore doomed to an eternity in Hell...” “What is it... and how can I know that I still have hope...?” ... The very thought of it.... Is enough to send some believers into a full panic mode.

Some people say it is the act of suicide. If we take our own life... some will tell you that it is the unpardonable sin – because we could never confess it as sin and be forgiven. Do they have a point...?

And yet... our passage seems to link the unpardonable sin to our words. There seems to be a connection to something that the one who is guilty of it has said.

Matthew 12:31-32

I have said a lot of careless things in my life. Have either you or I... said something that was not true about the Holy Spirit... and therefore we committed blasphemy against Him... and it is unforgiveable...? Should we all be concerned...? As Baptists... since our beliefs differ from the Charismatic Christians... are either... we... or them... guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit...? ... This is something about which we need some clear thinking... because there is a lot of confusion out there that is going around.

The best way to understand this whole concept is to study the only passage that mentions it - within its full context... which is what we are here this morning... to do. ... Hopefully this will help us get our own handle on the matter... and hopefully we can help clear up some of the confusion among our friends and fellow believers... because as I said... there are a lot of people who are bewildered by this puzzling concept. ... And really... why would God hold one thing out... and say all sin is forgivable - but not this one...?

Matthew brings the topic up... in light of another one of Jesus' spectacular healings. This whole "blasphemy-of-the-Holy-Spirit" thing... rises out of the

healing of a blind... mute... and demon possessed man... which resulted in antithetical responses. ... The crowd wondered whether Jesus was the Messiah... But the Pharisees... (perhaps in response to both the miracle and the crowd's openness to Jesus)... slandered Jesus (and, more importantly - the Spirit.) ... They leveled the charge of Jesus collaborating with the prince of the demons.

Matthew 12:22-24

The response of the crowd was one of amazement, leading to a host of possibilities about the identity of the one who had the ability to completely reverse this poor man's life. The conclusions were not yet firmly rooted. But the possibilities? This couldn't be the Son of David, could it? Daring to hope that their prophets were right, they struggled to gaze beyond their human doubt and perceive the reality of the man who could bring about such remarkable results.

The Pharisees (on the other hand) responded to Jesus' actions with disdain and ridicule. Making every attempt to discredit Jesus... Who was only the carpenter's son from Nazareth... they explained their own conclusions to those who would listen. ... And in an effort to explain away how the miracle could have happened... they proposed that Jesus was able to expel the demon only because He was in league with Beelzebul—Satan.

The Pharisees had already accused Jesus of being empowered by the prince of demons. (We saw this back in chapter 9... verse 34). They were trying to discredit Jesus by using an emotional argument. (Something our news media does an awful lot of today.) ... Refusing to believe that Jesus

came from God... they said he was in league with Satan. Jesus easily exposed the foolishness of their argument.

Matthew 12: 25-26

Jesus moved from the general observation that no logical individual would ever contest... to the specific charge that the Pharisees had leveled against Him. ... If Jesus were to cast out demons by the power of their ruler... (and bear in mind... it has not been one or two demons that Jesus has cast out; He has already cast out more than a THOUSAND)... So it would be reasonable to assume that Satan would be damaging his own cause... by warring with so many of his own evil messengers.... Jesus is being accused here of taking thousands of his own enemy fighters (if He is working with Satan)... out of the fight – forever. On closer examination... this does not make ANY sense at all. ... Any organization that kills a thousand or more of it's own dedicated workers is going to have internal problems in no time at all. If there were internal conflicts within Satan's kingdom... it would spell the end of that kingdom. Its energies would be directed toward its own internal conflicts... bringing about its destruction. Next... Jesus drove home the point on a personal basis. Jesus pointed to their own exorcists... who also were able to cast out demons.

Matthew 12:27

There is some evidence that the Pharisees also practiced the art of exorcism, believing that their magical incantations would force demons out of people. What an arrogant bunch these men were! When their exorcists cast out demons, it was because of their connection to God, but when Jesus cast them out, it was because of his connection to Satan. Jesus,

knowing the foolishness of their self-contradiction, informed them that their own exorcists would be their judges.

We read in Acts 19:13 of Jews practicing exorcism, but certainly not with the power and authority of Christ. He used no incantations or other common methods that were only indifferently successful. He cast out demons with absolute authority, by direct command, and with convincing power.

