



## **“The Unpardonable Sin”**

**Kevin Presley**

Today, we’re going to answer a question that has been posed by a couple of our viewers. I want to read their e-mails first. David writes, *“I feel I have committed the unpardonable sin by willfully sinning, and I feel hopeless, depressed, and numb. Is there any hope for me?”* And then, Brandon writes that he was, *“saved in 2017 but then fell away from the faith for a year and a half. I now want to come back and return...In light of passages such as **Hebrews 6:4-6**, is it that I can no longer be saved and have nothing to look forward to but a fearful expectation of judgment? I am very distressed and scared over this. Please help.”*

I think there are many people who share the fears of these two viewers. In fact, it’s one of the most common questions that preachers are asked: What is the sin that God will not forgive? Can men commit that sin today? Have I committed the ‘unpardonable sin?’ Most students of the Bible have surely wondered about the words of Jesus recorded in **Matthew 12**.

**Matthew 12:31-32** *“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.”*

These are sobering, in fact, frightening words, and whatever this seemingly mysterious sin against the Holy Spirit is, we dare not be found guilty of it. In today’s study though, we’re going to look at this chilling passage and learn about ‘the unpardonable sin’ and see whether it’s possible to commit it today. Any sin is serious in the sight of God. By definition, *sin* is *the transgression or breaking of the law of God (1 John 3:4)*. All sin is devastating to our relationship with a Holy God.

**Ezekiel 18:20** *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”*

**Romans 6:23** *“For the wages of sin is death...”*

But the Bible also tells us that God is rich in mercy and eager to forgive our sins when we approach Him through Christ in obedient faith.

**Mark 16:15-16** “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...”

Those who are Christians are told by John:

**I John 1:9** “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

But we also read in **Hebrews 6** that it is impossible for those who “**have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame**” (**Hebrews 6:5-6**).

We come to the text of our study today in **Matthew 12**, where the scripture seems to strike such a different tone when Jesus said that all manner of sin would be forgiven—even one who speaks against the Son of God, Jesus Christ—but one sin is beyond the reach of God’s forgiveness, and that is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says that one who *blasphemes* or *speaks against* the Spirit of God would not be forgiven then, nor in the world that was to come.

Those passages ring with cold and heartless finality. They seem to suggest that some sins are of such a nature that they are beyond the reach of God’s mercy. So, which is it: Can one be cleansed of *all unrighteousness* as John says? Isn’t the gospel to be preached to *every creature* and of those to whom the gospel is preached, those who believe and are baptized will be saved? Or are there sins that are beyond the pale and cannot be forgiven?

The true interpretation of any passage will harmonize with all other passages, or else one or more of those interpretations is false. So, what is Jesus saying when He speaks of the sin that God will not forgive, in light of the fact that the Bible teaches that God is willing to forgive all unrighteousness? And can I commit this unpardonable sin today? Is it possible that you or I are guilty of it? The viewers who have written in to this broadcast are fearful and worried that they have committed the unpardonable sin. Could it be that that is the case and that their state is therefore hopeless? Let’s see what the Bible says about all of that.

First, we can rule out some misconceptions that people have about this sin. Some worry that they can commit this sin without even knowing it. In other words, that a person can be ignorant and accidentally and unknowingly commit such an offense. But as we will see, the ones Jesus warned in our text were not doing anything in ignorance, but rather they were acting in stubborn rebellion and willful rejection. We’ll talk more about that in a moment.

Some have speculated that this could be any number of sins that one does not have the opportunity to repent of. For example, a sin that one commits immediately before death; perhaps even the act of suicide, because one has no chance to turn back and repent of such a deed. But the taking of one’s own life is nowhere under consideration in this passage, and as sensitive and tragic a subject as suicide is,

though the Bible addresses it in other ways, it has absolutely no connection whatsoever to the sin mentioned in these verses. So, you can put that out of your mind.

Some would warn us that refusing to accept the modern and speculative theories that people advance about the Holy Spirit and His supposed manner of working in the world today is perhaps the sin that Jesus was speaking of. Well, for one thing, rejecting the false doctrines of men about the Holy Spirit is NOT speaking against the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is speaking against the false doctrines that people spread about the Holy Spirit and is, therefore, speaking in defense of the Holy Spirit.

