

The Unpardonable Sin

Matthew 12:22-37

(The following text is taken from a sermon preached by Gil Rugh.)

1. Miracles Bring Out Opposition to Christ
2. The Question of the Multitude and the Charge of the Pharisees
3. The Response of Christ: A Divided Kingdom Cannot Stand
4. The Response of Christ: The Kingdom Has Come
5. The Kingdom in Their Midst Is Earthly Not Spiritual
6. The Response of Christ: Power Over Satan Displayed
7. The Seriousness of the Charge of the Pharisees
8. The Unpardonable Sin
9. Parallel Application for Today
10. Hardening of One's Heart Results in No Hope for Salvation
11. A Person's Words Reveal His Character
12. A Person's Words Will Be the Basis of Judgment

There is a turning point in Matthew 12 as it becomes clear that the nation will not have Jesus Christ to be its king. The people of Israel will not accept Him as the Messiah, so they are not open to the establishment of a kingdom for the nation under Christ's leadership. In the first section of Matthew 12, the leadership of the nation irrevocably set themselves to bring about the execution of Jesus Christ. **"But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him"** (Matt 12:14). They have come to the settled conviction that the only course open to them is to bring about the death of Christ. This decision occurs in the context of Christ's performing many mighty miracles. Christ performed a great miracle of healing on the Sabbath Day in violation of their religious traditions, and this was a major issue with the leadership of Israel. They could not accept Him because He would not submit Himself to their leadership.

What kind of Messiah would He be if He came and submitted Himself to their leadership? In effect, they would be leading the nation, and that is just what they wanted to do. They decided that if He would not do it their way and submit to their religious practices and traditions, they would do away with Him. They were not open to the Messiah as revealed in Scripture.

Their rejection of Him is amazing, yet that pattern continues down to today. People are entrenched in their religious convictions and traditions and are open to the Word of God only insofar as they agree with it and it agrees with their religious practices. The same was true in the day of the Pharisees.

1. Miracles Bring Out Opposition to Christ

In Matthew 12:22-50 the issue of a miracle is again brought to the fore. Christ is going to perform a mighty miracle which will be a catalyst to bring out the opposition of the religious leaders. As Christ performs this miracle, the issue will be the source of the power of Jesus Christ. There is no question raised at all about the validity of the miracle. This has been true of all the miracles Christ performed. No one claims that what Christ did was *not* a real miracle.

The issue revolves around *where* the power to do such a miracle comes from. In this passage, the religious leaders will say it comes from the Devil, and Christ will claim it comes from God. In this context, Jesus says one of the most fearful and awesome things that He will say during His entire earthly ministry. He will point out that it is possible to commit a sin for which there can be no forgiveness. In effect, He says that the Pharisees have been guilty of such a sin, and for them there can be no hope of forgiveness forever, not for all eternity. He is saying they have committed the unpardonable sin.

Jesus ties this section together by discussing the real revelation of character seen in what we say, particularly in what we say about Him. Our words reveal our character. Therefore, words will be a revelation of what we are when it comes to judgment.

Matthew records the miracle in verse 22: **“Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw.”** As was often the case in biblical times, demon possession manifested itself with physical symptoms. Demon possession involved a spirit being—a demon who is a fallen angel—taking up residence in the body of a person. That person would manifest the presence of the demon in a variety of ways. In Matthew 12:22, the presence of the demon was manifested by blindness and an inability to speak. The Pharisees recognized this illness to be the result of demon possession because when Christ casts the demon out, the religious leaders credited the power for the miracle to the demons.

A miracle clearly occurs. When the demon is cast out, the man who was blind and speechless was able to see and hear, and Matthew records it all in one verse. All Matthew has to say about the event is that Christ healed him. What a demonstration of power and authority! When Christ cast out the demon, the demon’s influence and power over the man were gone so that the physical afflictions brought about by the demon were also removed.