The Pharisees' disciples did not cast out demons by demonic power, and neither did the Lord. Satan's kingdom was not divided against itself. Therefore, given the ample proofs of His authority to tear up Satan's kingdom, it was obvious that what the Pharisees had said was absurd... and patently false.

Matthew 12:28

Jesus' argument left only one conclusion — He was able to cast out demons by the Spirit of God. ... Jesus presented His conclusion to the Pharisees with a conditional *if* clause... thereby reiterating the further conclusion that the kingdom of God had indeed entered their world.

Throughout His ministry... from that time forward... Jesus continued to press that point upon His audiences — by word... by debate with the Pharisees... and by the empirical evidence of His miracles.

Jesus used a very simple analogy to further convince the Pharisees of the foolishness of their position. No one can break into a strong man's house to plunder his goods if that man is in a position to defend his possessions. He

will fight to defend his house and all that is in it. However, that was not the case in this example. Jesus, the Lord of creation, was able to enter Satan's stronghold, binding the ancient adversary and removing his possessions.

Matthew 12:29

Satan was bound at Jesus' birth... Satan's power and control were disrupted. ... In the wilderness Jesus bound Satan by overcoming Satan's temptations... and at the Resurrection He defeated Satan's ultimate weapon — death. ... Eventually Satan will be bound forever (Revelation 20:10)... and evil will no longer pervade the earth. ... Jesus has complete power and authority over Satan and all his forces.

But each time Jesus cast a demon out of a person... He proved over and over... that He was able to bind and control the power of Satan. ... Every time Jesus cast a demon out of a person... was a moment in eternity... when He was able to save someone from the clutches of Satan... Certainly... Jesus was **plundering** Satan's own household.

The miracle that Jesus had just performed... casting this demon out and restoring the man's ability to see and to speak... was irrefutable evidence of Who Jesus is – UNLESS YOUR MIND HAS BEEN MADE UP AND WILL NOT BE CHANGED... DESPITE ALL CONTRARY EVIDENCE.

(REMEMBER THIS)... It is impossible to be neutral about Christ. ... Anyone who is not actively following Him has **chosen** to reject Him. ... Any person who tries to remain neutral in the struggle of good against evil... is choosing to be separated from God. To refuse to follow Christ is to choose to be on Satan's team.

Matthew 12:30

Jesus stated clearly that there was no middle ground where He was concerned. The Pharisees had already declared their intentions to discredit Him... by attributing His authority over demons (to the power of Satan.)... No one can doubt that they were firmly committed to their opposition of Jesus and his entire ministry.... In the midst of this heated debate... Jesus informed His adversaries that their position was logically indefensible. ... Therefore... if they were not on His side... then they were His enemies.

Whereas Christ's objective was to gather the lost into His kingdom... their commitment was to scatter the lost sheep of Israel... directing them away from their only source of redemption - their Messiah. ... So Jesus moves from defense to offense... from explanation to warning.

... ..

Well... now we come to the confusing... and very controversial part of the passage. ... Although maybe it won't be so confusing and controversial... since we are going to keep in mind the context... in which it appears.

What is going on... in the context that we have been studying...? Israel's religious leaders have said with their voice and their actions... that Jesus did not do His authenticating work of Who He is... by the Spirit of God... but that He did it by the power of Satan. Israel's leaders have stubbornly refused to accept Jesus as Messiah... even though He has given them PLENTY of proof. They defiantly repudiate Jesus' claims... and deny His substantial verification. ... Even though the evidence is overwhelming – they reject it – and they attribute the power behind it... to Satan! ... Do you see this?

Matthew 12:31-32

We know from Scripture that God is a forgiving God. That reality is all over both the Old and New Testaments. (Exodus 34:6-7 is one clear example)... where the Lord proclaims His name to Moses:

Exodus 34:6-7 (ESV)

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."

This is the God who forgave Adam and Eve... Abraham... Isaac... Jacob... Moses... Israel... King David... and countless others throughout the Old Testament. ... God even forgave His people for heinous and rebellious sins. ... We see the same thing in the New Testament... as forgiveness is extended to tax-collectors (like Matthew) and sinners... as well as anti-Christian terrorists like Paul. ... God's grace and compassion are consistent themes throughout Scripture.

Keeping in mind God's merciful character... we turn to consider Jesus' words (here in Matthew 12.)... Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders of the nation... who are showing themselves to be completely opposed to their prophesied Messiah... Who comprehensively verified Who He is. . . . They were saying that Christ's works were not through the power of the Spirit... but through the power of Satan.

