

## **The Unpardonable Sin**

**Mark 3:22-30**

- I. It reveals a hardened heart that calls good evil. 3:22**
  
- II. It reveals spiritual blindness that is willful and intentional. 3:23-27**
  
- III. It involves a verbal declaration that is continual and unforgiveable. 3:28-30**

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### **Mark 3:22-30**

**Introduction:** 1) It is like hearing the words “Antichrist”, “False Prophet”, “Great Tribulation” and “Lake of Fire.” To any spiritually sensitive person the phrase strikes terror and fear. The phrase: “the unpardonable sin.” Actually that phrase does not occur in the Bible. In our text it is identified as an “unforgiveable sin” and “an eternal sin” (v. 29). This, needless to say, does not soften the impact of the words.

2) Several questions naturally arise when we examine the idea that there is a sin that once committed, will never be forgiven and will condemn us eternally to hell, the lake of fire (Rev 20:11-15).

1) Is there really an unforgiveable/unpardonable sin?

2) If there is, what exactly is it?

3) Can a Christian commit this sin?

3) Whatever this sin is, we must approach it with the greatest possible gravity and seriousness. Why? Because when God says “commit this sin and I will never forgive you,” there is then no one you can turn to for help and there is no longer any hope for heaven and eternal life. When God says “never” it really means never! A billion years from now, His judicial verdict will stand like stone. His death sentence is as certain as His life giving pardon! John Piper is correct, “If forgiveness is withheld for eternity, guilt is sealed for eternity. God is never neutral to sin. He either forgives it or punishes it... Not to be forgiven by God forever, is to suffer his wrath forever” (1-1-84).

4) The context in which this sin is discussed in Mark is: 1) the accusation by Jesus’ family “He is out of his mind” (3:21) and 2) the arrival of an official religious delegation

from Jerusalem assigned to investigate and evaluate the young Jewish rabbi who was causing such a stir in Galilee. In the midst of their harsh judgment and criticism, we see the overarching characteristics of the sin that can never be forgiven. If ever there was a warning that would compel us to run from sin with fear and trembling and flee to Jesus in faith and repentance we find it right here! So, what do we learn about the unpardonable sin?

**I. It reveals a harden heart that calls good evil.      3:22**

- Jesus is preaching, healing and casting out demons around the clock. The crowds are growing daily. His family wants to stop Him and take Him home. They fear He is losing it! (3:21).
- Scribes from Jerusalem – a delegation of religious specialists sent from the Sanhedrin to check Him out. William Lane says their assignment was to “distinguish between the instigators, the apostates and the innocent.” (p. 141). Apparently they reached a quick verdict about Jesus. He was a demon motivated apostate who should be quickly silenced.
- Possessed by Beelzebul...the prince of demons – meaning perhaps “Lord of the flies or carrion,” Lord of that which is rotten and repulsive, “Lord of the dung heap.” More likely, “Lord of the house (temple)”, “Baal the prince.” Thus, the ruler of a house or dynasty of demons (evil spirits) as the text makes clear.
- Jesus is possessed, controlled by Satan, the prince or ruler of the demon world. (This is the only time we know of in Jewish literature where Satan is called Beelzebul). What He teaches and what He does in healing and casting out demons He does, they say, by the power of Satan.

- His family says He is deranged (3:21). These religious leaders say He is demon possessed (3:22)!
- One major observation I would note for our understanding is the tense of the verb in vs. 22 and 30: “they were saying.” It is the imperfect tense which carries the weight of “they were continually saying.” This is not a one time accusation. This is not an unfortunate slip of the tongue or a verbal *faux pas* (fo pa)!
- With a hardened heart which Bavnick calls “a sin against the gospel in its clearest revelation,” they call the supremely good one the supremely evil one. It is a persistent rejection of and declaration against what the Spirit of God is doing in and thru Jesus.
- The evidence was unmistakable and undeniable. Those who move in the direction of the unpardonable sin 1) are aware of the miraculous works of Jesus that cannot be denied (note they do not deny He has cast out demons!); 2) consistently reject the obvious and logical conclusion that these spiritual works are done by the Spirit of God; 3) declare verbally and consistently those works are actually from Satan; and 4) consistently tell others that Jesus’ works are of Satan.

**Transition:** This reveals a hardened heart that calls evil good. Continue down this road and you will never be forgiven by God.

**II. It reveals spiritual blindness that is willful and intentional.      3:23-27**

- Jesus responds to these outlandish charges by calling the religious elite to come near to hear a parable. This short proverbial saying quickly refutes their accusations and reveals the absurdity of their logic.

- He uses one illustration with two components to make His point: 1) a kingdom divided (vs. 23-24) and 2) a house plundered (vs. 25-27).

1) The kingdom divided (vs. 23-24) – Jesus makes a simple and basic observation in v. 23, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” Would Satan act against Himself? Oppose Himself? Seek to defeat Himself? The logic is inconceivable! If what you say is true, Satan is destroying himself. A divided kingdom cannot stand (v. 24) and one thing is certain: Satan is attempting to build a kingdom and I have come to destroy that kingdom. If Satan were fighting himself he would be utterly powerless to do anything and obviously that is not the case. Look at all the misery he causes and perpetuates.

- Would Satan try to do himself in?

-Would Satan empower someone to wipe out his own army?

