

The Sin Against *the* Holy Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 12:22-31, Mark 3:22-30, 10:45, Luke 18:10-14, John 3:14-16, 1 Cor. 15:3, 1 Tim. 1:15, Heb. 2:9.*

Memory Text: “Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation” (*Mark 3:28, 29*).

Of all the hard sayings in the Bible, this memory text has to be among the most difficult. Considering who Jesus was and what He did in order to be able to forgive our sins, the idea of a sin that even the Cross doesn't make provision for should cause us to tremble. Murder, incest, pride, adultery, theft, idolatry, even words spoken against Christ (*Matt. 12:21-32*) can be forgiven (*Eph. 1:7*); yet, in the words of Christ Himself, “he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness” (*Mark 3:29*). That's incredible!

Thus, the logical question is “What is this so-called ‘unpardonable sin’” (a phrase that, by the way, never appears in Scripture)? The whole idea of a sin that can't be forgiven seems so contrary to all we know about the God who went through so much precisely in order to forgive us all our sins. That's why this is a topic so worthy of study—for we all need to be aware of the one thing that, more than anything else, leaves us, as Jesus said, “in danger of eternal damnation” (*vs. 29*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 17.*

To Save Sinners

According to 1 Timothy 1:15, what was the purpose of Christ's coming to this earth?

Volumes could be written about the reasons for the incredible story of Jesus Christ, the God who veiled His divinity in humanity and died in our stead the death that we, as sinners, deserve. Among those reasons for the life and death of Jesus are:

1. He came in order to reveal to us just what God was like (*John 14:9*).
2. He came in order to be a Servant of God and show what servanthood was about (*Matt. 20:25-28, Phil. 2:5-7*).
3. He came to leave us an example of how to live (*John 2:6, 1 Pet. 2:21*).
4. He came in order to be a faithful and merciful High Priest in our behalf (*Heb. 2:17, 18*).

All these things, however important, would be meaningless to us without what's undoubtedly the most crucial aspect of Christ's earthly mission.

Read Mark 10:45, John 3:14-16, 1 Cor. 15:3, Heb. 2:9, and 1 John 3:8. What reasons do these texts together give for the life and death of Jesus?

Of all the reasons Jesus came and died, the most important—at least from our perspective—is that He died to save us from the legal penalty of sin, which is death, eternal death. And the great news is that through His work He is able to do just that for anyone who accepts Him. Salvation comes to all who believe, the Jew first and then the Gentile (*Rom. 2:9*). Those who believe are then spared the “eternal damnation” Jesus warned about in numerous places, including Mark 3:29, in which He talked about the one sin that could lead to this damnation. Thus, if through belief in Him we are spared this “eternal damnation,” and if the “unpardonable sin” leads to this damnation, what most likely is this “unpardonable sin” really about?

“All Manner of Sin and Blasphemy”

Read Matthew 12:22-31 and summarize the context in which Jesus said what He did. Notice, too, to whom He was speaking. How does that help us understand what He was saying in regard to the “unpardonable sin”? See also Mark 3:22-30.

Christ’s strong words didn’t appear in a vacuum. Instead, they were expressed in response to a statement by certain Pharisees who, after witnessing a healing performed by Jesus, said He “cast out devils” (*Matt. 12:24*) by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. This attitude was taken in the face of undeniable evidence given them of His divine power: the holiness of His life, which they could but recognize and which they later tacitly admitted (*John 8:46*); His supernatural healing of the sick (*Matt. 8:14-17, Mark 1:29-34, etc.*); His casting out of devils (*Matt. 9:32, 33*); and His raising of the dead (*Luke 7:11-17*).

However, by refusing to admit Christ’s divinity, and by actively opposing Him, these men had placed themselves in such a position that they were forced to explain His works on some other grounds than divine and, hence, assigned to Satan the work of God. They thereby closed their minds to the evidence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit impresses truth upon the mind and heart (*John 14:17, 16:13*) and convicts of sin (*John 16:8*). But although God is long-suffering and merciful and not willing that any should perish (*2 Pet. 3:9*), His Spirit will not labor with the obdurate heart indefinitely (*Gen. 6:3*). If truth is persistently resisted and refused, the Spirit’s promptings cease to be heard, and the soul is left in terrible darkness.

This is possibly the condition to which Paul referred when he described certain consciences as being “seared with a hot iron” (*1 Tim. 4:2*). For a person guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost, probation has closed, and there is for him or her “no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment” (*Heb. 10:26, 27*).

