

THE UNFORGIVEABLE SIN (Mk. 3:22-30)

²² And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. ²³ And he called them *unto him*, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. ²⁷ No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. ²⁸ Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: ²⁹ But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: ³⁰ Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness ... *The Unforgiveable Sin* ... what is it? Is there such a thing? Surely God forgives *all* sins? ... I don't understand it for it's too confusing! Well, that is exactly why we should *want* to understand it. We would not want to unwittingly commit it, and be unaware of it, if that were possible ... So what is it then?!

Down through the years, I've had conversations with a few folk who were convinced they had committed the unforgiveable/unpardonable sin. They believed they were at the stage where it was no longer possible for God to forgive them. They were certain they could never be saved because they had committed the 'unpardonable' sin. ... As far as they were concerned, they had refused His offer of grace once too often, and they no longer had any further opportunities to be saved. ... Therefore, so as not to fall foul of confusion in this matter, we need to know what the Bible teaches about 'the unforgiveable sin', and what it means to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

Thus far, in the Gospel of Mark, we have been considering the evidence of Jesus and how He was one hundred percent man and one hundred percent God, Phil. 2:6 being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ... He is also the Saviour, and outside of Him there is no salvation, Jn. 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. There is no other way to be saved. The Gospel is exclusive. It is the only means of salvation. No other religion or philosophy or form of godliness, no amount of good works or charities, it doesn't matter whether you are a prince or a pauper ... it doesn't matter who you are, or who you think you are, Jesus says there is no other way into Heaven except by believing in Him as Saviour, and trusting in Him as your Lord and Master.

So, it is very important what we believe about Jesus Christ. You cannot afford to get it wrong! And to find the evidence He is Who He claimed to be, you turn to His Word. Here, - especially set out so simply in the Gospels, - you have the way of salvation. And the evidence is too powerful to dismiss!

However, surely the evidence was powerful when Jesus walked on this earth, but the people did not believe it. That is true! For three-and-a-half years the people had the proof in front of them, but nonetheless, they continued to deny Him to be the Son of God. Whether He was with the simpler folk in Galilee or with the more self-inflated in Jerusalem, great numbers refused to accept Him to be the Son of God, the Messiah.

Everywhere He went, crowds followed Him. Mingled amongst them were scribes and Pharisees spreading their rumours and lies against Him. There were also many others who were simply caught up in the spectacular miracles He performed. They were not interested in what He said ... they were just fascinated by the sensational, and after a while, when their fascination would wane they would move on to something else. That is because Jesus had not captured their hearts, *Jn. 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

That is not how it should have been, though. The testimony of Jesus was so clear and so blatantly obvious. How could they have failed to recognise Him as the Son of God, their Messiah?

By the way, - in case you are wondering, - if Jesus was to come back today, do you think you would recognise Him? Or do you think you might be like those people who were *not* able to identify Him? Do you ever have the fear you could turn out like those unbelievers, when Jesus returns? ... Well, there will be false 'Christs', - more of them as the age draws to a close, - and people will be 'taken in'. In fact some of these false 'Christ's' will be so credible that even the Elect need to watch lest they be deceived! *Mt. 24: For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

If it happens in our lifetime, don't be taken in though, for there is no excuse for any believer to be duped ... for when Jesus Christ returns He will arrive with such glory that belongs to God alone! His coming will be unmistakeable. He will not be 'slipping in' some secret way that people won't notice Him ... *No*, for every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7). The very moment He appears there will not be a single person who does not recognise Him, and know Who He is.

How will they recognise Him, since they have never seen before? They will recognise Him because either the joy of God will overwhelm them, or the fear of God will grip them! His coming will be indisputable and undeniable!

However, the people two thousand years ago failed to recognise Him ... how was that? Well, some passed Him off as a good person, a wise and righteous man ... and He lived what He preached ... But was He more than that? Well, they wouldn't want to commit themselves ... maybe He was, or maybe He wasn't! ... That is also how people talk about Jesus today! They are not sure. God's Word says Who He is, but they are still not certain what to believe.

That was how it was in Galilee. Some of His friends, even, reckoned He was 'bordering on the crazy', for they said, He is beside himself (3:21). His brothers weren't sure either ... and the people who came to be healed, they didn't really care as long as they got what they wanted! It must have been heartbreaking for the Saviour.

Look briefly again at v.31, here came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. ³² And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. ³³ And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? ³⁴ And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! ³⁵ For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother. ... What is the will of God? What is the will of the Father? ... Jn. 17:3 that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. ... That was the will of the Father, - the purpose for which He sent His Son. These Jews ought to have known Who Jesus was, *but they refused to believe* the evidence that was in front of them. ... The prophets had spoken about Him, the Old Testament Scriptures had promised Him, John the Baptist had preached about Him, and there was also the miracles Jesus performed, along with the 'sound doctrine' He taught. Really, the evidence was there ... and it was *obvious* Who He was, and they should have believed in Him. ... Perhaps, they had committed the unforgiveable sin, and that is why they didn't believe, - they had rejected Him to such an extent, they had forever wasted their opportunity.

