

HE SAID *WHAT?* HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS



Am I really following Jesus?

Most of us are familiar with things Jesus did: walking on water, feeding five thousand with the loaves and fishes, healing a blind man, and of course, dying on the cross.

We're equally familiar with many things He said: Love God. Love your neighbor. Fear not. Do good.

We love these teachings, and they certainly line up with what we know about God: His love, peace, and goodness. But Jesus also said some other things that don't end up as framed prints on our walls.

- ▶ Sell everything you own.
- ▶ Love your enemies.
- ▶ Hate your parents.

Some of the teachings of Jesus are difficult, but we would be wise to see why Jesus said them.

So let's dive in to these hard teachings. What we'll find is that these hard statements—these seemingly counter-intuitive or counter-cultural teachings—are where we find the abundant life Jesus promises to those who really follow Him.



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He Said What? Hard Sayings of Jesus

Session 1 **God Won't Forgive This Sin** *Matthew 12:22-32*

Session 2 **You'll Never Die** *John 11:25-27; 20:24-29*

Session 3 **Sell Everything You Own** *Matthew 19:21-30*

Session 4 **Love Your Enemies** *Luke 6:27-36*

Session 5 **Let the Dead Bury Their Dead** *Luke 9:57-62*

Session 6 **Hate Your Family** *Luke 14:25-35*

Session 7 **Exploit Your Friends** *Luke 16:1-12*



How "He Said What? Hard Sayings of Jesus" supports the Discipleship Plan (see page 12):

Building Relationships. The difficult sayings focused on in this study impact our discipleship in areas such as exercising faith and sharing Christ, but the majority of these also speak to how we relate to and interact with others. Jesus challenges us to live radically different from the world in how we treat others, whether they are close family, acquaintances, or even enemies.



SESSION 1

GOD WON'T FORGIVE THIS SIN

▶ **The Point**

God does not forgive those who reject Jesus and never seek His forgiveness.

▶ **The Passage**

Matthew 12:22-32

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

A friend of mine told me about an encounter he had with a woman seated next to him on an airplane. It was a typical conversation until he told her he was a pastor. At that point, she became upset and began talking about a terrible crime one group of people had committed against another. My friend was also shocked by the immoral act, but the woman's insistence that "some sins should not be forgiven" and "those individuals should be condemned to hell forever" genuinely caught him off guard.

Before my friend could respond, the woman addressed her own sins and shortcomings. She declared, "I know I'm not perfect, but God knows my heart. I attend church, try to help others, and I'm a good person. So, I know God will forgive me, and one day I'll go to heaven!"

Is this woman correct? Are there some sins God will not forgive? Is being "religious" or "a good person" all it takes to get to heaven? Jesus' confrontation with a group of Pharisees found in the Gospel of Matthew will help to answer these questions.

▶ **The Setting**

Jesus had been in the public eye long enough to be seen as a threat by the religious leaders of the Jews. In this section of his Gospel, Matthew detailed two occasions on which Jesus and His disciples violated the Pharisees' rules concerning the Sabbath. (See Matt. 12:1-13.) Matthew 12:22-32 shows the escalation of the Pharisees' condemnation of Jesus and His response.

What does the Bible say?

Beelzebul (v. 24)—Probably derived from the Hebrew term “Baal-zebub,” meaning “lord of the flies,” the Jews used Beelzebul to refer to Satan.

Blasphemy (v. 31)—Meaning “to speak evil against” or “to slander,” the term is usually connected to speaking evil against God or His people.

