

**“The Unforgiveable Sin” Matt 12:30-32,
Sermon Notes
Pastor Marc Wragg
Saving Grace Bible Church
September 24th, 2017
Morning Worship Service**

Text:

"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.³¹ "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.³² "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come." (Matthew 12:30-32 NAU)

Text Main Idea:

Those who see Christ and His works and support Him are for Him. Those who reject His works have committed an unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit

Sermon Main Idea:

The unpardonable sin is to reject the Holy Spirit's work demonstrated through Christ. We today cannot commit the unpardonable sin in the same way the Pharisees did but when we reject the Word of God we in effect do the same thing

Introduction:

Things have been a little stressful and difficult getting our lives back in order. Last week people said the sermon was so right on for what we needed. I guess this week is the same because we need to learn to forgive each other for the various attitudes brought up from the stress of post storm cleanup

We have been working through the Doctrine of Forgiveness

- I have been working through for class and we are nearly half way through the preaching series. Each of these sermons will become the basis of my thesis

Here is what we have learned so far:

1. Based on Matt 18:21-35 We saw that we are to be regularly and freely forgiving others otherwise we will not receive forgiveness from God
 - a. Those who have been freely forgiven an impossible debt respond by freely forgiving others
 - b. We are to be forgiving people and it should come from our heart. It is not an external duty but a heartfelt gracious gift towards those who have sinned against us
2. Based on Luke 7:36-50 we saw that when one is forgiven it produces and heart of great gratitude. When someone knows their sin and the inability to restore the debt, forgiveness produces an overwhelming gratitude
 - a. We need forgiveness because we owe a great debt
 - b. We should respond to having received forgiveness with gratitude for the undeserved gift

3. Based on Matt 5:23-24 and Mark 11:25 when we come to pray before God we must either seek forgiveness if we have sinned against others or we are to give forgiveness if we have been sinned against
 - a. We have been called by God to release sinners from their personal debts against us.
 - b. A failure to forgive will hinder our spiritual lives
4. Based on Matt 6:12, 14-15 we are to pray regularly for forgiveness and to regularly be granting forgiveness towards others. Forgiveness is to be a regular part of our life as sinners living with other sinners

Now this morning we are going to see that while our forgiveness is modeled after God, our forgiveness is not the same as God's forgiveness

- We are never given the opportunity to not forgive someone
- Jesus on the other hand warned people there is a sin that God will not forgive

So the idea that our forgiveness is equal to God's forgiveness or in kind like God's forgiveness does not account for the realization that there are times God will not forgive someone and we have no such practice or permission

- So at best we can say is this, the basis of all forgiveness we grant is what God has done for us
- God sets the pattern and example. At best our forgiveness is a reflection of God's forgiveness

We now come to Matt 13:31-32 Which is known as the unpardonable sin

- Can we commit a sin that we will not be forgiven?

The Unpardonable Sin is a mysterious doctrine for many

- People search for it
- They wonder if they have committed that sin
- People hold the doctrine over others heads
 - Don't do that you will commit the unforgivable sin
- It is mysterious and causes many to fear

I remember a college friend leaving school dejected thinking he had committed the unpardonable sin

Many have used the Doctrine differently

1. Some, like the young man I describe, use the doctrine to ignore any promises about forgiveness and finding it in Christ. They do this so they can remain in their sin without a pain of conscience. After all, if they have committed the unpardonable sin then it is not worth trying to be reconciled to God
2. Some, use it as a threat to keep people in line. "Don't do that, you will commit the unpardonable sin and will never be able to receive salvation again." They use the doctrine to keep people from acting up

3. Some treat the doctrine as a mysterious trap door which can capture Christians and send them to Hell because they have not carefully walked in obedience and they sinned against the Holy Spirit
4. Still others use the doctrine today to say we cannot speak against anything done in the name of the Spirit lest we commit the unpardonable sin and deny the Spirit's work. If something is claimed to be done in the Spirit then it is of God
 - a. It would be unpardonable to deny that

As you can see then this passage is important for us to understand. It has a lot of practical implications and the better we understand this text the better prepared we will be against poor theology run amuck

SETTING

Now remember the setting of this text

This passage comes in a series of conflict in ministry. There is conflict in the Christian life. The task for us is to deal with it properly. What Matthew has given us here are examples of conflict Jesus faced in ministry and why that conflict existed. We can learn from these examples in our Lord's life and grow from them

1. Conflict over doctrine
2. Conflict over ministry calling
3. Conflict over faith
4. Conflict over the Spirit of God
 - a. What is the Spirit's work?
 - b. Through whom is He working?