Well, actually, no because a considerable number of them *did* realise on the Day of Pentecost Who He was, and they *did* come to believe in Him as their risen Saviour and Lord, their Messiah. So, obviously, they did not commit the unforgiveable sin. ...

What if the unforgiveable sin is as the consequence of harbouring bad thoughts towards God and Jesus Christ? For example, when you are telling the primary school child about God and he doesn't want to listen because his dad had told him it's all rubbish ... Before he has even heard, he has already made his mind up and he has rejected the message ... Is that the child's fault, or is he simply picking up on the ignorance passed on by his father? Is he in danger of committing the unpardonable sin?

There are many questions concerning this subject of the unpardonable sin and of blaspheming the Holy Spirit ... Here is the simplest one to answer though ... Can a Christian commit the unpardonable sin? The answer is a sure and certain "No!" because all the sins of every child of God have been dealt with decisively at the cross ... our past sins, our present sins, and our future sins.

Well, let's stop asking so many questions and deal with the text. It was either one of two powers that was 'driving' Jesus, - either the power of God, or the power of Satan. What he was doing was beyond the capability of an ordinary man ... so either God was behind Him, or the devil!

As far as the Pharisees were concerned, - and, of course, they passed on their opinions to the people, - Jesus was working under the auspices of the devil because since they, - the Pharisees, - were doing God's work Jesus 'was on the opposite side' and, therefore, He was working for the devil. ... He was Satan-inspired and Satan-possessed ... He was associated with Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons, and He was accused of belonging to such a Hellish association!
 v.22 He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

It was all very bad, - you wouldn't have wanted to be there and heard what they were saying. But, look at how Jesus responded, ²³ *And he called them unto him* ... and notice that when He called them, *they came!* That is the authority He had! When He said "come", they had to come! No avoiding Him, no making excuses, no running away ... they had to come! ... *Irresistible!*

Then He began by stating the obvious, *How can Satan cast out Satan?* If the devil wants to deceive the multitudes, then why would he be casting demons out of them?! It doesn't make sense. The more people who would become demon-possessed, the more content the devil would be ... surely that makes more sense! ... You Pharisees aren't thinking straight, ²⁴ *And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.* ²⁵ *And if a house be divided against itself,*

that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. You are basing your arguments on ‘muddled-up thinking’ ... and He demolished their irrational suppositions!

And that was what Jesus was saying here in Galilee. He was no devil because He was doing works contrary to Satan! ... And so the Saviour continued, ²⁷ No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. What's He saying? Jesus was telling these misplaced individuals that He was neither Satan nor working for Satan, but that He was infinitely more powerful than Satan who put himself forward as being the strong man. However, in order for Christ to enter into the strong man's house, - Satan's domain, - He had to overpower him, and so to *bind* Him, and then he will spoil his house.

And that was what Jesus did! When Jesus came to this earth, for the purposes of the time during His ministry He, - in a sense, - *bound* the strong man ... He dealt with him decisively during the forty days of temptation, during His ministry He exposed the demons, and He cast them out and rescued the people from their possession. Jesus *plundered* ‘the strong man's house’ and *bound* him, during His ministry here on earth! Jesus is mightier than Satan, - Satan is no match for Jesus, ... and yet for the purposes of our salvation God would permit Satan to bruise the ‘heel’ of Jesus, but on the cross Jesus would bruise the devil's head (Gen. 3:15)!

So, Jesus is not the devil, and His works are contrary to Satan, - diametrically opposed - ... and something else, since Jesus left this earth and returned to Heaven He has lifted the restraints placed upon the devil during His ministry here, and He has been allowing the devil to roam the earth, as a *roaring lion* ... seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8) ... just as when the Lord called him to give an account of himself in Job 1:7 And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. He continues to roam, but the day is swiftly coming when the Lord will have cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up [*bound*], and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season (Rev. 20:3) ... and then during the time when he must be loosed a little season he will make war with the Lamb and the Lord's people, but he will be utterly defeated and ultimately cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Rev. 20:10). ... And that is how he will end up!

So, Jesus is not the devil ... nor in any way in cahoots with the devil! They are enemies and they will never be reconciled for it is impossible! Therefore, these Pharisees had got it severely wrong!

Since Jesus, then, is not a lunatic, nor a liar, nor a deceiver ... the only other viable option is that He is Who He says He is ... *God*, and so He told them, ²⁸ Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: ²⁹ But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: ³⁰ Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit. ...

Well, what about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? What about the unpardonable sin? ... Read it again, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme. We are given some further information in the corresponding passage in Mt. 12:32, 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. ... Does that mean you can say something derogatory about Christ and get off with it ... but if you say the same thing about the Holy Spirit you won't?! Does that mean the Son of man (Jesus) is of lesser importance than the Holy Spirit? ... That doesn't sound right!

