"What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?"

This is certainly a question that comes up on a regular basis. There are many people who seem to be almost tormented by the idea that maybe they have committed this sin against the Holy Spirit: the unpardonable sin.

Several years ago there was a man who called me on the phone here at the building and he was extremely upset because he thought he had committed the unpardonable sin. And so I invited him to come to the building and we met for probably about an hour or an hour and a half. I basically told him that if he was truly worried about having committed this sin that he had not committed this sin. He took that advice, and unfortunately he never started worshipping here, but at least he came out of the deep despair that he was in over his belief that he had committed a sin for which there is no forgiveness.

There may be some here this evening who think that they have committed a sin that was so bad and so heinous that they cannot receive forgiveness of their sin.

This evening, let us look at this particular question. We find that our Lord spoke directly about this question on one occasion in the New Testament, and we have two other parallel accounts where we also have records of his comments. And so I would like to ask you to turn with me to the first and really major account of the discussion of the unpardonable sin. This is found in the book of Matthew, Chapter 12, one of three parallel accounts in the four gospels. But let us look at the most complete account of this. This is Matthew 12, and I'd like to go over this passage, and then let us look at some other scriptures later in the New Testament that refer indirectly back to the unpardonable sin-the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Would you look with me please at Matthew 12:22-29, which is the background leading up to what Jesus said about the sin for which there is no forgiveness. And unless we understand the background, these comments on the unpardonable sin do not make a lot of sense. So please look with me at Matthew 12:22-29:

"Then there was brought to him a demon possessed man who was blind and dumb. And he healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw. And all of the multitudes were amazed and began to say, 'This man cannot be the son of David, can he?' But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'This man cast out demons only by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons!' And knowing their thoughts, he said to them, 'Any kingdom divided against
itself is laid waste. And any city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand? And if I, by Beelzebub, cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. For how can anyone enter the strong man's house, and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

Notice in these verses, just 22-29, that Jesus was dealing with people who were hardened against Him as the Messiah. They were hardened against the Gospel. They would not even consider the possibility that Jesus might be the Son of God. Let us notice the evidence that the Lord presented to them that he was the Messiah.

Notice back in verses 22 and 23 the Lord Jesus performed a great miracle here. He took a man who was born blind and speechless, and he was this way because he was possessed by a demon. The Lord Jesus therefore cast this demon out of the man so that he could see and speak. But notice the reaction of the Pharisees. The Pharisees did not question the fact that a miracle had taken place. That is the interesting thing about this passage. They did not dispute, the way many people today would, that a miracle had occurred. But did that mean they would accept Jesus as the Messiah? Not at all! Notice, even in the face of the fact that a miracle took place, they took another approach, and in verse 24, they just dismissed Jesus Christ. The Pharisees said, "You did that by the power of Satan!" That was their answer to the miracle that had taken place.

Beginning at verse 25, the Lord used outstanding logic here, irrefutable logic against them. Jesus said beginning at verse 25, 'Why would Satan cast out one of his own demons? That doesn't make sense!' Satan in no way would destroy one of his own demons so that this man might be healed. Did that convince the Pharisees? The answer is no. They still said, 'No, you did it by the power of Satan.'

Can you imagine how frustrating that must have been to the Lord Jesus? I mean, here was clear evidence that was presented to a group of people, and yet their minds were closed. They were so hardened against Jesus Christ that they did not agree with his Messiahship even in the face of this clear evidence. That is the background to what the Lord said here about the unpardonable sin.

Notice then please, verses 30-32: "'He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him. But whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or the age to come.'"

What therefore, was the unpardonable sin, which these Pharisees had committed? Well first I would like to go over some suggestions people have made over the years concerning what the unpardonable sin was. Some people say that the unpardonable sin is taking the Lord's name in vain. Well certainly that is a serious sin. It violated one of the
Ten Commandments under the old law, it certainly violates the new covenant -- we are not to take the Lord's name in vain. And yet, beloved, we can get forgiveness if we take the Lord's name in vain. In fact, one of the apostles did that. Remember the apostle Peter? When he gathered around the fire and they accused him being a friend of Jesus, the Bible says that he took God's name in vain. He cursed, he swore, he used profanity, and yet Peter was forgiven. He repented of that sin, and he went on to preach the sermon of the day of Pentecost. So, just taking the Lord's name in vain in and of itself is not the sin against the Holy Spirit. We can get forgiveness of that.

