

The Unforgiven Sin

What follows was planned to be a one or two page summary of a topic. Instead it blossomed into a much longer lesson.

There was a question last week concerning the unforgivable sin of Matthew 12. This is an important question. It deserves a quick answer. Jesus is talking.

Matthew 12:30 He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

Matthew 12:31 “Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.

Matthew 12:32 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.

This is a difficult passage to interpret. There are several suggested interpretations of this passage. For a more in-depth treatment of this passage, see Robby Dean’s lesson 76 on Matthew¹. What is presented here is an abbreviated analysis.

¹ <https://deanbibleministries.org/new-testament-menuitem/matthew-menuitem/message/76-the-unforgivable-sin-b/read>

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Here are four different interpretations listed by Robby Dean.

1. **Rejection of Jesus as Savior.** It is obvious that someone who does not believe in Jesus as Savior and dies goes to the Lake of Fire. But if rejection of Jesus is counted as a “sin” how does that mesh with the fact that Jesus died for all sins? If the sin of unbelief is in fact a sin, then there are many sins for which Jesus did not die. That is a problem. Additionally, if we say that there are three issues in the barrier between man and God (sin, righteousness and eternal life), and sin was taken care of at the cross, that leaves only God’s righteousness and God’s life that remain. People do not go to the Lake of Fire because of sin.
2. **Christian commits a sin that causes loss of salvation.** This violates the doctrine of eternal security. But some, like the Catholic Church and others, believe that salvation can be lost. Free Grace people believe in the doctrine of eternal security. So, for Free Grace people, this is a problem.
3. **This is a unique sin.** Per Robby Dean, “Others believe that this is not a sin that we can commit today, but that this is a sin unique and distinct to this period of time—it is uniquely a sin in relationship to the messianic claims of Jesus during the first advent, and therefore could not be committed by any other generation.²”
4. **Sin of Israel.** This interpretation relates the sin to the leaders of the nation Israel rejecting the Messiah and leading to national judgment in time, the 70 AD judgment.

The interpretation must be placed in proper theological context. It must also be interpreted dispensationally.

The first rule of hermeneutics is context, context, context.

² <https://deanbibleministries.org/new-testament-menuitem/matthew-menuitem/message/76-the-unforgivable-sin-b/read>

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Matthew chapter 12 is found in the gospels. It is situated in the dispensation of the Law/Age of the Jews. There is no Church in this passage. The Church is still a mystery.

As far as Jesus' ministry was concerned, he was at a point where the Pharisees rejected the signs provided by the Holy Spirit that proved Jesus was the Messiah and were actively plotting to kill Him.

There is an important quote from Isaiah that precedes the verses we are studying. It provides some context for what follows.

Matthew 12:18 “BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL-PLEASSED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.

Matthew 12:19 “HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.

Matthew 12:20 “A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY.

Matthew 12:21 “AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE.”

This quote is from Isaiah 42:1-4. This is one of the four “Servant Songs” in Isaiah. This first song identifies the Messiah. It announces the arrival of the “chosen one.” It says that God put the Spirit, i.e. the Holy Spirit upon Him.

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Jesus is identified as the servant who God “chose.” Biblehub has an interesting comment on this Hebrew word used in Isaiah:

“Derived from the root denoting choice or selection, בָּחַר consistently refers to persons or groups whom God Himself has singled out for a special purpose. The word therefore carries a dual sense: privilege conferred by divine favor and responsibility to embody God’s redemptive intention. Throughout its occurrences, בָּחַר underscores the unbreakable link between God’s sovereign election and the outworking of His covenant promises.³”

“Isaiah employs בָּחַר more than any other book, extending its significance beyond the historical nation to the Servant and eschatological remnant.⁴”

In Jesus’ ministry, he accomplished His work in the power of the Holy Spirit. One of the ministries of God the Holy Spirit is to reveal God to man. In Christ’s ministry, the miracle healings were signs, credentials of the Messiah. Later on in Matthew, Jesus will heal a man who is both blind and mute. No ordinary man can heal a man born blind. Even given the necessary eyes and neural connection to the brain, there must be training that tells the brain what the eye sees. Today’s technology has not been able to take someone who was born blind and give them instant eyesight. That was a credential reserved for the Messiah.