So keep this in mind here as Jesus is instructing he is giving a warning. He is not giving a class lecture on sin and serious sin. He is warning those who are in hostile opposition to His work. He is telling them how grave the circumstances are

Context

Now again, to understand the unpardonable sin we must understand the context

Who is Jesus talking too?

- Is he speaking to His disciples?
- Or someone else?

The Pharisees and the crowds

- Talking to unbelievers
- Religious unbelievers at that
- Those who hold to a form of religion and deny its power

These are the people Jesus has been addressing from the beginning of Chapter 12

- Vs 2 the Pharisees
- Vs 9 he went into their synagogue
- Vs 15 many who were drawn to him
- Vs 23-24 the crowds who were amazed and the Pharisees who rejected

Vs 30-32 are a continuation of Verses 25-29

- vs 30 makes the connection to the previous section
- This is because whatever the doctrine teaches it cannot be separated from its historical and literary context

So Jesus is addressing the multitudes and giving them a warning about the accusations the Pharisees are making

- Jesus has just healed in front of a large crowd of witnesses made up of ordinary people and religious leaders a man who was demon possessed and as a result blind and mute. Matt 12:22
- The miracle was rather insignificant for Matthew at this point. (Matthew does not spend much time talking about the miracle) Rather he is concerned about the response of people to the miracle
 - Chapters 8, 9 are the miracles and their significance
 - Here it is about how people respond to Jesus as He performs these signs
- The Pharisees respond by discrediting the work of Christ
- They have attributed the Spirit's supernatural work to a demon
- They are unwilling to believe and unwilling to acknowledge the power Christ demonstrates comes from God

Body

In this text before us we are taught to:

- 1. Remember the Exclusivity of Christ vs 30**
- 2. Beware of the Unpardonable Sin vs 31**
- 3. Heed the Serious Warning vs 32**

These three warnings work together to make us think carefully about how we respond to Christ.

- 1. Remember the Exclusivity of Christ vs 30**

"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters." (Matthew 12:30 NAU)

First

- We start with a message about loyalty to Christ
 - In the midst of a context where people are turning on Christ and denying His work, the issue of loyalty is made clear
- We are either with Christ in His work or against Him

We are to be with Christ. What does that mean?

- “With” is a preposition which shows relationship
- We can be near someone
- Before someone
- After someone
- Over someone
- Ect
- The point is that prepositions show relationships between nouns
- Here Christ says we are either “with” Him or “against” him

That is to say that our relationship is either “with” or “against”

What does it mean to be “with” Him?

- It could be spatially
- Meaning we are where He is at.
- IE we are either in His presence or we are not
- Now this cannot be the sense because Christ is not here; He is not in a place where we can go to Him; and true loyalty is not lost when Christ is not in our presence otherwise how would he send them on a missionary journey as He did in chapter 10
- So “with” in this context does not mean proximity or spatial
- It could mean identity
- In this case it would be like a Politian saying “stand with me” in a particular cause – Protecting Israel for example
- In this the idea of with then means we are in a relationship of solidarity
 - union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests, as between members of a group or between classes, peoples, etc.:
 - to promote solidarity among union members.
- This is the sense of this passage as explained in the next clause
- We are with him in that we have a solidarity with Christ

Now notice a couple of key terms

- Gather
- Scatters

The conjunction “kai” could be adding more content or it could be explaining

- So here it could read

“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.” (Matthew 12:30 NAU)

- So here Gather and scatters do not relate to each other they are adding more
 - IE to say you are with me because you gather
 - You are with me because you do not scatter

"He who is not with Me is against Me; also he who does not gather with Me scatters." (Matthew 12:30 NAU)

- Also then would explain what He means by being "with me"
- He is not adding two ideas but rather is explaining what me means about being "with" Him
- You see that right?!

