

I Beg Your Pardon – Matthew 12:22-32

Introduction: Every now and then, I get a question or concern from someone about committing the unpardonable sin. It is a concern a lot of people have because; of all the things Jesus said in Scripture, this statement is one that is probably the most puzzling. It seems to contradict everything else Jesus said about forgiveness. For example, in the Old Testament:

Ps. 86:5 (NIV) says, *"For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You."*

In the New Testament: **1 John 1:9 (NIV)** says, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

The worst sin that we can imagine is to kill God's own Son while He was trying to save us. Yet from the cross, Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*

But in our text today, Jesus identifies one sin that God cannot forgive. So what did Jesus mean when He said, *"but anyone who speaks a word against the Spirit will not be forgiven?"* Since this so called unpardonable sin has to do with our response to the Holy Spirit of God, we're going to look today at who the Holy Spirit is, what the Holy Spirit does, and what our response should be to Him. Then we will have the proper basis for answering the question, of what the unpardonable sin is. First:

1. Who is the Holy Spirit?

According to **John 4:24 (NIV)** *"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."* The Holy Spirit of God is the invisible power and presence of God. He is the third Personality of the Trinity. He is the Writer of Scripture, the revealer of truth, the giver of spiritual gifts. He was present and actively involved in the creation of the world, and He is ever-present within every believer.

2. The Function of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit of God is the ultimate multi-tasker. He has several functions in the lives of people:

A. He Reveals and Convicts. **John 15:26 (NIV)** *"When the Counselor comes..., he will testify about me."*

The focus and mission of the Holy Spirit is always to bring our attention and focus to Jesus, and never to the Holy Spirit Himself. And when we focus on Jesus, we become immediately aware of our sin. That is when the convicting power of the Holy Spirit comes upon us and we are forced with a decision.

B. He Draws us to the Gospel and Leads us to Respond.

1 Thess. 1:5 (NIV) says, *“because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction....”* The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the truth that Jesus really is the only way to the Father.

C. He Recreates and Restores us to a Right Relationship. In **John 3:5 (NIV)** Jesus told Nicodemus, *“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”*

Rom. 8:16 (NIV) says, *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”* It is by the Spirit and through the Spirit that we are restored to a right relationship with the Father. We are born again, re-created, made alive in the Spirit.

D. He Indwells and Comforts Us. After we accept Jesus, God's Spirit dwells within us. **Rom. 8:9b (NIV)** *“...if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”*

1 Cor. 6:19 (NIV) *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”*

The Holy Spirit of God is the presence of God, who walks beside us, who never leaves us, and is always present within us.

He is the *“Comforter”* and the power of God living within us.

E. He Seals Us and Keeps Us. **2 Cor. 1:21-22 (NIV)** *“...He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”*

He keeps us in God's family forever. He is why no one can *“pluck us out of the Father's hand.”* He is why nothing can separate us from the love of God. Because He is active and alive and powerful, and He is able to keep us. He is God's promise that we'll spend eternity with Him.

Rom. 8:11 (NIV) *“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”* That means that the Holy Spirit is given to us by God the Father to give us a little fore-taste of heaven.

F. He Teaches Us. John 14:26 (NIV) *“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”* The Holy Spirit reveals to us the truth of Scripture and helps us recall those truths when we need to remember them and apply them to our lives.

G. He Enriches and Blesses Us. Gal. 5:22-23 (NIV) *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, He conforms us to the image of Jesus. And we begin to produce evidence of a changed heart, and a new way of thinking.

H. He Guides Us. John 16:13 (NIV) *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

He reveals to us what God is doing, where He’s at work around us, what He wants us to do.

I. He Empowers and Equips Us. Zech. 4:6 (NIV) *“‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”*

I heard of an article that appeared in one of those hometown newspapers that read: *“Leslie Puckett, after struggling to start his car, spending twenty minutes jiggling his key to make a better connection, lifted the hood and discovered that someone had stolen the motor.”*

That is what Christians sometimes do. They fail to realize that God’s work is always done through the Spirit’s power, not their own. It is by His power that we can even spread the gospel and the truths of God’s word.

In the Great Commission, in Mt. 28:18-20, when we’re instructed to *“Go therefore, and make disciples”* it’s because Jesus said in vs. 18, *“All power is given to Me in heaven and earth,”* In other words we can only go and make disciples through Jesus’ power, the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

So He empowers us to do His work, but He also equips us for the ministry He has called us to.

We've talked about these spiritual gifts on Wednesday nights, and we said that they are given to each and every believer in order for us to carry out the ministry He's called us to do. In other words, He wouldn't empower us unless He also equipped us.

That is a brief description of the function of the Holy Spirit of God. Now, finally, let's look at:

3. Our Response to the Holy Spirit.

There are 3 responses we can make to the Holy Spirit. First,

A. He Can Be Received. Now when we talk about receiving the Holy Spirit, we're not talking about getting some special anointing, or having some sort of special ability to speak in unknown tongues. or slay folks in the Spirit, or go into convulsions. No, we're talking about simply receiving Christ as your Lord and Savior, because at the very moment that happens, you receive the Holy Spirit. He takes up residence with you.

However even after receiving Him, we still need to respond to Him on a daily basis. **Eph 5:18 (NIV)** says, *"...be filled with the Spirit."* That means we still have choices to make about the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives. First,

a. We Can Choose to "Walk in the Spirit." **Gal. 5:25 (NIV)** says, *"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."* Of course, this is what pleases God the most.