David Garland says it exactly right, “Satan extends his kingdom by sowing chaos and enslaving humans, not by setting them free” (ZIBBC, *Mark*, 26). To not see this reveals spiritual blindness that is willful and intentional. “My mind is made up! Don’t try and confuse me with the facts!”

2) The house plundered (vs. 25-27) – Jesus changes the analogy but continues His argument.

Vs. 25 – A house divided cannot stand. Pick the context: marriage, family, business, sports, church. A division when it comes to goals and purposes will fail, destroy itself.

Vs. 26 – If Satan fights himself, he will fall; his doom is sealed.

Vs. 27 – here is the parable. Satan is the strong man and Jesus is the one breaking into his house, his realm, to bind him and plunder (destroy him).

- Satan is indeed a strong man in this world. His house is a “house of horrors” filled with sin, sickness, death, demon possession and all that is evil and wicked. His possessions are human beings, people, enslaved by these evils, and demons are his agents of evil, his minions of misery, who delight in carrying out his demonic and diabolical agenda. No one but Jesus can invade his realm and carry away his possessions. No one but Jesus is stronger and more powerful than this strongman. Then, as Eugene Peterson says, “he can clean him out!” This is what Jesus is doing and will do climactically at the cross. It is self-evident and indisputable that the Son of God has come to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

**Transition:** To deny it is to reveal a spiritual blindness that is willful and intentional. “Don’t try to confuse me with the facts. My mind is made up!”

### **III. It involves a verbal declaration that is continual and unforgiveable. 3:28-30**

- Jesus now moves to conclude the matter. He begins with the word “truly”, literally “amen.” This word will occur 12 times in Mark, it is found only in the gospels, and said only by Jesus. There is no analogy to it in all of Jewish literature. It is a serious and solemn affirmation that adds strength and significance to what follows. Lane again says it “introduced a completely new manner of speaking” (p. 144). It affirms His words are completely true and reliable because He is uniquely the true witness of God. Put this in the mouth of any other person and it is completely out of place. With Jesus, there is a perfect fit.

- Jesus begins on a positive note that affirms the gracious forgiveness and mercy of God in forgiving sins.  
 “All sins” will be forgiven, even literally, “the blasphemies whatever they may blaspheme”. All sins and all sinners can find the forgiveness of God if they will come to Him in repentance and belief. However, vs. 29-30 notes the one tragic and fearful exception.
- Speak against the Holy Spirit verbally and continually, with willful and malicious intent that reveals a hardened heart beyond the possibility of repentance: 1) there is no forgiveness; 2) you are guilty of an eternal sin.

I cannot improve on the insights at this point of the wonderful New Testament scholar William Lane whose commentary on Mark remains to this day the benchmark in its field He writes:  
 “Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit forever removes a man beyond the sphere where forgiveness is possible. This solemn warning must be interpreted in the light of the specific situation in which it was uttered. Blasphemy is an expression of defiant hostility toward God... “the profanation of the Name,”...This is the danger to which the scribes exposed themselves when they attributed to the agency of Satan the redemption brought by Jesus. The expulsion of demons was a sign of the intrusion of the Kingdom of God. Yet the scribal accusations against Jesus amount to a denial of the power and greatness of the Spirit of God. By assigning the action of God to a demonic origin the scribes betray a perversion of spirit which, in defiance of the truth, chooses to call light darkness. In this historical context, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit denotes the conscious and deliberate rejection of the saving power and grace of God released through Jesus’ word and act...the failure of the scribes to recognize him as the Bearer of the Spirit and the Conqueror of Satan could be forgiven. The considered judgment that his power

was demonic, however betrayed a defiant resistance to the Holy Spirit. This severe warning was not addressed to laymen but to carefully trained legal specialists whose task was to interpret the biblical law to the people. It was their responsibility to be aware of God's redemptive action. Their insensitivity to the Spirit through whom Jesus was qualified for his mission exposed them to grave peril. Their own tradition condemned their gross callousness as sharply as Jesus' word. The admonition concerning blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not to be divorced from this historical context and applied generally. Mark emphasizes this by terminating the incident with a reference to the specific accusation that Jesus was possessed by an unclean spirit... repetition and a fixed attitude of mind... brought the scribes to the brink of unforgivable blasphemy. (p. 145-146).

**Conclusion:** 1) So, what is the unpardonable sin, the sin that will never be forgiven now or ever?

It is to knowingly, willingly and persistently attribute the works of God done by and in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit who testifies to these truths in your heart, to Satan.

- 1) It is a sin of full knowledge and understanding.
- 2) It is a persistent and ongoing disposition of the heart that resists the conviction of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) It is a verbal act of the mouth which attributes the works of the Holy Spirit to Satan.
- 4) It is a willful rejection of God's grace and goodness in Jesus.
- 5) It is rooted in unbelief.
- 6) It is a sin a Christian cannot commit.
- 7) It is a sin not committed by one who fears and is concerned they may have committed it.



2) But, it is a sin that should awaken all of us to the seriousness and gravity of all sin committed against a holy and righteous God who never winks at sin. It is a sin that should lead all of us to confess with Jesus in Mark 9:42-28, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”

3) There is a boundary of sin that once you pass it, there is no possibility, no hope, of return. Do not even think of going there. Instead, run to Jesus in faith and repentance. You will find open arms there! You will find forgiveness free and eternal. Today, do not delay, run from any and all sin and instead, run to Jesus!