Now here Jesus explains what it means to be with Christ

- You gather with him
- You do the work of ministry of bringing God's people to him

You bring people to God

- You don't oppose Christ
- We do this all the time
- We confront people when they are living in sin. Why?
 - Because we know they are going to face Judgment and we want them to take God's remedy for that sin now rather than face an impartial judge
- We call people to see the emptiness of sin
 - We point out futile and godless living
 - We call people to believe the truth
- We warn people about dangerous living
- We call people to know Christ, love God, be a part of God's people, enjoy fellowship, and express love

This is the work we regularly do

- When you reach out to people and call them to fellowship and you help them think properly about the truth God's word you are at that moment in the Work of Gathering.
 - You might be fixing their faulty theology
 - You might be demonstrating what godly living looks like
 - You might be leading them to a proper understanding of the gospel
 - Or you might be rebuking them for their godless living

In all of these cases when you are calling sinners to repentance and a proper understanding of Christ then you are gathering with Christ

- You gather when you disciple
- When you counsel
- When you fellowship around godliness

To contrast this is the person who scatters

- They reject God's work
- They push against His ways
- They change His message
- They lead away from God

This is the person who scatters

You either gather with Christ or you are against Christ

Vs 30

“The one who is not with me is against me”

- There is no neutrality with Christ
- You are either on his side working with Him or you are against him
- Either in or out
- Hot or cold
- Black or White

There is no in between

- No gray
- No lukewarm
- No maybe

There are always only two camps – God’s side and not God’s side

If the kingdom has come neutrality is impossible

Now some have confused Matt 12:30 and Mark 9:40

“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.” (Matthew 12:30 NAU)

“For he who is not against us is for us.” (Mark 9:40 NAU)

- But these verses should not be seen as problematic
- First because the prepositions are different
- “With” vs “against”

These two verses are basically teaching the same thing

- You are either with Christ; to say it another way you are for Christ by which you are teaching and doing the work of gathering people to Christ
- OR you are “against” Christ or “scattering” which means you are pushing people away from Christ

This is it. There are only two works. Those who lead people to Christ and those who lead people away from Christ.

- Now listen you can subtly lead people away from Christ or actively.
 - Obviously the Muslim or the atheist actively teaches against Christ
 - As does the Jehovah’s witness or Mormon who deny the Bible’s teaching about Christ
- But then people can subtly lead others away from Christ
 - Hypocritical living
 - Sinful lifestyle
 - Abuse of godly privileges
 - False doctrine

- Ungodliness and in our context clearly false teaching is being against Christ and pushes away

This is why we work hard to guard the flock by teaching sound doctrine and encouraging and exemplifying Godly living. By doing this we are showing that we are “with” Christ and are “gathering” God’s people together

To not be with Jesus is to not follow after His rule

Matt 10:38

"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:38 NAU)

As God’s people we are exclusively devoted to Christ

2. Beware of the Unpardonable Sin vs 31

"Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven." (Matthew 12:31 NAU)

Vs 31

Now, here is the sin of Blasphemy against the Spirit

- This is the unpardonable sin
- To be blasphemous is to speak against
- To openly oppose
- In most cases blasphemy is speaking against
 - So clearly in this context calling the Spirit’s work the work of Satan was blasphemous
 - But more importantly it is

“To slander God is one thing. But to slander His work in this world through the Spirit is another. Since the Spirit is the instrument through which God’s eschatological salvation has entered the World, blaspheming that divine tool of salvation behind Jesus cannot be forgiven.” Pg 477 BEC

To be clear here, the sin is “blasphemy against the Spirit” and it “shall not be forgiven”

This is to say, to speak against the very agent which brings salvation to man, thus denying the forgiveness man needs, is an unpardonable sin

- This is a specific kind of sin and is not generic
- So this is not a passage teaching on mortal sins
- Like somehow you can be moving along in your Christian life and sin the unpardonable sin and fall into Hell

Also this passage does demonstrate that all sins are not equal. While all deserve the death penalty they are not all equal

BUT on the other hand this passage does tells us about the sin

1. Its object is against the Spirit
 - a. Not against the Father or Son
 - b. Not against other humans
 - c. Not against creation
 - d. Not against the Church
2. It is blasphemous
 - a. To speak against
 - b. To resist in Word

When you speak against the Spirit of God your sin is unforgiveable

- Now I know you have some lingering questions
- Like can I commit this sin now?
- Are we guilty today of this very sin?
- In what ways could we commit this sin?
- Should I be afraid?