2. The Question of the Multitude and the Charge of the Pharisees

The impact upon the multitude was clear when this miracle occurred. The multitude was amazed because they could hardly believe what had happened. They were so dumbfounded by the events that they responded, **“This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?”** (v. 23). The Old Testament prophesied that one of David’s descendants would be established as the Messiah of Israel over an eternal kingdom, and **“Son of David”** became a title or name for the Messiah, the One who would sit upon the throne of David forever. The title, **“Son of David,”** was used in Matthew 9:27 by two blind men who asked Jesus to have mercy upon them. Seeing this display of power caused the multitudes to stop and ask, *“Could this be the Son of David?”* The way their question was stated implies that a negative answer was expected *“Surely He could not be the Son of David, the Messiah?”*

In the face of this miracle, why would the Jews think this was *not* the Messiah? It is because they expected the Messiah to come and do other mighty works as an evidence of His position. They did expect Him to heal the people of their afflictions, but they *also* expected Him to be a physical deliverer. They could not understand why Jesus did not come in a display of His glory by destroying the Romans and establishing a Jewish kingdom. Since He did not do that, they were not ready to say that He was the Messiah. But the multitudes were beginning to wonder if He might be the Messiah of Israel.

At this point the religious leaders of Israel intervened. Any time the Word of God and the Spirit of God are working, false religious leaders are intimidated and caused to fear. Unbelieving leaders become defensive because they are jealous for their people, afraid they might be lured away from their leadership into a personal relationship with Christ. There is no fear by leaders who are followers of Jesus Christ. But when the leaders do not believe the Word of God, they oppose you when you start talking to people about salvation by faith in Christ, the power of the Word and the need for being born again.

Since this is the position of these Pharisees, they respond very quickly in Matthew 12:24: **“But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, ‘This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.’”** The Pharisees did not question whether a mighty miracle actually occurred. They did not doubt that the man was delivered from a demon when he was given his sight and speech. The only issue they were concerned about was the source of the power. This power was obviously supernatural, but there were two possibilities for its source: God or Satan.

They concluded that the power came from Beelzebul. In Matthew 9:34, the Pharisees charged the same thing. By saying that the power came from Beelzebul, they were saying that it was the work of Satan, not of God. The background of Beelzebul in the Old Testament was discussed previously in the study of that passage. The Pharisees were trying to discredit the ministry of Jesus Christ in the same way that some religious people do today. One of the key things that unbelieving pastors try to do is to discredit the Word of God. When you ask them why they do not believe what is written in the Bible, they respond that there are mistakes in it and that it was written by mere men. Those are efforts to

undermine God's Word and His truth. The Pharisees were trying to undermine the ministry of Jesus Christ.

3. The Response of Christ: A Divided Kingdom Cannot Stand

Christ's response to these men follows three lines of development in Matthew 12:25-30. His response, in effect, is to show that it is ridiculous for them to say that He casts out demons in the power of Satan.

Jesus introduces the first refutation in verse 25: **“And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, ‘Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand.’”** Jesus is saying that if Satan is at war with himself, he is destroying his own kingdom, and Satan is too smart to do that; a nation tears itself apart when it goes to war against itself. This is seen in some countries of the world today as they war against themselves and destroy the country. The kingdom no longer exists in such situations because the country is in disorder.

He continues in verse 26: **“If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?”** Jesus did not perform only one isolated miracle of casting out a demon. The casting out of demons characterized His public ministry. Jesus is telling them that their argument would indicate that Satan is warring against himself. Satan knows that he would be destroying his own kingdom if he did that. Satan is a brilliant strategist whose kingdom is well organized with all of his forces under his authority. Therefore, their argument makes no sense. If you think about their argument, you realize how foolish it is.

4. The Response of Christ: The Kingdom Has Come

Jesus' second point is one with which we are not quite so familiar. The Pharisees evidently accepted the fact that demons were being cast out by Jews and that God was doing it. Jesus does not go into the matter in any detail, so we do not know much about it. In Matthew 7:22 Jesus referred to those who will say, **“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?”** The Pharisees accepted the fact that God empowered men to cast out demons.

In light of this, Jesus says in Matthew 12:27, **“If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges.”** Christ is saying that their own sons would be their judges. They accepted power from God over demons as evidenced by their sons, but with Christ, they want to say that His power came from Satan. He is telling them that something is inconsistent as He applies their reasoning to His own situation.

Jesus continues His second point of refutation in verse 28: **“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”** In this point Jesus moves into His own situation saying that they acknowledge the possibility of a person casting out demons in the power of God. Therefore, if He is demonstrating this power, there can only be one explanation: the kingdom of God has come. In other words, He is the Messiah and is offering the kingdom to them.