The answer lies in the context of the passage. God had been patient beyond words with His chosen nation of Israel. He had sent John the Baptist to prepare the people for the coming of their Messiah. Many of them responded to that call and repented (Mk. 1:5), but the religious leaders permitted John, - the messenger of Jesus, - to be arrested and eventually killed.

Jesus, the Son of God came as promised and called upon the nation to accept Him, but the same religious leaders polluted the minds of the people and together they eventually called for Jesus to be killed.

Then, after Jesus had returned to Heaven, the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost and thousands believed in Christ and were saved. Once again, though, the religious leaders had the Apostles arrested, and they themselves even took Stephen out and stoned him to death. ... And Stephen said something that explains the unpardonable sin and blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, for he told them, Acts 7:51 *ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.*

... You see, the people had ignorantly sinned against the Father and the Son, but on the cross the Son asked His Father, *Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do* ... and Jesus' prayer was answered on the Day of Pentecost, and on the days following, when thousands of those ignorant Jews came to realise Him as their Messiah and they were saved in Jerusalem and throughout Judea ... They had been graciously forgiven.

However, it was a step too far when the Pharisees and Jewish leaders had sinned, because they had 'shut out' the Holy Spirit by 'closing off' His appeals to them concerning the validity of Jesus as the Messiah. They refused the plain teachings of the Old Testament Scriptures in which they had been instructed and which they claimed to uphold. They renounced and repudiated the message of the Holy Spirit, and it brought His condemnation upon them. That meant, since the Holy Spirit guides sinners to the Saviour, those Pharisees had put themselves beyond repentance, and ultimately beyond forgiveness.

Some Bible commentators say this episode was restricted to the times of Jesus, and that it is not possible for anyone to commit the unforgiveable sin, - blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, - today. They say it was for those times only, and it no longer applies because there is not a single sin *today* that God's grace cannot save you from. Therefore, the unforgiveable sin, - blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, - was something that happened only in Jesus' day to those Pharisees. I would tend to agree with that analysis ...

And the 'unforgiveable sin'? ... Well, God saves the hardest of sinners. He saved the thief on the cross ... And there was also another man He saved, - on the other end of the spectrum. This particular individual believed Jesus to be a most foul pretender and a real threat to the Jewish religion. We don't actually read anywhere this person had ever said Jesus was demonic, but by virtue of the fact he travelled the length and breadth of the country to quell and eliminate any mention of Jesus, the evidence points to this person believing the Saviour to be a deceiver and a fraud. In fact, this person went so far that he arrested people who followed Jesus, and he was even complicit in the murder of at least one of their number. That is how much he *hated* Jesus! Now, could such a person be saved? *Yes, for God saved that man ... Saul of Tarsus ... Paul!*

Therefore, I believe there is no sinner beyond the reach of God's grace to save, Rom. 9:11 that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth ... ¹⁵ For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ¹⁶ So then

it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.
 ... God saves whosoever He has chosen, for He alone has the power to save!
 For every sinner who cries out to Him in repentance, He saves them! It is a
 work of grace He carries out in this life alone, - there is no Purgatory or any
 other place where sins can be dealt with ... It is only in this life by believing in
 Jesus Christ, - no matter how bad you are, - that you can be saved.

But, *are* there those He will not save? Let's put it another way, are there those
 who will not be saved? Sadly, the answer is yes ... for Jesus said, *Mt. 7:13 wide
 is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which
 go in thereat: 14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto
 life, and few there be that find it.*

So, yes there is an unforgiveable sin, in that sense, because it is the sin for
 which forgiveness is not sought. If you are not saved and you long to be, you
 can and you will by coming to Christ in repentance and in believing faith.
 However, if you will not come by that means you cannot be saved. You
 consciously are making the decision to 'throw God's offer of mercy back in
 His face' ... and you are refusing the only means by which you can be saved.
 That, if you like, is application of the unforgiveable sin.

But there is no excuse for anyone to go down that road, especially when you
 have heard the Gospel. There was no excuse for the Pharisees either, but sadly,
 they ended up denying themselves salvation because they denied Jesus as the
 Saviour, *Mk. 3:30 they said, He hath an unclean spirit.* ... They judged the Holy
 Spirit of God to be the deceiving spirit of Satan, and by so doing they were
 blaspheming the Holy Spirit ... The word 'blaspheme' (βλασφημέω) means to
 speak reproachfully, rail at, and revile ... and that is what they were doing!

It is a very sombre subject. The devil has convinced some people they cannot
 be saved for they have rejected Christ once too often. It is another one of His
 lies, though, for as long as there is breath in your body, and an understanding
 in your mind the Lord can do a work of grace in your heart when you cry out
 to Him in saving and believing faith ... for ...

Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
 Pardon there was multiplied to me;
 There my burdened soul found liberty,
 At Calvary.