Matthew 12:22-32

22 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”

24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”

25 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

26 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

29 Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 69 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“Growing up, what was an ‘unforgiveable sin’ in your home?”**
Allow time for each person to respond.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 5**, “He Said *What?*” poster, to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the special focus of each session.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The

Bible Meets Life” on page 70 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of seeking God’s forgiveness by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, obtain some index cards, pens, and a small box. Instruct group members to take a card and pen and write on the cards some sins they think would be tough to forgive and then put them in the box. After everyone has participated, take the cards out of the box and read them aloud one at a time. Ask which of these sins seems like it would be toughest to forgive.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 70 of the PSG: **“God does not forgive those who reject Jesus and never seek His forgiveness.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to help us understand the teaching of Jesus in this unit. Thank Him for the forgiveness He offers to all who call upon Him.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

Want to know about biblical culture, people, archaeology, and history? *Biblical Illustrator* has articles that tie to each session in this study at lifeway.com/BI.

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Matthew 12:22-32
- ▷ YOU'LL NEVER DIE
John 11:25-27; 20:24-29
- ▷ SELL EVERYTHING YOU OWN
Matthew 19:16-26
- ▷ LOVE YOUR ENEMIES
Luke 6:27-36
- ▷ LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR DEAD
Luke 9:57-62
- ▷ HATE YOUR FAMILY
Luke 14:25-35
- ▷ EXPLOIT YOUR FRIENDS
Luke 16:9-12

TIP: When helpful, use this “Notes” column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Matthew 12:22-23

22 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. 23 And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?"

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 12:22-23 on page 71 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to give background for what demons are and how they operate.

RECAP: This man had tried everything within his own power to be free from the evil spirit. Those who tried to help him may have accepted the popular notion this man was just a sinner who had no hope. Some days even he may have believed the same thing. But all that changed when people brought the man to Jesus, knowing He was the only one who could help him.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 71 of the PSG: **"Where have you seen the power of Jesus at work around you?"**

RECAP: No matter how many times people reject Jesus, He stands ready and waiting to forgive them. But they must come to Him. Our responsibility is to point people to Jesus. When the demon-possessed man was transformed by Christ, it pointed to the power of God. Likewise, when we lead people to Jesus, their lives are changed, and that change points others to God.

TRANSITION: Not only does the work of Christ point to the power of God, it also points to the presence of God's Spirit.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What convinced you that Jesus is the Son of God?

Matthew 12:22-23 Commentary

[Verse 22] The miraculous signs that Jesus performed pointed to the power of God and confirmed His identity as the Christ. A man who needed to be healed was brought to Jesus. The individual was a **demon-oppressed man** who was **blind** and **mute**. Such a condition was apparently not unusual in the first century, as the Gospels frequently describe Jesus (as well as His disciples) delivering people from demon possession (or demon oppression). (For example, see Matt. 8:28-34; 17:14-18; Mark 1:34,39; Luke 4:33-35.)

Concerning demons themselves, many theologians believe them to be fallen angels who rebelled with Satan against God. "They follow Satan, doing evil and wreaking havoc. They have limited power and like Satan are already defeated (Col. 2:15)."¹ Various terms are used to describe such beings in the New Testament: "demons" (Luke 8:2; 1 Tim. 4:1), "evil spirits" (Luke 7:21; 8:2), "deceitful spirits" (1 Tim. 4:1), "unclean spirits" (Matt. 10:1; Mark 1:23; Luke 4:36), "demonic spirits" (Rev. 16:14), and "unclean demon" (Luke 4:33). Activities ascribed to demons include causing blindness (Matt. 12:22), deafness (Mark 9:25), muteness (Matt. 9:32; 12:22; Mark 9:17,25; Luke 11:14), convulsions (Mark 1:26; 9:18,26), violence (Matt. 8:28), self-destructive behavior (Mark 5:5), and superhuman strength (v. 4).

When Jesus saw the man and his condition, He **healed him**. The text does not indicate exactly how Jesus healed the man in this instance, but earlier in his Gospel, Matthew detailed how Jesus "cast out the spirits with a word" (Matt. 8:16). The confirmation of this healing was that the man could both speak and see.