Some people have said that the sin, which is without forgiveness, is the sin of adultery. Certainly adultery is a horrible sin. It is such a severe sin that God allows that sin to dissolve a marriage, and allows the innocent party to remarry. And yet, people can get forgiveness for adultery. In fact, do you remember the woman that the Pharisees brought to Christ? They were going to stone her to death, and yet, remember there at the end that Jesus told her that he would not condemn her if she went on her way and sinned no more. Adultery therefore is a sin that is forgivable.

I have heard a number of people say that the unpardonable sin has to be murder. People have said, well if you kill somebody, you can't bring the person back from the dead, therefore, it has to be the unpardonable sin. Well, I would point out in the first place these Pharisees had not committed murder, and yet they had committed the unpardonable sin. So it's not murder. They had also not taken the Lord's name in vain; they had probably not committed adultery, so none of these things work. But it is definitely not murder because they had not committed murder. If they had committed murder, that is still forgivable. Remember in Acts 2? The apostle Peter charged the people on the day of Pentecost with killing the Son of God. They had committed murder. And when they understood what they had done, they asked Peter what they had to do, and Peter said, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins in the name of Jesus Christ and you will be saved." We can even be forgiven for the sin of murder.

There are many people today who believe that the unpardonable sin is suicide. That is not the unpardonable sin. The reason I know that is these Pharisees had not committed suicide. They had not killed themselves yet; therefore, this is not the unpardonable sin. Somebody might say, well is it possible to get forgiveness even for the sin of suicide? Certainly suicide is a horrible sin. But in 1 Corinthians 6:19, we are told that we are not to damage this body, because this body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Certainly if we kill the body, that's about the worst thing you can do to the temple of the Holy Spirit. And beloved, I in no way want to lower the seriousness of the sin of suicide. It is an awful sin. There will be many, many people in eternal destruction because they killed themselves. And yet these Pharisees had not committed suicide. Is it possible there might be some people forgiven for the sin of suicide? I think that it is. I think there may be some people who are in some kind of mental illness, a severe mental illness. In fact, I know of a lady who took her own life under these circumstances. She was involved in a car accident, had a brain injury, and she ended up taking her life. And I would say that that fine Christian woman was saved. There are cases like that where a person is in a severe state of mental
illness and takes his or her life, and that may be one exception to the general rule of the condemnation of people based on suicide.

There might be another situation that we could speculate about. Let's say somebody takes a bottle of sleeping pills or whatever, and regrets it, but it's too late to stop the onslaught of death. Maybe a person could truly repent between the time that the suicide begins and the time that the death actually takes place. However we want to explain it, we would all have to say that these Pharisees had not killed themselves, but these Pharisees had committed the unpardonable sin.

What is the sin, therefore, for which there is no forgiveness? Notice here that Jesus said that is was 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.' What is blasphemy? To blaspheme means to speak against God. These Pharisees had done that. They had just seen one of the outstanding miracles that Jesus performed, and he performed it through the power of the Holy Spirit. And they looked at that miracle performed by the Holy Spirit and they said, "You did that by the power of Satan." Why did they attribute that miracle to Satan? Because their hearts had been hardened against God and against the Holy Spirit.

In fact, they had become so hardened against the Holy Spirit that they no longer had the ability to repent of their sins. Jesus therefore said that they could not be forgiven. Why could they not be forgiven? Because they didn't want to be forgiven. They were not about to repent. They no longer felt any guilt over rejecting Jesus Christ as Lord, and over rejecting the power of the Holy Spirit. They had reached the point where they could not turn from the path that they had set their lives on of rejecting the power of the Holy Spirit.

Somebody might say, well, we do not have miracles today from the Holy Spirit. Well, yes and no. We do not have outward miracles, let's say, overt miracles. I don't go to the hospital and heal everybody on the first floor. However, we look at the Bible, and the existence of this book is a miracle, is it not? Here is a book composed of 66 parts without contradictions. The writers all work together to produce one common theme. How did they do it? Through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is just as great a miracle as was the healing of this blind and speechless man. And if we reject the Bible we are rejecting the Holy Spirit -- the words that were written down as a result of inspiration by the Holy Spirit. If we continue to reject this book for a long enough period of time, we would reach the point where we would not have the ability anymore to change. And it's not that God won't forgive us, it is that we will not want to be forgiven, and we will have no intention of repenting. Our hearts will be permanently hardened against the gospel.