Some are under the impression that the sin against the Holy Spirit is decreed unpardonable because of the very special nature of the Holy Spirit and His work. In other words, that Christ was exalting the third person of the Godhead as perhaps being so holy, unique, and special that it is simply unforgivable to speak a word against Him. Really, that doesn't have anything to do with it either. Yes, the Holy Spirit is divine, and He is Holy and is to be revered, but no more so than Christ. No more so than God the Father. Jesus said that the Spirit's purpose was to bring glory to Jesus and not the other way around (**John 16:14**). Christ didn't pave the way for the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit came to confirm that Jesus is the Christ. It's not that the Holy Spirit is holier than the other two of the Godhead. That's not what this sin has to do with. It DOES have to do with the work of the Holy Spirit in this particular context. Some believe that this sin could only be committed while Jesus was on earth performing miracles, and since the miraculous age has passed, it has no relevance to modern people. As we will see, this sin DID have an immediate connection to people who witnessed the miracles of Jesus, but that doesn't mean that the passage has no relevance whatsoever or no bearing on us today. Now, the actual circumstance that Jesus describes cannot be repeated, but that doesn't mean that we cannot place ourselves spiritually in the same position that these people were placing themselves in. I'll explain what I mean by that in just a little while.

So, what is Jesus warning them about? What is this awful sin for which there is no redemption? Let's read through the context of our text passage.

**Matthew 12:22-23** “Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?”

Here is a clear miracle that took place and there was no denying it. One would've been a fool to say that this was not a miracle. Consequently, when miracles took place in ages past, there was no doubt that they were miracles. A *miracle* is something that *suspends or sets aside the laws of nature*, as the miracle *supersedes natural law*. If men were able to perform miracles in the world today, as many claim to do, there would not be question among people whether they possessed that power or ability; there would be no doubt. People were not questioning here whether or not Jesus had worked miracles; that was evident for all to see. The people were amazed. What was happening was a question of the source of the miracle.

**Matthew 12:24** “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.”

In essence, they're saying, *He's not doing this by the power of God, but by the power of Satan.*

**Matthew 12:25-27** “And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.”

Jesus tells them that it doesn't make any sense for Him to be casting out devils by the power of Satan because that would have Satan dividing his own kingdom. Their statement was not even logical. The Pharisees had such prejudice and such bias that they were not being logical.

**Matthew 12:28** “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.”

That's a key here. It would've defeated the devil's purpose to cast out devils by the power of Satan, but to cast them out by the Spirit of God proved something. If this power came from God and the Holy Spirit, then it proved that the kingdom of God had come unto them. Of course, the kingdom had first come to the Jews before it was given to the Gentiles. Jesus is saying, *If I am performing these miracles by the power of the Spirit of God, that is proving that God's kingdom is come; that I am the Christ and what I am preaching is truth.* So, miracles proved that Jesus was the Christ and that the kingdom of God had come to the Jews.

But as we've recently studied, what did they do with that kingdom offer? As an institution, they rejected it. As a nation, they rejected it.

**Matthew 12:31-32** “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against (or speaking 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.”

The translation *world* is a little misleading to some. He is not saying *in this life nor in the life beyond*. That is not what He means by *world*. That can't even be the case because the fact is that no sin will be forgiven in the life that is to come. You see, now is the time of salvation and there will be no forgiveness extended after the probation period of this earthly life is over. The judgment bar is not going to be where God's mercy is shown; His mercy is being shown and offered now, and if you refuse it by refusing the gospel, then only judgment awaits in the life to come.

The word translated *world* in this passage is often used in the Bible for *age* or *dispensation*. So what Jesus is saying is that those who commit this sin against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven in this age (which was then the Mosaic age, while Jesus was among them showing His divinity to them, working miracles among them) or in the age that was to come (that is, after His resurrection, when the gospel would be confirmed by the apostles and preached to the Jews and, ultimately, to the whole earth). Before Calvary and the resurrection and after Calvary and the resurrection. Before the kingdom came and after the kingdom came, there would be no forgiveness for this sin.

Why was it so serious to sin against the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit's work in Christ and His apostles was the ultimate confirmation of Christ and God's final appeal to them. If they rejected it, there would be nothing else to convince them. Their hearts would be so hard and impenetrable that they would never

turn to Christ and be saved if they rejected the evidence that the Holy Spirit was offering and ultimately would offer in the resurrection of Jesus.

Imagine that a man is in a boat floating down the river. Below him are some dangerous rapids over which if he passes, he will go to his death. A little way down the river, a man stands on the bank and shouts a warning. The man in the boat ignores it and floats on. He says, *I see no danger*, and he goes on his way. A little farther down, a second man shouts a second warning, even offering to pull the man out of the water. But the man refuses again, saying, *I don't know what these people are talking about. The water looks fine to me*, and he floats on by. Just before he reaches the brink, a third man shouts a final warning and makes an impassioned plea to save the man. That, too, is refused. What's going to happen? The man has ignored all three warnings and he is going to be swept over the rushing falls to his doom. He might've accepted the first man's offer and have been saved. Perhaps he rejects that offer and he waits. He still has the opportunity to accept the second man's offer. He could still be saved. In fact, he could reject both the first and second men's offers and still accept offer number three and have been saved. But when he passed up the third offer, he passed the deadline. He passed his last chance for salvation.