The kingdom of God that Jesus refers to is the earthly kingdom with which the Jews would be familiar. They knew nothing about a spiritual kingdom, which is how some people today interpret this. If Jesus had been talking about a spiritual kingdom in this verse, the Jews would have had no idea what He was talking about. The kingdom of God they were looking for was the kingdom that the Son of David, the Messiah, would establish on the earth. That is the issue at hand with the question of the multitudes. In other words, *Jesus could not be the one who would sit on David's throne and establish a kingdom for Israel, could he?*

5. The Kingdom in Their Midst Is Earthly Not Spiritual

Christ is saying to the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God has come upon them. Jesus has to be talking about the earthly kingdom or they would not be able to identify with it. If He had been talking about a spiritual kingdom, they would have been talking in two different worlds and would no longer be communicating. The kingdom Jesus was referring to would be the Old Testament messianic kingdom, which is another way of Jesus' saying that He must be the Messiah because He is demonstrating God's power in preparation for the establishment of the kingdom.

Some people use a verse in Luke 17 to try to explain Matthew 12:28. The verse does fit, but not in the way it is often explained. Some want to deny that Christ was offering a literal earthly kingdom or that such a kingdom will be established. They use Luke 17:20-21 as a basis for their argument: **“Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, “Look, here it is!” or, “There it is!” For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.’”** It is important to notice that in Luke 17 the Pharisees are the ones who have been addressing the questions to Jesus. After reading these verses, you may respond that you thought Jesus *was* doing signs and miracles. Yes, He was, but the signs that the Pharisees were looking for are those which will be seen in connection with the Second Coming of Christ. That is when He will come in a full display of glory with lightning flashing across the sky as mentioned in Luke 17:24 and in Matthew 24. At that time He will come with a full display of His power as He brings political as well as spiritual deliverance to the nation. But Jesus is saying that is not the situation He is facing at this time. He has come to offer them a kingdom, but not with that kind of display.

Luke 17:21 is often misunderstood on the basis of the translation of the King James Version which says, **“For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”** That translation has caused some to say that Jesus is talking about His kingdom as a spiritual kingdom, implying that the Pharisees do not understand the issue. They say that Jesus was telling them that the kingdom of God was *in* them.

From the context, it is obvious that such an approach has a real problem. According to Luke 17:20, Jesus is addressing the Pharisees. Even if Jesus had been referring to a spiritual kingdom rather than a literal kingdom, there would be a serious problem in His telling those unbelieving Pharisees that the kingdom of God was *in them*. How could the kingdom of God be in them when they did not even believe in Him? Such an approach is ridiculous, but that is the kind of problem you get into when you pull out one phrase of Scripture and ignore its context. If you read verse 20, you would know that He could not be talking about a spiritual kingdom in their hearts in verse 21 because you would realize that Jesus was addressing unbelieving Pharisees who could not have the spiritual kingdom in their hearts.

Luke 17:21 is translated more accurately in the New American Standard Bible, **“For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.”** Some commentators translate the phrase, **“within your grasp,”** or **“in your possession.”** In other words, He is saying that the kingdom of God has been brought to them if they will but receive it and believe it. It is evident in Matthew’s gospel that kingdom is present in the person of the Messiah. You could say the kingdom of heaven is at hand because the Messiah is here. If they will believe in Him, the kingdom will be established. Two things were necessary for the kingdom to be established: the presence of the Messiah and the faith of the nation. The Messiah was present. If the nation would believe, the kingdom could be established. But they would not believe, so the kingdom could not be established.

Another theological problem often arises as a result of an improper approach to the statements of Matthew 12:28. The casting out of demons in this verse is in the context of the presence of the kingdom prophesied to Israel. All kinds of confusion and disorder are brought in if you ignore the progressive unfolding and dispensational revelation of Scripture. There are some that reason that Jesus Christ did mighty miracles when He cast out demons and that we are part of His kingdom. Therefore, we cast out demons today. That is exegetical nonsense. Jesus is talking in this passage about an earthly kingdom. In connection with the offering of an earthly kingdom to the nation, Jesus is casting out demons.