From what you’ve read so far this week, what’s your understanding of the sin against the Holy Spirit?

The Unpardonable Sin

Sin is fatal to our existence, but God delights to forgive us our sins. We need not perish, although “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (*Rom. 3:23*). Jesus died to earn the right to forgive repentant sinners.

But there is one sin that is unpardonable and inevitably results in eternal death. When someone refuses to respond to the goodness of God, which is designed to lead unto repentance (*Rom. 2:4*), this continued refusal to accept God’s overtures of grace will finally result in the commission of the unpardonable sin.

Read again Matthew 12:31 and Mark 3:29, in their respective contexts. How does this context reveal what’s being expressed in the above paragraph?

The unpardonable sin, or the sin against the Holy Spirit, is persistent rejection of light, the persistent rejection of what Christ has done for us. This rejection inevitably blinds the spiritual eyes and hardens the rejecter’s heart to the wooings of the Spirit, as the example of those leaders in Israel. Finally, there is utter darkness in the soul, and the person is eternally lost because he or she has ruined his or her soul’s perceptivity to the promptings of the Spirit.

Placing one’s self beyond the power of the Holy Spirit is “unpardonable” because we cannot even repent without the aid of the Spirit of God. God can’t do anything for us unless He forces us, which He won’t do. We have, through our own choices, cut ourselves off from salvation.

Read again Matthew 12:32 and Mark 3:29; notice how Jesus ties the unpardonable sin with the idea of speaking. Why, considering the above definition, would He do that?

In biblical thought, words are deemed as actions. Words are part of the reality they depict. God spoke, and the world came into existence (*Genesis 1*); Jesus Himself was the “Word . . . made flesh” (*John 1:14*). In the Hebrew, the most common term for “word” (*dabar*) also means “thing,” “history,” “prophecy,” and that’s because words are linked to the reality they refer to. Thus, it seems that Jesus equates speaking against the Holy Spirit as a persistent rejection of the truth the Spirit seeks to bring us. Actions and words are inseparably linked.

Think about the last time someone hurt you with words. That should show you that, indeed, words are “real” things. Make a covenant with God right now to guard carefully your tongue.

Convictions of the Spirit

“When he [the Spirit] comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in me” (John 16:8, 9, RSV).

In order to qualify as a candidate for salvation, a person must recognize that he or she is a sinner. No person asks for help of the Savior unless sensing a need. One of our greatest needs is a personal conviction of sin. We cannot bring this conviction about ourselves; it is the Spirit's prerogative and work to convict us of sin. His very first work is to make the sinner aware of his or her sinfulness and, hence, his or her lost condition. The Spirit is not merely the Comforter. He is also—and first—the Convictor of sin. He becomes the Comforter to those who have made peace with God by admitting and confessing their sins.

What dramatic illustration demonstrates the Spirit's power to convince of sin? *Luke 19:8, 9.*

How did Jesus illustrate the availability of salvation for a contrite sinner, while at the same time pointing out the hopelessness of a person who thinks he or she is righteous? *Luke 18:10-14.*

“We must have a knowledge of ourselves, a knowledge that will result in contrition, before we can find pardon and peace. The Pharisee felt no conviction of sin. The Holy Spirit could not work with him. His soul was encased in a self-righteous armor which the arrows of God, barbed and true-aimed by angel hands, failed to penetrate. It is only he who knows himself to be a sinner that Christ can save.” —Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 158.

When a person receives a vision of the righteousness and holiness of God, as did the prophet Isaiah (*Isa. 6:5, 6*), the Holy Spirit will convince that person that he or she is sinful and nothing but judgment and utter destruction will await him or her unless Jesus intervenes. Thus, it's the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that's so important in leading us to Christ. Imagine, then, the hopeless state of people who have, through their own hardness, made themselves immune to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

In what ways can guilt be good, a tool used by God? At the same time, at what point does guilt become bad, a tool used by the devil? How can we know the difference?

Repentance and the Unpardonable Sin

At times, there have been church members who have lived in fear that they have committed the unpardonable sin. In a sense, it's not hard to understand why. We are sinners; if not moment by moment under the control of the Holy Spirit, we are capable of just about anything. And for a person who has known the Lord, who has gotten a glimpse of God's holiness, his or her own sense of sin can appear horribly damning and condemning. The guilt can be overwhelming. Most Christians, at some point in their walk with the Lord, have had moments of fear, moments of believing their case is hopeless, that they cannot make it, that they, in fact, may have committed the unpardonable sin.