Some people in the crowd observing Jesus recognized the sign. But the Pharisees did not. Or perhaps they recognized the sign but discounted from their hatred of Jesus.

3 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/972.htm>

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Matthew 12:22 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.

Matthew 12:23 All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, “This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?”

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 people question whether this can be the “Son of David.” They were ready to identify Jesus as the promised “seed of David” in 2 Samuel. But the Pharisees ascribe the miracles to demonic forces. The Pharisees had the power to cut off people from temple worship. Their anti-Messiah policies could be imposed on the people. They could force the nation to become anti-Jesus. Today, even, rulers have ways of influencing citizens to be hateful against others.

We must also understand that there is forgiveness and judgment in time as well as eternity. There is a sin unto death in time for a Christian. The believer does not lose eternal salvation, only temporal life. In some cases, even after a person acknowledges sin and is back in fellowship, there can be suffering that lingers. David saw this in his life after he acknowledged his sins and was back in fellowship with God. This is also true of nations. In particular there are the five cycles of discipline found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. As I was reading Deuteronomy 28 on Biblehub.com, I noticed that the pronouns were in the singular. But the cursings were obviously applied to the nation because of the multitude of individuals who had abandoned (often said as “forsaken”) God. The

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judgments in time are particularly severe for those who attack God's character.

Numbers 15:30 But the person who does *anything defiantly*, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people.

Numbers 15:31 Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *will be on him.*”

If the guilt of a person remains on him in time, then the expectation is that person would endure judgment in time from God.

There are four words for blasphemy in Hebrew. It is beyond the scope of this lesson to delve into each one of them. But, it is not just taking the Lord's name in vain. It is more than that. Per Robby Dean it can mean, “to despise, to treat disrespectfully, blaspheme, provoke, reject, revile, spurn⁵” Hostility toward God. We saw that in the book of Judges.

Listen to the introduction to the 5th cycle of discipline paragraph in Leviticus:

Leviticus 26:27 ‘Yet if in spite of this (the four previous cycles of discipline) you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me,

5 <https://deanbibleministries.org/dbmfiles/slides/2013-Matthew-076b.pdf>

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Leviticus 26:28 then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins.

In Jesus' time, the Pharisees were ascribing demonism to Jesus' miracles which were accomplished by the Holy Spirit and were clear signs that the long anticipated Messiah had arrived.

So here is Jesus, operating under the power of the Holy Spirit, healing people in such a way that only the Messiah could do those things. People recognize the signs. But, the Pharisees who rule the people accuse the actions of the Holy Spirit to be demon energized.

Summary Points:

1. The unforgivable sin must be placed in the context of Jesus' ministry during the dispensation of the Law.
2. The interpretation of this sin cannot violate established doctrine. All sins were judged at the cross. People do not go to the Lake of Fire to be judged for their sins. They are there because they lack God's righteousness and God's eternal life.
3. People do not lose their salvation because of any sin they commit. That would violate the doctrine of eternal security. I teach this doctrine at least once a year because it is so important for a believer's orientation. We do not serve out of fear of losing salvation. We serve out of gratitude and for blessing. If we understand grace, we walk by faith.
4. The context is Jesus' ministry to the nation of Judah. The audience is both the "crowd" of people and the Pharisees who ruled the people. The people understand that Jesus presented authentic credentials of the Messiah. But the Pharisees did not want to accept

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those credentials so ascribe them to demonic forces. This is extreme hostility toward God, in particular the Holy Spirit who accomplished the credentials on behalf of Jesus.

5. So the answer to the question of the unforgivable sin requires knowledge of doctrines, eternal security and the barrier and the gospel.
6. As a result of the actions of the Pharisees, the nation Israel was to suffer the 5th cycle of discipline, again. This occurred in 70 AD.

Summary from Robby Dean:

“Jesus is announcing to Israel the final straw related to their rejection of Him as Messiah. This blasphemy is related specifically to a historical event and is unique to the life of Jesus. This judgment is a national judgment, not a personal judgment, and was fulfilled in AD 70.⁶”

6 <https://deanbibleministries.org/dbmfiles/slides/2013-Matthew-076b.pdf>