[Verse 23] The crowds of people who had witnessed the healing were **amazed**. At a previous exorcism performed by Jesus, the crowds had expressed similar amazement and proclaimed, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel" (9:32-33). However, in this instance, when the crowd realized they had seen a miracle, they naturally connected it with the power of God. Thus they correctly reasoned that Jesus must have some special connection to God in order to exercise such power. Their question, "**Can this be the Son of David?**" indicated they thought Jesus might be the Messiah. The term *Son of David* referred to the royal lineage and role of the expected Messiah. He would be the descendant of King David and would establish His rule over Israel and reign as King forever. (See 2 Sam. 7:11-16.) In the genealogy at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, the term *Son of David* is closely connected with the term *Christ*. (See Matt. 1:1.) *Christ* (Anointed One) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Mashiach* (Messiah). *Son of David* is also frequently the term those seeking healing used to address Jesus. (See 9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31.)



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Matthew 12:24-29

24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.²⁶ And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house."

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 12:24-29 on page 72 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to give background on Jesus' reference to Beelzebul.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 72 of the PSG: **"What are some ways our culture responds to the work of Christ?"**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, "God at Work Around Me" on page 73 of the PSG to help them see the importance of being aware of our opportunities to point others to the forgiveness Christ offers.

Select the image that best represents God's work around you. Then answer the question. [PSG has four pictures from which to choose.]

RECAP: The failures of the Pharisees should be a warning for us today. The Pharisees were so prideful they thought Jesus was of Satan. Their self-righteousness blinded them to the truth about Jesus' identity. The Pharisees had blinded themselves to this truth, so they saw no need to repent and turn to Him.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that willful unbelief leaves no room for repentance, and forgiveness is absent when repentance is absent.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What can you tell about the Pharisees' thoughts based on Jesus' response to them?



Matthew 12:24-29 Commentary

[Verse 24] Jesus' casting the demon out of the man pointed to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in Him. Among the crowd were some **Pharisees**, a religious group who had control over the Jewish synagogues and had great influence over the people. They taught the way to God was through strict observance of the Jewish law, both the written (Old Testament) and oral laws. The oral law was composed of hundreds of rabbinical interpretations as to how to obey the written law. The Pharisees held that the oral law was of equal authority with the written law. They saw Jesus as a threat to their position and authority over the people because He rejected their interpretation of the law.

The Pharisees tried to discredit Jesus by saying that His power came from **Beelzebul, the prince of demons**. The term *Beelzebul* is another name for Satan in the New Testament. Its exact meaning is unknown, but it is probably based on the Hebrew word *Baal-zebul*, meaning "lord of the flies." Apparently, this was not the first time the Jewish religious leaders had made such an accusation against Jesus. (See Matt. 10:24-25.)

[Verses 25-26] Jesus responded to the Pharisees with an example of a **kingdom divided against itself**. In order for any group of people to continue to exist as a cohesive group, it must remain united. If Jesus had driven out the demon through the power of **Satan**, then Satan would have been **divided against himself**. Satan would be working at cross-purposes with those allied with him.

[Verse 27] Jesus' next argument involved the followers of the Pharisees (**your sons**). "**If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?**" In effect, the Pharisees' own followers would answer Jesus' question for them—"**Therefore they will be your judges.**" The Pharisees' followers would obviously deny that their power came from Satan and claim that it came from God instead.

[Verse 28] Jesus pointed to the true source of His power—"**But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons.**" The original Greek wording assumes the truth of this proposal, which would translate as: "Since I am driving out demons by the Spirit of God." With the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, **the kingdom of God** was being revealed through His miraculous power.

[Verse 29] Jesus asked a question and then provided the answer. "**How can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods?**" How could anyone rob such a person unless he first overcame the **strong man's** power and bound him? Only then could the robber **plunder his goods** and **plunder his house**. In Jesus' story the powerful man represented Satan. The one who overcame Satan represented Jesus. Since Jesus is God in the flesh (see John 1:14), He has the authority to bind Satan, demonstrating His superiority over Satan by casting out demons and healing those who were sick. Since Jesus had more power than Satan, there could be only one conclusion: He was who He claimed to be, the Son of God, the Christ. Through God's Messiah, the kingdom of God had come near (see Matt. 4:17; 10:7-8) and was overcoming the kingdom of Satan!