Years ago, D. L. Moody was leading a crusade in England, and one pastor was upset because Moody was preaching and not some other evangelist he wanted. That pastor said, *"Who does Mr. Moody think he is? Does he have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?"* Another pastor kindly answered, *"No sir, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody."*

If we are obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit within us, then we'll allow Him to have a monopoly on us, and then we can experience His joy, produce the fruit of the Spirit. So one choice we can make after we receive the Spirit is to walk in Him, but another choice we can make after we receive the Spirit is:

b. We Can Choose to "Grieve the Spirit." **Eph. 4:30 (NIV)** *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."*

How can we grieve the Holy Spirit? When we refuse to let Him lead our lives. When we cause disunity in the church. When we refuse to listen to His instruction, or fail to allow Him to mold us into the person God created us to be. And another choice we can make after we've received the Spirit is:

c. We Can Choose to “*Quench the Spirit.*” 1 Thess. 5:19 NIV) says, “*Do not put out the Spirit's fire*”

As Christians, We can quench the Spirit when don't live up to the name of Christian. Many people don't go to church because they've been put off by Christians who don't walk their talk, and the work of the Spirit drawing them to Christ is quenched.

We can quench the Spirit by being a distraction when the Holy Spirit is working to draw people to Him. The most common time this happens is during a meeting such as this. As hymns are being sung, prayers are being prayed, and gospel messages are being preached; those are times that the Holy Spirit is drawing people's attention and focus to Christ. That is when the Holy Spirit is at work convicting people of sin and urging them to respond to the grace of God.

But at the same time, there is a Spiritual warfare going on around us. While the Holy Spirit is working, Satan is fighting against Him. Satan is working to keep people from hearing what the Lord is saying. He's doing his best to distract people's attention away from the gospel message, and make it ineffective.

That is why it is so important to turn those cell phones off and keep the talking down, and use the facilities BEFORE you come to worship. It's not necessarily distracting me, but it might be distracting the Spirit's working in the heart of an unbeliever.

Now, if a physical condition requires you to get up and move around, then by all means do so. If the baby cries and you have to take it out, that's fine. Everybody understands those things.

Now, let me say that these activities are almost never are done intentionally, but they can be Spirit-quencherers that we need to be mindful of. Our second response to the Holy Spirit is:

B. He Can Be Resisted. Acts 7:51 (NIV) “*You stiff-necked people...! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!*”

When you put off salvation, you're resisting Him. When you consider the things of God as unimportant, you're resisting Him. And resisting the Holy Spirit leaves you just like you were before - separated from a relationship with God.

Finally, one last response to the Holy Spirit is:

C. He Can Be Blasphemed. Mt. 12:31 (NIV) *"And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."* According to this passage, every sin is forgivable except this one. Heaven is filled with redeemed and forgiven murderers, adulterers, and perverts of all descriptions. If God could not forgive them, he could not forgive us.

"Blasphemy" is a sin, but it has a dual status, and the two are treated separately in this passage. Someone defined *"blasphemy"* in this way: *"the uniquely terrible sin of intentionally and openly speaking evil against holy God or defaming or mocking Him."* In the Old Testament times, they would stone folks who blasphemed in this manner. Jesus says that this type of *"blasphemy"* will be *"forgiven"* when the sinner confesses and repents.

Paul said in **1 Tim.1:13 (NIV)**, *"Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief."*

When Peter denied Jesus, he cursed and swore, blaspheming the Lord. Yet, Peter found forgiveness and restoration.

The other type of blasphemy is the one that is unforgivable. It's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. What is that? Simply put, you have blasphemed the Holy Spirit when, after you've examined all the evidence, you've defiantly and repeatedly refused to accept Christ as your Lord and Savior. The Pharisees were in danger of committing this unforgivable sin.

Jesus said, *"Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven."* (32). That means that people because of ignorance, or because they don't understand who He is, who rejects Jesus or uses His holy name in vain, can still be *"forgiven."* Because they spoke or acted without knowledge.

However, the one who *"speaks against the Holy Spirit"* will never be forgiven. Now what is the difference? The answer lies in an understanding of the sin of unbelief.

As we said, the Holy Spirit draws people to salvation. He convicts us, calls to us and compels us to come to

Christ.

When someone, after hearing and understanding the gospel, defiantly walks away for the last time, he or she has blasphemed the Spirit. They've turned their back on God, and have no intention of accepting God's offer of salvation. That is unbelief, and the person who does not believe is lost.

Can such a person ever be saved? Well, Jesus said he will not be *"forgiven... either in this age or in the age to come."* In other words, if a person continually rejects Christ, and refuses to accept God's free gift of salvation, he or she cannot be forgiven. God will not forgive an unrepentant heart. Though He loves you and is willing to forgive, He cannot make you believe. And certainly, after death, the opportunity to believe and accept Christ is over.

So, how can a person know if he has *"blasphemed the Spirit?"* How can you know if you've gone too far? Well, if you're still searching and open, and you're still being convicted, you've not yet totally rejected the Spirit of God. There is still opportunity for you to believe and accept. So, if you are here today, and you've heard the offer of salvation, you've not gone too far. Jesus is still calling for you to come. He's still calling for you to say, *"I beg your pardon God."*

But one day, you'll not have another opportunity. One day, you'll hear God's final call. One day, you'll turn you back on God for the last time. Don't let this be that day. Don't resist Him. Don't grieve Him. Don't quench the Spirit today. Receive Him. Come to Christ while He's still calling you.