We do not preach the coming of an earthly kingdom at this time. God is not working with the nation Israel as He was at the time He offered the kingdom to Israel when He was present at His first coming. Therefore, I cannot expect the powers that were characteristic of the Messiah when He was present on earth to be operative today in His absence. The casting out of demons at the time of Christ’s presence on earth is an evidence that the kingdom was present in the person of the Messiah. It is important that you see that difference.

6. The Response of Christ: Power Over Satan Displayed

In Matthew 12:29-30 Jesus gives another refutation to the argument that His casting out demons is done in the power of Satan. **“Or 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”** (v. 29). By casting out demons, Christ is demonstrating His power over Satan because He is plundering Satan’s household or domain. Satan is the god of this world. Christ is

plundering it by breaking the power of the demons. Thereby He is demonstrating that the kingdom of God is present.

This passage does not say that Christ has bound the strong man. Some interpret this verse to be saying that Satan is bound. Christ is demonstrating His power to bind Satan, and if Israel had believed in Christ on that occasion, Satan would have been bound and the kingdom would have been established because Scripture says that Satan will be bound during the existence of the earthly kingdom.

Revelation 19 unfolds the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when He will come in the full display of His glory. At that time it will not be necessary to tell someone that the Messiah is coming. Jesus said in Matthew 24:27 that His coming will be like the lightning flashing across the sky. He will be coming in the full display of His glory so that everyone will know He is here.

Revelation 20 describes what will happen when Christ comes to earth to judge His enemies. **“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed”** (vs. 1-3). When Christ casts out demons in Matthew 12, He is demonstrating His power to bind Satan because He can plunder his household and do with his demons as He pleases. That demonstrates His power to bind Satan. Jesus is telling the nation that if they will believe in Him, the kingdom of heaven has come. He will bind Satan and establish the kingdom. They would not believe in Him, so Satan was not bound and he still roams to and fro on the face of the earth.

Jesus is saying in Matthew 12 that there are two kingdoms in opposition to each other: the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. Christ is plundering the kingdom of Satan demonstrating His power over him. **“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters”** (v. 30). Jesus draws attention to the fact that there is no middle ground. The two kingdoms are opposing one another, and you are either aligned with Christ or you are opposed to Him. The simplicity of the Word is beautiful. Some people say the Bible is hard to understand and confusing. There are some things that are challenging to our minds, which take more study than other things. But much of the Bible is just plainly simple. It is the simple things that people miss.

The question is often raised about the condition of all of the neutral people in the world. What does the Bible say about them? According to this verse, there are no neutral people. The line is so clearly drawn, yet we sometimes try to say there are lots of people who are in the middle. You may have been taught that, but that is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches very simply that if a person has not aligned himself with Christ, he is opposed to Christ. One who has not believed that he is a sinner, guilty before God, and placed his faith in Christ as the One who died to pay the penalty for his sins is opposed to Christ. *“Oh, you’re judging”* you say. No, I am not judging. I am reading Matthew 12:30. Some people accuse me of taking the prerogative of setting myself up as a judge of other people. I am not setting myself up as a judge, I am simply telling you what the Bible says. Scripture teaches that those who are with Christ are those who have believed in Him as the Savior who died for them. Anyone who has not believed in Christ is against Christ.

The last phrase of verse 30 refers to the gathering of the flock: **“And he who does not gather with Me scatters.”** Earlier in Matthew Jesus saw the people of the nation scattered as sheep without a shepherd. Those who are not joined with Christ in drawing people to Him are involved in drawing them away from Him and scattering them.

7. The Seriousness of the Charge of the Pharisees

Beginning in Matthew 12:31 Jesus wants to show how serious the charge of the Pharisees really is. They have said that the source of Christ’s power is Satan. That has identified them as those who are opposed to Christ as the servant of God.

Jesus speaks in these verses of what we frequently refer to as the unpardonable sin: **“Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.”** Look at the last phrase first: **“either in this age or in the**

age to come.” The Jews divided time into two periods: this age and the coming age, referring to the kingdom. Jesus is saying that for such a man there will be no forgiveness in this period of time or in the coming period of time known as the kingdom. In other words, Jesus says there is never any hope for forgiveness for one who has committed this sin.