That's what many people have done. Think about it: when man sinned in the garden of Eden, God's justice would've allowed the annihilation of the human race. But mercy stepped in and stayed the judgment of God. For at least 4,000 years, through the tearful pleadings of the Old Testament prophets, God sought to turn wayward man from his sinful course with little success. In fact, the prophet Isaiah represents himself standing with outstretched arms before a *disobedient and gainsaying people* according to Paul (**Romans 10:21**).

So, through the prophets, God extended the first offer, which was largely refused. They stoned the prophets. They killed the prophets. They rejected the prophets. Then, in the fullness of time, God sent His Son to the lost world. That was offer number two. That, too, was rejected. **John 1:11** reminds us that, **"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."** Not only did the masses reject Him as the Son of God, but they crucified Him. Yet still, the mercy of God had not run out. Just fifty days after the resurrection on the Day of Pentecost, offer number three was extended through the work and influence of the Holy Spirit, through the apostles in their revealing and confirming the gospel to the world. But listen, friend: that's it. That was the last opportunity. The outpouring of the gospel there in Jerusalem in those first years of the kingdom, those first years of the work of the apostles—that was the last opportunity for the Jews as a nation. There will never be another plan offered to the world. The gospel which the Holy Spirit brought to earth through the apostles that was confirmed through them by the miracles they performed, their testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the final offer of mercy to ALL of mankind. If you reject the gospel plan of salvation and harden your heart against it until there is no room for repentance in your heart, doom awaits.

Since we're not able to see Jesus perform miracles, it is impossible to commit the same sin under the same circumstances that these people were either already guilty of or on the verge of committing. You can rule out the idea that you've somehow, accidentally or unknowingly, committed the unpardonable sin. That's just simply not the case. But I do want to warn you that it is possible to be just as hardhearted, just as prejudiced, just as unyielding to divine testimony as they were. And when that becomes the case, there is no salvation because there will never be any repentance. It's not a matter of God refusing to forgive such a sin because it's so terrible or grievous; it's that one is unable to repent because through their own stubbornness and rejection, they have finally hardened their heart. That's what happens over time as one hears the truth, resists the truth, and ultimately, rejects the truth.

Let me illustrate the difference. In **Luke 22**, when they arrested Jesus as He was there in the garden praying that night with His disciples, they took Him before the high priest and so forth. Read with me from Luke's account.

**Luke 22:63-65** "And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him."

You see, they blasphemed the Son of Man. Could they be forgiven? Well, what did Peter preach to these very people just weeks after this on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**?

**Acts 2:23, 36-37** "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain...Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Peter didn't say, *Well, too late for you. You crucified Christ, so you can't be saved.*

**Acts 2:38** "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

We can read about another class of people in **John 3:1**. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews who came to Jesus by night inquiring of Him. Do you remember what he said?

**John 3:1-2** "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

You see, they knew. Now, a lot happened between this occasion and the final rejection of Jewish leaders, but what this shows is that the leaders of the Jews knew Jesus was from God. But many of them, because of their pride, prejudice, political agenda, and hardheartedness still refused to believe on Him. Now, that's a hard heart. Friend, your heart can become just as hard if you willfully reject what God says. It does not happen immediately, but it happens over time. It is a dangerous, silent, subtle process.

**Ephesians 4:30** "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God..."

Like a disobedient child grieves a parent, when we refuse to submit to the will of God, we are *grieving the Spirit* who brought and revealed that word. Stephen told the Jewish leaders in **Acts 7:51**, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." It wasn't that the Holy Spirit was represented by some better-felt-than-told feeling, vision, or dream that they had resisted; they had resisted the word of God that was preached to them by the Holy Spirit. Do you resist the Spirit's teaching by ignoring, resisting, arguing or fighting with the word of God? Do you realize how dangerous that is?

Paul warned in **I Thessalonians 5:19-20**, "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings." Just like when you pour water on a fire, you quench it, you destroy its power. That's what happens when one finally and totally closes his mind and heart to the teachings of the Bible. It's a dangerous thing to resist

the truth that you know is true. My friend, if you've not obeyed the gospel, today is the day of salvation. I urge you to act upon what you know you need to do before your heart becomes so hard, you'll never have the desire to do it. If you want to be saved, you have not committed the unpardonable sin or anything like it. But time may be running out.

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