So... the only place where the unpardonable sin is mentioned... quite clearly means...

The attributing what is accomplished by the power of God - to someone or something else - and doing this through the flagrant, willful, and persistent rejection of God and his commands. The unpardonable sin is the deliberate refusal to acknowledge God's power in Christ. It indicates a deliberate and irreversible hardness of heart.

This is a person remains so committed to rejecting Christ that he (or she) goes out of their way... to find alternative explanations for any obvious proof (such as miracles) that point to Who Christ is. ... This sin is committed today - **only by unbelievers** who deliberately and unchangeably reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit in calling them to salvation.

Sometimes believers worry that they have accidentally committed this unforgivable sin. ... But **only those** who have turned their backs on God and rejected all faith... have any need to worry.

Jesus said those who are like this will NEVER be forgiven — and it's **not** because their sin is worse than any other kind of sin... but because their hearts are so hardened that they will never ask for forgiveness. ... Whoever rejects the prompting of the Holy Spirit... removes himself or herself... from the only force that can lead him or her to repentance and restoration to God.

If you have ever worried that you have committed the unpardonable sin – it just proves that you haven't! Only a soft heart... would be concerned... at all.

So Jesus gives this stern warning to anyone who hardens their heart... and will not allow the work of the Holy Spirit lead them to Christ. ... But Jesus is not satisfied with just letting them off with a warning. So He continues.

Matthew 12:33-34

Slowly... but surely... the debate had gone from an objective analysis of the Pharisee's ridiculous claim... to a personal warning... and now... to judgment. ... Jesus called these profoundly hypocritical men exactly what they were — a brood of snakes.

There is a sense in which Jesus acknowledged that his debate with them was useless. It's over. ... They were already overcome by evil and... therefore... could only accept a position that was consistent with who they were. They were evil... deceiving snakes!. ... The Pharisees had accused Him of being in league with Beelzebub. ... He accused them of being the serpent's seed.

During the debate... Jesus demonstrated that the Pharisees were bad fruit... which could be clearly seen in their poor logic that they held onto... so they could reject Him. ... Through His miracles... teaching... and debating... Jesus demonstrated that He was good fruit.

The Pharisees and the people must now make their decision. They must either view Jesus (the tree) and its fruit (His words and deeds) as worthless... or they must view them as good. ... Jesus' good fruit demonstrates that he is good... but the Pharisees illogical and baseless claims... showed them to be bad fruit. (NOW NOTICE – because this is how we will understand the next verses - that it is their very own words in what they said about Jesus... that show they are bad fruit!)...

Matthew 12:35-37

The words of the Pharisees... (when they said Jesus did His miracles with Satan's power)... condemned them. Those words demonstrated the hardness of their hearts. Jesus was the clear embodiment of the living God whom they claimed to worship. ... But the Pharisee's words were the outward expression... of a heart that did not want to see the reality... with which they were confronted.

Our words reveal our faith... (which saves us)... and our words reveal our condemning hardness.

So what is our take-away from today's passage...? I find two.

#1) The more we scrutinize the words and teachings of Jesus... and the concepts and perspectives they stimulate... the more we realize that there is very little wiggle room in the kingdom of God. ... There are no gray areas — only two clearly defined alternatives. ... Either we serve Jesus... or we serve Satan. ... Either we are children of the kingdom of our gracious Lord... or we are slaves to our sinful human condition... serving the kingdom of Satan... with all of its deceit and self-importance. ... We... by the grace of our Redeemer... are either headed for an eternity in His glorious presence... or we... by the foolishness of our own sin... are headed for an eternity with the prince of this world in the lake of fire.

There is no middle ground. Either you are for Him... or you are against Him. ... And this leads me to...

#2) There's a sense in which **all of us** are guilty of blasphemy. ... We deny Christ by our silence or cowardice... or we defame Him by questioning His

goodness toward us. ...Thankfully... these sins are forgivable by God's grace.

Matthew 12:32 (ESV)

And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

He will forgive blasphemy against the Son... for those who repent of their sins. ... Do you need to repent of any blasphemy against the Son, Jesus...? Have you been silent... when you know He has called you to speak to someone about Him. ... Or have you failed to open your eyes this week to all the good things He has provided you with...?

You can repent of this... and be forgiven!