

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Miracles of Jesus	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	13	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Matthew 12:22-32; Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31	
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### THE UNPARDONABLE SIN: A MOST SOLEMN WARNING (Part I)

All three synoptic gospels include this account. Matthew specifically tells us that Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. A delegation of Pharisees from Jerusalem accused Jesus of doing these miracles through the agency of Satan. They were forced to admit the reality of the miracles that Jesus did, but attributed this to a Satanic source. This was the context for Jesus issuing this most solemn warning, that in making this accusation the Pharisees were guilty of committing an eternal sin that could not be forgiven. Why? How does this fit in with what the Bible says about the vastness of God's mercy? Berkouwer writes: "Apart from what this sin *is*, do we ever meet a definite limit beyond which it is *not forgiven*? Is that limit obvious in the case of this one sin *alone*? But why, then, should this single sin, *qua talis*, be outside the confines of redeeming grace? Where must we draw the line between those other sins that evoke God's wrath, but still are pardoned, and *this sin*? What must we say about the word of John: *the blood of Jesus . . . cleanses us from all sin* (1 John 1:7)? Should we cordon off the limits of that statement? How should we read the reference in Isaiah: *Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool* (1:18)? The hallmark of divine forgiveness would seem to be its unrestricted scope; but how then can we speak of a *limit*? May we isolate this single sin? We read in the Scripture that God is *good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on him* (Ps. 86:5). What sense does it make to curb his steadfast love which *extends to the heavens* and his faithfulness which reaches *to the clouds* (Ps. 36:6)? The saints of the Old Testament knew that although their transgressions prevailed against them, yet God forgave (Ps. 65:3). *For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever with me* (Ps. 38:17); *if thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee* (Ps. 130:3-4). *Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea* (Micah 7:19). Is not *this* the glory of the Gospel, that there is forgiveness with God no matter what our guilt?"<sup>1</sup>

- I. **THE NATURE OF THIS PARTICULAR SIN.** J.C. Ryle notes that, "the doctrine here laid down is to be found in other places of Scripture beside this. I allude of course to the well-known passages, Heb. vi. 4-6; Heb. x. 26, and 1 John v. 17. In all these places there seems a reference to a sin which is not forgiven. What then is the unpardonable sin? It must be frankly confessed that its precise nature is nowhere defined in holy Scripture. The most probable view is, that it is a combination of clear intellectual knowledge of the Gospel, with deliberate rejection of it, and willful choice of sin. It is a union of light in the head, and hatred in the heart. Such was the case of Judas Iscariot. We must not flatter ourselves that none have walked in his steps. In the absence of any definition in Scripture, we shall probably not get much nearer to the mark than this. Yet even this view must be carefully handled. The limits which knowledge combined with unbelief must pass, in order to become the unpardonable sin, are graciously withheld from us. It is mercifully ordered of God, that man can never decide positively of any brother, that he has committed a sin which cannot be forgiven. But although it is difficult to define what the unpardonable sin is, it is

far less difficult to point out what it is not.”<sup>2</sup> What we do know is that this sin involves blasphemy.

- II. **WHAT IS BLASPHEMY?** Our English word in an anglicized form of the Greek word *blasphēmia*, which means to speak evil of God. It is, as R. C. Sproul has pointed out, a verbal sin, one that is committed with the mouth or pen.<sup>3</sup> An older work explains: “There can be no blasphemy, therefore, where there is not an impious purpose to derogate from the Divine Majesty, and to alienate the minds of others from the love and reverence of God. The blasphemer is no other than the calumniator of Almighty God. To constitute a crime, it is also necessary that this species of calumny be intentional. He must be one, therefore, who by his impious talk endeavors to inspire others with the same irreverence toward the Deity, or, perhaps, abhorrence of him, which he indulges in himself. And though, for the horror of human nature, it is to be hoped that very few arrive at this enormous guilt, it ought not to be dissembled that the habitual profanation of the name and attributes of God by common swearing is but too manifest an approach toward it. There is not an entire coincidence: the latter of these vices may be considered as resulting solely from the defect of what is good in principle and disposition, the former from the acquisition of what is evil in the extreme; but there is a close connection between them, and an insensible gradation from the one to the other. To accustom one’s self to treat the Sovereign of the universe with irreverent familiarity is the first step, malignly to arraign his attributes and revile his providence is the last.”<sup>4</sup>
- III. **WHO IS BEELZEBUB.** In the OT, Baalzebub, “lord of flies” was a Philistine idol whose temple was located at Ekron. The Philistines thought that flies were gifted with the power of prophecy, since they appeared and vanished, depending on the weather conditions. Seeing the hand of a god behind this activity, the Philistines ascribed special prophetic power to the “lord of flies” (cf. 2 Kings 1:2, 3, and 6). In the NT, the name is changed to Beelzebul in the Greek (but translated Beelzebub in the major English versions; cf. Mt. 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18, and 19) and therefore means “lord of the house” or “lord of the dwelling.” Sometimes it is interpreted to mean “god of dung.” Beelzebul is one of the most important devils, specifically the prince of the evil spirits who lived in those possessed by evil spirits. This indwelling makes the name “lord of the dwelling” readily understandable and probably accounts for the change from “-zebub” into “-zebul.” Jesus was called “Beelzebul” to equate him with the prince of the devils. In Mt. 10:25 there may be a play upon words. Jesus says that *the* Lord of the house (i.e., Jesus Himself) is called “Beelzebul” (“lord of the dwelling”) with the intent of disqualifying Him and of characterizing Him as a servant of the devil. How much more, says Jesus to His disciples, will this name be given to the members of His house to portray them as a pack of devils!<sup>5</sup>
- IV. **WHY THIS SIN IS SO HORRIBLE.** Warfield wisely observed, “The judgment of unbelief on Jesus, we have found occasion to remark, is inevitably that He was mad. As inevitably the judgment of active disbelief on Him must be that He was wicked. Not only in His own day but throughout all time the alternatives constantly stare us in the face – *aut Deus aut non sanus; aut Deus aut non bonus*. If in our own time the latter alternative has retired somewhat into the background, and that which imposes itself upon the consciousness of contemporary criticism is that between a Divine Jesus and an “ecstatic” Jesus, as it is euphemistically called – a paranoiac Jesus, as it really would amount to – that is doubtless in part because, in the languid skeptical temper of our times, and their preoccupation with abstract questions of pure history, little occasion or place has been left for the play of the more violent emotions about our historical findings. At bottom, however, disbelief, when it works itself out, must

not merely neglect Jesus but condemn Him; and the ravings of a Nietzsche may serve to keep us in mind that the ultimate alternative is always that of the Pharisees and Scribes. Either Jesus has come forth from God, or we can scarcely avoid declaring Him possessed of the Evil One. He makes or mars the world.”<sup>6</sup>

(to be continued)

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies In Dogmatics: Sin* (Eerdmans, 1971), p. 325.
  - <sup>2</sup>J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts On The Gospels I* (rpt. Baker, 1977), p. 58.
  - <sup>3</sup>R. C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary Series: Mark* (<http://www.ligonier.org/store/mark-hardcover/>).
  - <sup>4</sup>J. McClintock and J. Strong, *Encyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature I* (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 330.
  - <sup>5</sup>J. G. Aalders, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity I* (The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1964), p. 620.
  - <sup>6</sup>*The Words of Benjamin B. Warfield III* (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 93.