During my years of ministry I have had a number of people come to me burdened down with guilt, despair and depression because they were sure they had committed the unpardonable sin. Let me make two initial statements about this sin. First, if you have any concern about it at all, that is an indication that you have not committed it. Secondly, I understand that this sin could only be committed as it is recorded here in the days during which Christ was on the earth.

It is also important to look at more of the details related to this sin. Notice that in this passage Jesus makes a statement that **“any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people....”** Do not lose sight of the emphasis on the greatness of God’s forgiveness. The grace of God is sufficient to cleanse and forgive you of your sin no matter what your sin has been.

After saying that any sin and blasphemy can be forgiven, Jesus then lists an exception in verse 31: **“But blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.”** Why would He say that you could be forgiven for blasphemy against the Son of Man, but you could not be forgiven for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? If there is a triune God consisting of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, why would blasphemy against one member of the Trinity be forgiven while blasphemy against another would not? Is the Holy Spirit more important than Christ? Obviously not. The three persons of the Trinity are equal. Then why could forgiveness of blasphemy against the Father and Son be forgiven while the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could not?

This statement must be taken in the context in which it was given. The Son of Man is a messianic title for Christ while He is on earth offering the kingdom. That title emphasizes His identification with humanity. Philippians 2 indicates that while He was a man on earth, He emptied Himself or set aside the brilliant display of His glory and the prerogatives that were His as deity. While He was a man walking on this earth, it was possible for people not to recognize Him for who He was. He could have been mistaken for a mere man. Those who misunderstood Christ in this way while He was on earth could be forgiven for blaspheming Him during that time. As the Holy Spirit displayed Himself through Christ in doing these mighty miracles, such as casting out demons and healing the sick, there was no excuse of any kind for misunderstanding who He was. So while some people could have misunderstood who Christ was as He was present on earth in His physical body, there was no excuse for mistaking that it was God working when He cast out demons, caused blind men to see and gave speechless men the ability to speak by the power of the Spirit of God.

8. The Unpardonable Sin

The Pharisees said that Christ was doing these miracles by the power of the Devil. This full, clear display of the Holy Spirit’s ministry was attributed to the Devil. In effect, they were calling the Holy Spirit the Devil. For those who attributed Christ’s ministry to the Devil in this way, there was no hope for their forgiveness. There could be no clearer revelation given to men, yet they refused it. When they called the Holy Spirit the Devil, they committed an unforgivable sin.

Matthew and Mark include the account of the unpardonable sin, but Luke and John do not record it. The explanation of this sin given in Mark 3:28-30 gives further insight into what Jesus was saying: **“Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”**—because they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’” This is why I believe this sin could only be committed when Christ was present on the earth with the Holy Spirit doing His mighty supernatural works through Christ. There was no excuse for misunderstanding or misinterpreting what was going on.

These people saw the full display of the power of the Spirit of God through the Person of the Son of God. Yet they were saying that His work was done by a demon. There could be no greater revelation than they had experienced, yet they attributed this great revelation of the Spirit of God to the Devil. By their calling the Holy Spirit of God the Devil, they were blaspheming the Holy Spirit, and there could never be forgiveness for this sin. They had sinned against the greatest light, and for that sin there was great condemnation. Therefore, I believe that the unpardonable sin cannot be committed today. It was unique to the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry. I believe that is why the unpardonable sin is never

mentioned again in Scripture.

9. Parallel Application for Today

There is a parallel in application of which you need to be aware. This parallel involves a sin that Scripture indicates still is present even today. The sin is referred to in Hebrews 6. In Hebrews, the writer is referring to Jews who have been exposed to the revelation of God and His truth. Some have even professed faith in Christ, but have stopped short of actually believing. A word of warning is given to them in 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 again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”**

These verses describe all the privileges that those Jews had. They did not have salvation experiences, but they were enlightened as the truth of God was given to them. They **“have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.”** They have been part of the Messiah’s ministry on earth for a time as the Holy Spirit has dealt with the nation through the years. Those who have been exposed to the full revelation of God and decide they will not have Christ as their Savior are turning back from their only hope of salvation. They are identifying themselves with those who say that it was right to crucify Christ and that He deserved it because He claimed to be God, a fact which they do not believe. For such people there is no hope for forgiveness and cleansing.

