WHAT IS THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT?
(#6 in the Series: “The Helper”)
Matthew 12:22-32

Today I will bring to a close our special 6-part sermon series on the Holy Spirit. I sincerely hope these messages have been enlightening and helpful to you as you seek to grow and mature in your knowledge of the Christian faith. Knowing more about the God who loves us enables us to love and serve our Lord better.

A TROUBLING AND PERPLEXING SUBJECT

Today’s text is very troubling and perplexing to say the least. It is extremely difficult to hear Jesus say there is a sin that absolutely cannot ever be forgiven—not in this life or in the life to come.

I don’t know what I was thinking a year ago when I added this text and sermon to the series! I am certainly going where angels would fear to go. This is one of the most troubling passages in the Bible. Greater minds than mine have grappled with this text and struggled to understand it, so I will tell you right out of the gate this is a passage that requires careful reading, study and prayer. And even then we must proceed with caution. I have read the commentaries and will attempt to shed some light for you on this disturbing passage.

INCREDIBLE GOOD NEWS!

But first I want to draw all our attention to the incredible good news found in this text in verse 31. This good news is in danger of being overlooked or forgotten because of the warning issued in the second half of the verse. But for now let’s concentrate on this incredible good news.

Jesus says that every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven. The wideness of God’s forgiveness is amazing. The mercy of the Lord is great. No one is too bad for God’s forgiveness. What are your sins? They can be forgiven. All that is needed to obtain forgiveness for any and all sin is to repent. God in Christ has done everything needed to obtain our forgiveness and nothing can be added to it. Someone has said that we are indeed saved by works but Jesus Christ did all the work. It was his doing and dying and rising from the dead that purchased our salvation. Our only part to play in the whole scheme of things is to admit our need—or in Biblical terms, repent of our sin.

All the sins found in each of us gathered here today is no match for the atoning sacrifice of Christ. A thimble full of the blood of Christ can wash clean an ocean of sin! One drop of the blood of Christ is sufficient for all the sins of the world.

You must understand this good news! And you must never think that anything you have done is beyond the pale of God’s forgiveness. Hear one more time that great news of the gospel of our
Lord Jesus Christ: “If we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”¹ Notice again the emphasis on the word “all” in this passage. He will forgive all sin and will purify from all unrighteousness. Got it? Never forget it! Our God is a forgiving God, period; end of the discussion!

So we cannot let something in this passage cloud or hide the greatness of God’s mercy and forgiveness.

THE CONTEXT OF THIS TEXT
And so it is important for us to stop and carefully notice the importance of the context in our understanding of this text. Of course context is important in understanding of every passage in the Bible. Always get in the habit of noticing what is being said in the verses before and often after the text you are considering.

In the study of the Bible you have several contexts to keep in mind when you are studying a specific verse or verses.

- **First, there is the immediate context of the chapter** in which the verse you are studying is found. What has been said before and what is said following the verse you are considering. Sometimes you will need to read one or two chapter previous to your verse and a chapter of two after to get the full understanding of the immediate context.

- **Second, there is the general context of the book** in which the verse is found. What is the basic message of the book in which the text you are considering is found? You may need a commentary or Bible handbook to discover the overall message of the specific book of the Bible.

- **Third, there is the overall context of the entire Bible.** One cannot be correctly interpreting a passage if you come up with a meaning of a passage that is in conflict or in disagreement with the overall message of the Bible.

In real estate the mantra is “location, location, location;” in interpreting the Bible it is “context, context, context.” Make sure you understand the context of any passage before you feel comfortable in understanding it.

And so, let’s look together at the immediate context of this saying of Jesus—“And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander will be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be

¹ 1 John 1:9
forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who
speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

1. **Matthew’s context is found in verses 22-29 where the Pharisees witness the**
deliverance of a demon-possessed man and was also healed of his blindness and inability to speak. It is an astonishing miracle to say the least. The people exclaim, “Could this be the Son of David?” That would be a Messianic term and shows that some are starting to think that Jesus just might be the Messiah. But the Pharisees have another interpretation of this deliverance and miracle—they attribute it, not to God or God’s Messiah, but to Satan. For the Pharisees this marvelous and wonderful good thing was not a act of God but is from Satan. It is very important you see this reaction by the Pharisees.

