

Have You Committed the Unpardonable Sin?

Have you committed the unpardonable sin? That is, could you have said something or done something at some unguarded moment that has cut you off from God's love and made it impossible for you to go to heaven when you die? Believe it or not, that's something I worried about as a youngster.

I wasn't raised in a Bible-believing church. Nor did I become a Christian at an early age, like some of you. But I did read the Bible on my own, and because I didn't have anyone to explain it to me or the Holy Spirit living inside me to help me understand it, sometimes I came away from my Bible reading more confused and worried than when I began. I worried, "Could I do something or say something, if I'm not careful, that might cut me off from God's love and make it impossible for me to be forgiven and go to heaven when I die?"

Then during my second year of college, I decided that I wanted to follow Jesus the rest of my life. But rather than making my worries go away, they got worse, because now that I had experienced God's love firsthand, I knew what I'd be missing if I lost it. So I worried, "Could I say or do something that would cause me to lose my salvation and go to hell?" Some of you will think, "That's silly! A Christian shouldn't worry that!" I agree. You're right! But the fact is, many of us do—and not just new Christians. I've talked to people who've been Christians for years, but still in the back of their minds is this nagging worry: "Could I say or do something so awful in God's sight that I might lose my salvation and wind up in hell as a result?"

Hal Lindsey talks about this fear in his book, Satan Is Alive and Well on Planet Earth. He reminds us that Satan is the accuser of the brethren who does everything in his power to keep us from feeling secure about our salvation, because he knows if we aren't sure of where we stand with our Heavenly Father, we won't be free to concentrate on what He wants us to do—like reaching out to people in need and preaching the Gospel to every creature under heaven. Instead, we'll be so paralyzed with fear that all we can think about is: Can I lose my salvation if I'm not careful? He writes: "The helmet of salvation is knowing that your salvation is absolutely secure and complete. However, Satan will take some obscure verse and try to undo all the clear teaching in the rest of the Bible and have you thinking that you have lost your salvation. He will take some of these verses and twist them to undo all the

teaching of the entire book of Romans which clearly declares that salvation is a once-and-for-all matter through faith alone.”

In my case, the verses he used were Matthew 12:31-32, where Jesus warned about the unpardonable sin. He said, “And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come.” And so I worried, “Lord, don’t let me do this! Don’t let the devil catch me at some unguarded moment and trick me into cursing Your Spirit! I don’t want to lose my salvation and wind up in hell!” And I have to say it didn’t help much when dear Brother John, an elderly saint in the church I was attending, took me aside one day and warned me, “Gary, remember, the one sin the Lord can never forgive is blaspheming His Spirit. I’ve known many people who’ve committed that sin and died as a result!” And right away, I thought, “Oh, no! Am going to be next? Will I in a weak moment let down my guard and lose everything I’ve gained in Christ?”

The answer to that question and what I want to assure you in this lesson is: No! No one today can commit the unpardonable sin. To commit an unpardonable sin is possible—and in a moment, I’ll explain what I mean by that—but to commit the unpardonable sin, referred to by Jesus in Matthew 12:31, is impossible for anybody to commit today. And what I want to share with you in this study is why that’s so, not only for your own spiritual comfort, but so you can help others gain assurance of their salvation as well. It’s embarrassing to admit, but Cheryl will tell you that I spent 3 or 4 months in terror as a new Christian thinking I’d committed this sin. I was numb with fear because of this verse. But the Bible says, “All things work together for good to those who love God,” and in my case that was true! What this fear drove me to do was to study my Bible until I not only gained an understanding of this passage and the Gospel as a whole, I also gained an unshakeable assurance of my salvation and an ability to help others too. So let me do that for you today, if I can. Maybe you’ve received Christ and been baptized as a public testimony that you intend to follow Him the rest of your life. But the question is: How can you be sure He’ll help you do that and keep you safe from this or some other terrible sin? To answer that question properly, the first thing we need to understand is—

I. The Context of This Passage

That’s the first step in understanding any Bible passage, because the Bible is more than a collection of wonderful verses strung together like beads on a wire. It’s like

a beautiful Persian carpet, which is woven together from various colored yarns. In fact, the word “context” comes from two small words meaning “weave together.” Because just as it would be wrong to pull one piece of yarn from a beautiful carpet and say, “This is the rug!” So it is wrong to pluck one verse from the Bible saying, “This is what the Bible teaches on this subject!” To understand salvation or any doctrine, we have to understand each verse in the light of its context.

In fact, the Apostle Peter warns us that we can put our souls in danger by taking verses out of context. In 2 Peter 3:15 he says, referring to the Apostle Paul, “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” That immediately brings to my mind the cults and what they do with the Bible, plucking this or that verse out of context and trying to make the Bible say things it was never intended to say. In fact, did you know you can make the Bible teach almost anything you want—reincarnation, polygamy, evolution—if you take verses out of context? But Peter says that is very, very dangerous.