For a number of years, I had on my desk a piece of petrified wood. I used to use it as a paperweight, and somewhere in our moves it got lost. I couldn't find it anywhere in our house this past week, but there was a little piece of petrified wood. If you think about petrified wood, think about the fact that at one time that was useful. At one time you could cut that tree into two-by-fours or whatever and build a house, or you could carve on it -- you could do all kinds of great things with that wood. And yet, over time that wood was turned into stone. And my piece of petrified wood was basically a rock. And what
good was it then? It wasn't good for anything, except hold down papers on a windy day or something. But in terms of being useful to people, it really wasn't good for anything. Over time, it had become hardened, and there was no way to change petrified wood back into wood that is useful.

Think about a person that has cancer. Just think about all the forms of cancer in their very early stages that can be cured. Just about all forms, either through surgery or radiation, chemotherapy, whatever means at our disposal, if you find it early enough it can be cured. And yet, there is that point of no return. There is that point at which the cancer takes over in the body and the body has no other hope of surviving, and the cancer is eventually going to kill the body. In the same way, these Pharisees had allowed their rejection of Jesus Christ to harden their hearts to the point where they questioned even the power of the Holy Spirit.

May I point out that these Pharisees did not reach that point overnight. No person's heart is hardened over a short period of time. Over a long period of time, as a person rejects the gospel, rejects the Bible as the word of the Holy Spirit, gradually that person's heart is hardened. It becomes easier and easier and easier to say no to the invitation of Jesus Christ, and eventually, that person no longer wants to obey the gospel. And it doesn't matter what evidence you present, it doesn't matter how you may try to persuade that person to become a Christian, it is not going to happen because that person has become hardened. He has allowed himself or herself to be hardened against the power of the Holy Spirit, and beloved, if we are hardened against the Holy Spirit, what hope is there of salvation? If we have rejected the message of the Spirit, that is the Bible, there is no other way of which we can be saved.

The unpardonable sin, therefore, is not unpardonable from God's point of view. He will forgive us of any sin that we repent of. It is unpardonable from man's point of view, because the person no longer has any guilt, no longer has any desire to be forgiven, and no longer cares anymore about God's plan of salvation.

A good of example of this would be the two thieves that were crucified on either side of Jesus Christ. Remember the one thief on the right changed his mind while hanging on the cross? He praised Jesus as the Son of God, and our Lord Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in paradise." That thief was saved. What about on the other side, though? Here was a man who was dying, moment by moment, and yet he continued to rail against God, against Jesus Christ, right up until he died. And why did he do that? Because he had hardened his heart against Jesus Christ and would not accept him under any circumstances.

You may think about somebody who has a bottle of hydrochloric acid. And we could take that bottle of acid and we could pour it into a big bucket of several gallons of water. And I could take an eye dropper, and I could take a drop of that water out of there each day and put one drop in each eye. At first, there would not be a change in my eyesight. But over a period of time, if I kept doing that -- one drop of diluted acid a day in each eye -- over a period of time I would gradually go blind from that. And that is parallel to what
Jesus is saying here. People allow themselves, over time, to get hardened against the gospel of Jesus Christ and the words of the Holy Spirit.

I would like to call your attention to some other scriptures later in the New Testament. If you would look over with me to 1st Timothy 4, there are several places that indirectly refer back to the sin against the Holy Spirit. And these don't make much sense unless we understand what Jesus was saying in Matthew 12. But if you would look at a few passages in 1st Timothy 4, notice what Paul wrote in 1st Timothy 4:1-2. "But the Spirit explicitly says in the latter times; some would fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. By means of the hypocrisy of liars, seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron."

We all know what it is like to burn ourselves badly. That becomes a part of skin that has no feeling to it anymore. Jesus said people let their consciences get that way. They could be "seared as with a branding iron." They won't have any feelings anymore -- there is no conscience left. That is what our Lord was talking about back in Matthew 12. They are searing their conscience, they are no longer able to accept the message of the Holy Spirit. They no longer care about the Holy Spirit.