If, however, the “unpardonable sin” is constant rejection of the Holy Spirit, why is someone who fears he or she has committed that sin, someone who clearly has not committed it? See also Ps. 51:1-4, Luke 5:8, 18:13.

The commission of crime or sin is no permanent obstacle to salvation. Jesus can save anyone who is willing to accept salvation. He is not primarily concerned with anyone's dismal past. Any sin and shortcoming may be blotted out through His shed blood. There is one condition for this forgiveness, and that is repentance, and that comes only from the work of the Holy Spirit. As long as we repent, there is forgiveness.

Of course, we must remember that sin cannot be trifled with. Each sin hardens us; every time we fall, we do so only because we have pushed away conviction. The more we do that, the easier it is to do it again and again and again. And though we can always repent and find forgiveness, the more we sin, the more we harden our hearts to the very Person who leads us to repentance, the Holy Spirit.

Thus, how crucial that we, each day, claim the power of God to cleanse us, to regenerate us, to remake us in the image of the Savior. (See 1 Cor. 10:13, Gal. 5:16, Titus 3:5.)

Have you ever felt your case was hopeless, that you were going to be lost even after you had made a decision to follow Christ? What brought those feelings? What caused them finally to leave? What did you learn from that experience that you could use to help someone who feels his or her case is hopeless?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 621, 622; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 321–324, 565–568; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 75, 76; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, “Two Worshipers,” pp. 150–152.

“He who rejects the work of the Holy Spirit is placing himself where repentance and faith cannot come to him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 322.

“Every impure thought defiles the soul, impairs the moral sense, and tends to obliterate the impressions of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 302.

“But if a man, by repeated refusals of God’s guidance, has lost the ability to recognize goodness when he sees it, if he has got his moral values inverted until evil to him is good and good to him is evil, then, even when he is confronted by Jesus, he is conscious of no sin he cannot repent and therefore he can never be forgiven. That is the sin against the Holy Spirit.”—William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 81.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, imagine if you had to deal with someone who was convinced he or she had committed the unpardonable sin. What have you learned from this week’s study you could use to help that person find hope and forgiveness?
- 2 As a class, go through the Bible and see what examples you can find of those who, apparently, had committed the unpardonable sin. Make a list of these people and discuss their specific cases.
- 3 Read over the above quote from Barclay. What’s the process he is describing? Why is this a danger for everyone, even professed Christians?
- 4 As a class, pray together that each one will be more surrendered to the workings of the Holy Spirit.

The Shining Church, Part 2

Mar Dela Fuente

When Datu (chief) Lagunday invited the student missionary teachers from Mountain View College to start a school in his village, he predicted that one day the village would be a shining light in the mountains of southern Philippines. The school closed briefly when Datu Lagunday died, but soon reopened. The villagers learned God's plan of salvation and accepted Jesus as their Savior. They built a simple church on the hill above the village.

Rainy season turned the dirt path that led to the church into a slippery mass, making it difficult to reach the church. Villagers decided to meet in the church on Sabbath and in the village hall during the week. Some wanted to move the church to the center of the village for easier access.

One evening when a woman returned from midweek service, her husband asked, "Where did you hold your prayer meeting?"

"In the assembly hall," she replied.

"Yes, I thought so. That's where the sound of singing came from. But the church was lit up, as it is when you worship there."

The wife looked in the direction of the church, but it was dark.

"It is dark now," he said, "but when you were worshipping, bright light shone from the church."

The next day a man who lives on a hill opposite the church visited the village. "You had such beautiful music last night during your worship," he said. "And the light from your church shone very brightly!"

On Friday evening the church members gathered for vespers in the village assembly hall. The man's wife, remembering what her husband had said, looked outside toward the hill where the church stood. She saw it was brilliantly lit.

"Look!" she cried, interrupting the song service. "The church is shining!" The worshipers gathered to look at their church on the hill. They stood in awe, some with tears in their eyes, as they realized that their faithful chief's prediction had come true. The church had become a shining light in the mountains. "A host of angels must have come to worship with us," whispered one worshiper.

Your mission offerings support Mountain View College and its student missionary program which has introduced thousands to Christ in southern Philippines.

When this was written Mar Dela Fuente was a student missionary teacher at the Adventist mission school in Migtulod Village in southern Philippines.