We will answer these questions as we conclude but lest make it clear now, the unpardonable sin is speaking against the Holy Spirit who was working in Christ to demonstrate the power of God in Christ

3. Heed the Serious Warning vs 32

"Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come."
(Matthew 12:32 NAU)

Vs 32

- You can speak against Christ and have it forgiven but you cannot speak against the Holy Spirit

Answer is in vs 31

- Attributing the Work of the Holy Spirit to Beelzebub
- To miss the Holy Spirit's work then is to be in Satan's camp

Also we should see here a pre resurrection pre-cross element here

- Jesus has yet to complete His work of redemption
- Has yet to go to the cross to take our penalty
- Yet to be resurrected and exalted to the right hand of God
- So at this point it is fair for Jesus to say all sins against the Son of Man are forgiven but to sin against the Spirit of God are not forgiven
- Later the NT writers add the unpardonable sin to extend beyond the Spirit to Christ
 - Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31

There is no chance of forgiveness now or in the future

- Serious sin

Natural understanding of this passage is this:

- Jesus is saying to blaspheme the Holy Spirit is a serious matter so be careful
- More serious than missing the significance of the Son of God
- Maybe this is because Satan can mimic and mock and distort the Work of the Spirit

“These are frightening words. They are intended to be. But they have also been unnecessarily alarming for some people.” Boice pg 214

“In fact the fear that they might have sinned unforgivably is the best possible proof that they have not.” Boice

The unpardonable sin is to call good evil and evil good

DA Carson points out to sin against Christ could be a sin of ignorance as you do not believe or are confused about the work of God. While sinning against the Holy Spirit is seeing His work performed before you, the manifestation of the undeniable power of the Spirit of God, and then not believing and attributing that power to Satan

- One is a sin of confused ignorance
- The other a sin of willful unbelief and an unwillingness to submit to God

Downward spiral of turning God’s ways and righteousness on its head

- Calling good evil and evil good
- Perversion of godliness manifested by the Spirit is unpardonable

Conclusion

Let’s try to answer some of the natural questions we could face when addressing this passage

- Can I commit this sin now?
 - No
 - Christ is not here incarnate with the Spirit working through Him
 - Notice nobody accused the Apostles of being demonic
 - Only Christ because He came as the Messiah
- Are we guilty today of this very sin?
 - No
- In what ways could we commit this sin?
 - Only in denying or speaking against Him

Should I be afraid?

- Christians do not need to fear this sin for we love God and the things of God

Is blasphemy really unbelief?

- Yes

Let’s draw from this text few implications for our understanding of forgiveness

Forgiveness Paradigm

5. All sins can be forgiven us. Mark 3:28

"Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter;"
(Mark 3:28 NAS)

- We should not think that we need to make ourselves presentable to be forgiven
- We should not think that somehow we have sinned too much and cannot be forgiven
- Any and all kinds of grievous sin can and will be forgiven by God

There is no place for a sinner to say, "My sin is too serious and too great for God to forgive."

- There is no transgression too big
- You say, "but I have Murdered, stolen, lied, cheated, cursed, got drunk, committed immorality, blasphemed God, hated others. There is no way God can forgive me."
- Indeed, you have you reprobate. But so has your neighbor. That person sitting next to you in the pew they are bad too. They are sinners and need of grace as you are
- The hope we all have is that "all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men."

The hope is that God is forgiving. BUT there is one sin God will not forgive

- The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin
"-- (Mark 3:29 NAS)

- Wait? Didn't Jesus say all sin will be forgiven? Yep and He qualified that to one exception. Do not blaspheme the Holy Spirit
- Attributing the works of the Holy Spirit to the Devil. By the way this is simply unbelief
- At the same time, this sin was only able to be practiced at the time of Christ while here on Earth
- The principle of this sin can be expressed today, it's unbelief. But even this unbelief can be repented of
- There was no hope for these Jewish leaders who denied the power of the Spirit of God working through Christ

Now it is important to see here that this is where God's forgiveness differs from ours. We must forgive everyone who sins against us. We forgive our debtors. We are not the Holy Spirit. This is what is expected of us. Yet here God withholds forgiveness from those who blasphemed the Holy Spirit

- This is to say that while we forgive because God has forgiven us, our forgiveness is not like God's

Proof of this idea:

1. Our forgiveness does not release someone from their duty to pursue forgiveness from God
 - The sinner who repents and seeks restoration must also repent and seek forgiveness from God
 - When people sin against us they not only sin against us but they also violate the law of God
 - That is to say the murderer is not only guilty of sinning against the victim and his family but also against God since he violated the Law of God by murdering
 - Our forgiveness does not release someone from their personal obligation to seek forgiveness from God

2. Our forgiveness at best can reflect God's parental or relational aspects of forgiveness but not His judicial forgiveness
 - By this again we do not have the power to release anyone from their legal debt
 - We can only release someone from their personal obligation to us
 - This is why a violator, though forgiven by a victim or his family, is still liable to the court. We are not reflecting God's judicial forgiveness

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