The same idea is addressed in Hebrews 10. **“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”** (vs. 26). The willful sinning is continuing to refuse to believe in Christ even though being repeatedly exposed to the truth. The writer continues in verses 28 and 29: **“Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?”** Those who are repeatedly exposed to the truth of God while continually rejecting Christ are trampling underfoot the Son of God and are insulting the Spirit of grace. That is the closest one can come to what we would call blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Christ could address the Pharisees in Matthew 12 in this way because He knew their hearts and recognized their condition. He had identified their sin as unforgivable. As we apply these principles today, this is the danger we confront. Those who are repeatedly exposed to the truth of the gospel of Christ are in danger by their repeated refusal of coming to a hardened condition where they can no longer ever repent.

Hebrews 12:15 says, **“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.”** Coming short of the grace of God is to stop short of believing in Christ. The warning continues in verses 16 and 17: **“(See to it) that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.”** Notice in these verses that Esau desired to inherit the blessing, but he did not actually repent. Repentance would involve an acknowledgment of wrong and turning from it. That was not the case with Esau. The only thing he changed his mind about was the fact that now he wanted to inherit the blessing which he had already given away. But there was no repentance in his attitude.

10. Hardening of One’s Heart Results in No Hope for Salvation

I believe that it is possible for people to come to that point today where they cross a line after repeated exposure to the truth of the gospel. They can become so hardened through their rejection that there is no hope for their salvation. I believe that is why the Spirit of God gives a warning and an exhortation in Hebrews 3:7,8: **“Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness.’”** When you experience the ministry of the Spirit of God convicting you of your sin and you reject the truth of God, you never know if you may be hardening your heart for the last time. You may never be given another chance for repentance. I make that statement being a committed Calvinist. You must understand that

from the human perspective it is possible through repeated exposure to the gospel of Christ for a person to harden his heart for the final time. Such a person will never again, in light of what Hebrews says, have the opportunity to repent and believe the gospel.

This shows the seriousness of our responsibility in presenting the gospel in our daily contacts, in our jobs, and to our families. Every time I present the gospel, I should have a burning desire that those to whom I present it should not harden their hearts. Some people take the approach that they will simply present the gospel and whatever happens will happen. But that is not what the Holy Spirit says. When you present the gospel, it ought to be with a passion that people will believe it, because the Spirit of God may not necessarily offer them another opportunity. They are hearing His voice in that presentation of truth, and it is a serious matter to say no to that. As we present the gospel to unbelievers, our presentation should be saturated with prayer that God will use it to draw the unbelievers to Himself.

Some people have heard the gospel and turned their hearts against it for 30 years before, by the grace of God, they have been saved. It is not possible for me to know when a person has crossed that line, but there is the danger of crossing it. If you are reading this as an unbeliever, you do not know if your rejection now will be the final hardening of your heart to the ministry of the Spirit of God. That is just how serious this is.

This application is somewhat different than Jesus addressed directly in the unpardonable sin in Matthew 12, but there is an obvious parallel to it. My concern is for people who hear the gospel week after week and become so conditioned to hardening their hearts to it that there is no hope for them to change their minds. I do not know when a person comes to that point. Only the Spirit of God knows that, and that is in His hands.

11. A Person's Words Reveal His Character

Jesus concludes this section of Matthew 12 by showing the significance of a person's words. What a person says reveals something about him. First, He draws attention to Himself in verse 33: **"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit."** Jesus says that the Pharisees have to make a decision. They cannot say that the works He is doing are good, but He is a rotten person. Either they have to acknowledge that the works He is doing are good and, therefore, He is a godly man, or they must say that the works He does are rotten and He is a rotten person.

The Pharisees had to acknowledge the goodness of what He was doing. The problem was that they wanted to say He was a demon-controlled man. Jesus says it is impossible to do that. The tree is known by its fruit.

Jesus then turns the statement around and tells the Pharisees that the same is true for them. They are known by what they say. What they have said about Him in blaspheming the spirit of God reveals their true character. He charges them in verse 34, **"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart."** This charge sounds like John the Baptist back in Matthew 3. Notice that their character has not changed a bit even though they have been exposed repeatedly to the ministry of John the Baptist and to the ministry of the Son of God Himself. Jesus is telling them that it would be impossible for them to speak the truth concerning Him because they are evil at heart.