Could you turn over a few more pages to Hebrews 3:13, which is another indirect reference to the sin against the Holy Ghost. "But encourage one another, day after day, as long as it is still called today, lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Notice the use of the word hardened there. Over a period of time, people get hardened by sin. Would you please notice Hebrews 6:4-6. "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them against to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." He's talking here about people who were converted to Christ, and then they fell away, and there are those cases to where they fall away to such an extent you cannot remember them anymore. They don't want to come back. They're not concerned about the Church anymore, and they commit the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Look please over at the book of 2nd Peter 2, another reference to the sin against the Holy Spirit. Notice 2nd Peter 2, a rather famous passage here, again talking about Christians who have fallen away. "For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.'" Again, a reference to Christians at one time who were faithful Christians, but they fell away, and Peter says there it's worse than it was before they ever obeyed the gospel.
There's one more passage, please, that I'd like to ask you to turn to. And this is 1st John 5. This one has caused a lot of confusion for some people. But would you look please at 1st John 5:16. "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this." Notice there that the apostle John was saying that if a person is caught up in a certain sin, if he is trying to get out of it, than we are to pray for that person. We're to do all that we can to try to bring that person back to the Church and get him out of whatever sin he's caught up in. But notice that John said that if he is in a sin leading to death… what is a sin leading to death? A sin leading to death describes a person who just doesn't care anymore. He says to us, or he says to himself, it doesn't matter what you say, I'm going to keep doing this even if it kills me. Have you heard people say that? I've heard people say that. Even if it kills me, I'm going to keep doing this! If a person therefore is caught up in a sin to that extent, he's going to do it regardless of what we say. John said you can't even pray for that person. We are not to pray for God to help that person -- forgive that person -- if he has that attitude. Because that person has committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, a sin leading to death. He will be condemned for that.

Those are some scriptures then that refer back to what Jesus discussed in Matthew 12.

Are there any applications of this subject today? There are many applications. Think about people who visit our worship services, and continue to reject the gospel time after time after time. It is a very dangerous thing to reject the invitation over a long period of time, because eventually, that person will no longer be concerned with the invitation.

I can think about a man that I personally saw in this auditorium, trembling, several years ago, during the invitation song. He was trembling because of the effect of the gospel upon his heart, and the fact that he had not yet become a Christian, and he knew that he ought to become a Christian. He was literally shaking as he stood there while the rest of us were singing that invitation song. Unfortunately, that man got to the point where he didn't tremble anymore. And eventually he stopped attending on a regular basis. His heart was hardened against the gospel. That is what can happen to people today also if they reject the gospel over a long period of time. They will get to the point where it doesn't bother them anymore to hear the invitation song or to hear the preaching of the gospel.

There may be Christians here who are caught up in a certain sin. And I would ask you this question: if there is some sin that is deeply engraved in your life, do you still feel guilty about it? If we feel guilty about it, good! There is still hope for a person if we feel guilt over it! But if a person no longer feels any guilt, that is when there is a real danger of committing the unpardonable sin.

Sometimes I talk to people that miss the services of the church here. That's a question I ask them, half humorously, but half seriously. Do you feel bad about missing last Sunday, whenever it was? And if they say yes, I say that's great! I hope that you always feel guilty about it! The danger is, when we do not feel guilty about something such as that
anymore. It is important, therefore, that we do not allow our hearts to be hardened against the gospel.

Several years ago, brother Guy N. Woods compiled some statistics that he's published in one of his books of sermons that I have in my office, and I want to read his statistics along the lines of the sin against the Holy Spirit. Brother Woods compiled these pieces of information. He said that 90% of the Lord's church today obeyed the gospel before they were 20 years old. Brother Woods took the general population of the U.S. and the estimated number of people in the Lord's church. Brother Woods said that by the age of 25, the odds of finding the Lord's church and being baptized are 5,000 to 1. He said at the age of 35, the chances of finding the Lord's church and obeying the gospel are 25,000 to 1. At the age of 45, they go to 80,000 to 1. At the age of 50, they go to 150,000 to 1. And at the age of 75, brother Woods said that the odds are really too high to figure in any degree of accuracy.

As we think about our own lives, probably most of us obeyed the gospel when we were younger. In fact, as I think back over the people that I've baptized in the last 17 years, to the best of my memory, the oldest person I ever baptized was 56 years old. Why is it that we do not baptize older people? Because they get set in their ways. Over a period of years they have rejected the gospel for such a long period of time, that after a certain point, they no longer care, are no longer interested, they just want us to go away and leave them alone. And they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit.

It is important for us, therefore, to obey the gospel as we feel the necessity to do so, and not to put it off. It is important for us to watch our own lives, and make sure that we are not overcome by the sin for which there is no forgiveness.

[invitation]