2. **Mark’s context (Mark 3: 20-29) for this statement by Jesus is similar but with one other addition.** According to Mark the family of Jesus (and we are not told specifically who that was) came to get Jesus because they thought he had gone insane: “When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’” Here the context again is attributing Satanic power to the work of Christ plus there was concern that Jesus might have lost his mind—or insane.

3. **Luke’s context (Luke 11:14-20) is the same as Matthew’s and Mark’s with one additional statement that says “Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.”** They needed an additional sign from heaven even though they had just witnessed Jesus casting out a demon, giving the demon-possessed man the ability to do something he had never been able to do the whole time he had been demon-possessed: see and speak? Are you kidding me.

So please notice three things going on with this passage:

1. There is a common theme in all three gospels of the Pharisees attributing power to Satan of that which had been clearly done by God.

2. There is a serious questioning of the mental stability and soundness of Jesus by his family (whoever they were).

3. There is a response from some that what Jesus had just done was not sufficient to reveal that God was at work in him.

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2 Matthew 12:31-32
3 Mark 3:21
UNDERSTANDING THE WARNING OF JESUS

Perhaps we are now in a little better position of hopefully understanding the warning issued in this text by Jesus. What could the sin for which there is no forgiveness possibly be?

1. First, what this sin cannot be:

*It cannot be flippantly committed* in a moment of weakness and or ignorance. We have all said some pretty silly things about God and Jesus in our lifetime that we have all been thankfully forgiven of. This sin is not done casually or ignorantly.

*This sin cannot be committed by a believing Christian.* Christian people can and do commit all the others sins that human beings can do but this one cannot be committed by a person who truly and genuinely believes in Jesus. So you may be guilty of lots of other sins today, you are not guilty of the sin that cannot be forgiven.

*It would appear that this sin is a gradual development within the mind and heart of the person who commits it.* It is not something a person does once and now its over—but is a basic mindset or attitude or disbelief that has been developed over a period of time.

2. Okay, then, what is this sin?

This sin is a combination of the following dynamics:

*It is a deliberate and sincere confusion of good and evil.* It no doubt starts out with a person’s struggle with things in their life that they enjoy doing or being and yet they know those things are morally wrong. But everyone seems to be doing them and getting away with it and there are loud voices proclaiming these things to be good and normal and even helpful. And so, at first, a person goes along with the crowd and silences their conscience and decides they are going to be or do those things because they are enjoyable or popular. And little by little over time there is a true, genuine mixing of what is right with what is wrong so that one declares, with utmost sincerity that what is good is really evil and what is evil is really good. And when that truly happens inside a person—not in some casual and flippant way—there is no forgiveness because there is never any room for repentance because there is never any “felt” need for repentance.

When a person fails to clearly see Jesus for all that he is: the mighty God and glorious Savior; and when a person declares the work of Christ to really be the work of Satan, then there is no forgiveness for that person because there is no understanding of Jesus as Lord and Savior in the way that is required for a person to place their faith in him.
Listen carefully. Once the distinction between good and evil is confused then one will commit to believing that good is evil and evil is good and therefore there is no forgiveness possible because there is no true understanding of what is right and what is wrong and that makes genuine repentance impossible.

WHERE ARE YOU TODAY?
Do you believe that Jesus Christ loves you and seeks your best interest? Do you believe Jesus died for your sins? Do you believe that Jesus is the truth and his word is to be believed and obeyed? These things are true even if all of society declares them to be offensive and false. Stand with Jesus and his word and you will never have to worry about this unforgiveable sin.

I have never met a person that I believed had committed this sin. But I will tell you this, my Christian friends our society is going dangerously in the direction of confusing good with evil. When this happens, our nation will be in jeopardy with God. Society makes everything the Bible teaches to be silly and intolerant and out of date and weird. And if we aren’t careful, we Christians will cave under the pressure and go with the flow and throw the Bible out the window as we drift along. We don’t have to be judgmental and condemning about things but we do need to stand up for what we know is clear teaching of Holy Scripture.