STUDY THE BIBLE

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Matthew 12:30-32

³⁰ *“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”* ³¹ *Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.* ³² *And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 12:30-32 on page 74 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to give some background for the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.



LEADER PACK: Refer to **Pack Item 6**, the “The Holy Spirit” handout. Explain the work of the Holy Spirit and just why blasphemy of the Spirit is unforgivable.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 75 of the PSG: **“How were the Pharisees in danger of committing the unforgivable sin?”**

RECAP: Jesus’ warning is very serious, but it has caused people to wonder, “What if I have committed the unpardonable sin?” At one time or another, everyone has rejected the Spirit’s call to repentance, belief in Jesus, and commitment to live for Him—even if momentarily. The very fact that you accept the truth about Jesus Christ and have a desire to turn from sin and follow Him is a sure sign you have not committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit!

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 75 of the PSG: **“What is the hope and challenge for us in these hard words of Jesus?”**

GUIDE: Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“God does not forgive those who reject Jesus and never seek His forgiveness.”**

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What pain have you seen result from willful and persistent unbelief?

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Matthew 12:30-32 Commentary

[Verse 30] Jesus stressed the danger of willful and persistent rejection of God's truth, especially God's revelation through the One who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus made clear that no middle ground exists when making a decision about who He is. **"Whoever is not with me is against me."** Jesus added an illustration to confirm the principle He had stated: **"whoever does not gather with me scatters."** One is either *with* Jesus or *against* Him. One either *gathers* with Jesus or *scatters*. Every person has to decide on his or her response to Jesus.

[Verses 31-32] Jesus warned of the consequences of the mindset behind the Pharisees' charge. In the Old Testament period, **blasphemy** referred to using God's name, *Yahweh*, in an irreverent manner. It was considered a capital offense. (See Lev. 24:14-16.) To ensure they avoided this sin, the Jews would not even say God's name but instead used the title *Adonai* ("LORD"). In the New Testament era, this sin of blasphemy included speaking untruth about Jesus or Jesus' followers, the church.

Jesus told the Pharisees and the crowd that God would forgive all kinds of sins, even the sin of blasphemy. God would even forgive those who were saying evil things about Jesus, **the Son of Man**. However, **"blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."** Jesus emphasized the eternal nature of this sin by saying that God would *never* forgive it, **"either in this age or in the age to come."** The two ages are this present age and the age to come when Jesus returns.

When the **Spirit** does His work of convicting and illuminating an individual about his or her sins and need for a Savior (John 16:8), then that person has a decision to make. That decision is either to agree with the truth which the Spirit reveals or to reject it. In his Gospel, John emphasized that those who refuse to receive Jesus remain guilty and condemned. (See 3:18-19,36.) Though God loves the world and sent His Son "in order that the world might be saved through him" (v. 17), a person can choose to reject the Holy Spirit's revelation of his or her sinful, lost state and God's love in Jesus' sacrifice.

When a person is confronted with the truth about his or her sinfulness and keeps on refusing to repent and trust in Jesus, at some point that individual's heart will become hardened. (See Heb. 4:1-11.) In that hardened condition the individual will never listen to the Holy Spirit and humble himself or herself in repentance. "This is a state of hardness in which one consciously and willfully resists God's saving power and grace. It is a desperate condition that is beyond the situation of forgiveness because one is not able to recognize and repent of sin."²

Jesus knew that at least some of those standing before Him had reached this point. Jesus spoke His stern words to warn the crowd of people of this grave sin. He also spoke His words for us today. Jesus' words should encourage us to challenge those who hear the gospel to repent before it is too late!

1. Joe Cathey, "Demonic Possession" in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* [HIBD], gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. ed. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 411.

2. Jerry M. Henry, "Blasphemy" in HIBD, 224.