The last phrase of verse 34 is the key to everything Jesus says in this section. The Pharisees are revealing their character in what they are saying about Christ because their words are a revelation of the condition of their hearts. This helps us to appreciate what Paul said in Romans 10:10 regarding a man believing in his heart and confessing with the mouth, because the mouth expresses what is in the heart. These Pharisees have said certain things about Christ and His ministry. That reveals the condition of their hearts.

Jesus continues the same emphasis in verse 35: **"The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil."** You reveal your character by what you say. By his words, you can know where a person is in his relationship to Jesus Christ. Some people always object to such an approach saying that we are not to judge the hearts of other people. It is true, we cannot judge the heart of another person, but the words reveal the heart. Our words come from the treasure of our hearts and they reveal who we are.

What a person says about Jesus Christ reveals the condition of his heart. If someone expresses in his words that he thinks he can get to heaven on the basis of his good works, his baptism or his church membership, then his words indicate that he is not a believer. Such a person is not going to heaven. Many people get indignant if you say that, because they feel we are not to judge. But the person has just expressed with his words his relationship with Christ. Therefore, we can make the judgment on the basis of his words.

12. A Person's Words Will Be the Basis of Judgment

Matthew 12:36-37 indicates that our words will be the basis of judgment: **“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”**

By now you may be confused. James says we are justified by works. Paul says we are justified by faith. Now Jesus says we are justified by our words. Does that mean there are three different ways to get justified? Not if you read the context. Jesus has just said that your mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart, so those who have been transformed by the grace of God and have been given a new heart will reveal that in what they say. Their words are a revelation of the condition of their hearts. When it comes to judgment, God can judge us on the basis of what we have said concerning Jesus Christ because that reveals the condition of our hearts.

Sometimes we look for excuses and say that we do not think that what the person said is what he believes. Sometimes people are covering up what they really believe. But there is another way to find out what you are really like.

While I was in college, a professor shared something which has stuck with me through the years. He said that what you are when you are alone is what you are. While at church on Sunday, everybody says nice things. We sometimes try to cover up what is in our hearts. We may meet someone we cannot stand, but since we cannot avoid them, we shake hands and tell them it is good to see them. We are really lying, because in our hearts we wish we had never seen them, but we cover that up. However, when we are alone, we reveal what we are really like.

We sometimes reveal what we are like in our private conversation with other individuals. We may not tell a group of people how we really feel about someone, but if we are talking to someone privately, we may begin to tear down another person. In so doing, we reveal our heart's condition.

You also reveal your heart's condition in your relationship with your family. You may come to church and try to impress others by helping your wife get her coat on. You may help her get into the car. You may say nice things to her and to the children. But what are you like when you are home with them alone? How do you talk to your husband or wife then? How do you relate to your children when you are home with them alone? That is a revelation of your character.

Another place you reveal your character is at work. When the pressure is on you at work, what are you like when you get angry? That reveals what you are really like on the inside.

Sometimes we say things we wish we had not said, then we say we did not mean what we said. But that is not true. What we said is really what we meant. We just got into a situation where we boiled a little bit too much and could not hold it in any longer. In our expression of anger, we revealed our character in our words.

This is a good test for us and will enable us to examine ourselves. What is your relationship like with Jesus Christ? Your words are a revelation of your character. If you are a good tree, you will have good fruit. If you have rotten fruit spewing out, you had better examine your relationship with God. He says that rotten fruit comes from a rotten heart, one that has not been changed by His grace. Be careful that you are not self-deceived.

The Pharisees have revealed themselves so that there is no question regarding their character. They were confronted by the Son of God, yet they found reasons not to believe in Him.

There is a danger today for some to hear that the only hope of salvation is by faith in the Son of God and yet to reject

the wooing of the Spirit of God as He draws them to Christ. If they continue to harden their hearts and are unreceptive to Him, it is possible for them to resist His grace to the point where repentance is no longer possible.

What is your relationship with Christ? You have been exposed to the truth again in this study. Are you really a believer in Christ? Examine yourself. What are you like when you are alone? What do you think about? What do you talk about when you are with others? How do you respond when the pressure is on? What really bubbles out of your heart?

If you hear the voice of the Spirit of God convicting you of your sinfulness and of your need of a Savior, do not put it off because in grace He invites you today.