On the lighter side, maybe you heard about the ignorant fellow who wanted to know God’s will for his life. So holding the Bible before him, he prayed, “Lord, show me what you want me to do?” He then closed his eyes and opened the Bible to Matthew 27:5 which says: “And Judas went out and hanged himself.” He didn’t like that much, so he tried again. This time he got Luke 10:37, “Go and do likewise!” That was worse, so he tried one last time. This time he got John 13:27, “What you are about to do, do quickly!”

The point is: Not all of the Bible was written to us. All of the Bible was written for us—so we can learn God’s principles—but not all the Bible was written to us. The Bible was written by some 40 different authors over 1500 years addressing thousands of problems affecting billions of people. We must understand that—who each book was written to and what the original writer meant by what he said. Otherwise we’ll be hopelessly confused, especially when it comes to understanding something as difficult as Matthew 12:31-32.

The fact of the matter is, Matthew 12:31-32 was not addressed to us. Nowhere in the Bible are Christians ever warned about committing the unpardonable sin. And you can bet, if this were a sin we could commit, then surely Peter or James or John or Paul would have warned us about it in one of their epistles. But they

never did. The only place this sin is mentioned is in the Gospels, because this isn't a sin we can commit today. This was a warning to the religious rulers of Israel, who had seen Jesus perform miracle after miracle in the power of the Holy Spirit. But instead of worshiping His Lordship, which was the purpose of His miracles, they rejected him as the son of Satan. So Jesus warned them, "Be careful now. You're about to commit a sin that cannot be forgiven."

For what was the unpardonable sin? Study the context of Matthew and it becomes clear. For to whom was the book of Matthew written? The Jews, to prove that Jesus is their long-awaited King. The book opens with His genealogy, proving that Jesus was born in the royal line of David. That's followed by His royal birth in Bethlehem and wise men asking the question: "Where is He who is born King of the Jews?" Next we read of His introduction by His royal herald, John the Baptist, His royal proclamation about who can enter His kingdom, called the Sermon on the Mount, followed by miracle after miracle proving that Jesus is not only the King of Israel, but the Savior of the world! But nothing is enough for those who won't believe. So when we come to chapter 12, which is the turning point of the book, the King is rejected by the very people who should have been His greatest supporters. For notice what happens starting in verse 22. Jesus heals a blind man who's been possessed by a demon, but rather than rejoicing at this great miracle of God, what do the religious rulers say?

Verse 22: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?' (That is, could this be the Messiah?) But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.' In other words, "The spirit in him is a demon!" And not just any demon, but Beelzebub, prince of demons. In fact, if you translate this word, "Beelzebub," into English, do you know what it means? It means "Lord of the dungpile!"

This was a very specific sin. It was the willful rejection of the miracles of Jesus and the attributing of the power behind them to Satan rather than the Holy Spirit. That's why I say the unpardonable sin cannot be committed today. When Jesus was on earth performing miracles, and when He returns in glory, you could commit this sin. That's why Jesus said, "Whoever commits this sin will not be forgiven in this age (referring to His first appearance) or in the age to come (referring to His future reign as King of the earth). You see, the person who sees all these things and then rejects them has run out of excuses. I mean, after you've seen everything there is to see and you still

won't believe, what more is there to say? But today the situation is different. Jesus isn't physically present on earth, which means the only way to learn about Him is through faulty human messengers like you and me, which makes it difficult to believe at times. That's why God gives us so many opportunities to hear the Gospel before we believe. That, then, is the first reason this sin cannot be committed today—the context surrounding it.

J. Vernon McGee, the Bible teacher, had this to say about it in his commentary on Matthew. He writes: “Sheer logic leads us to see that if in the days of Christ’s presence on earth—to attribute His miracles to the power of Satan rather than to the power of the Holy Spirit was to commit the unpardonable sin, then conversely: His absence today makes it impossible to commit the unpardonable sin.” And he adds, “Our position is entirely consistent with a ‘whosoever will Gospel.’”

What does that mean? What does he mean when he says our position is entirely consistent with a “whosoever will Gospel.”

II. The Nature of the Gospel—

What is God promising when He says, “Whosoever will may come.” Probably the clearest passage is Romans chapter 10. You see, when developing a doctrine from the Bible like the doctrine of salvation, the first place to go is not to a few obscure verses like Matthew 12:31-32. You go to several clear verses like Romans 10:9-10, where Paul explains how to be forgiven by God. He writes: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’” What, then, is the promise of the Gospel? It’s the promise that if we believe in our hearts that Jesus died for our sins and rose again, and if we confess to others that He’s our Lord, we will be saved. For verse 13 adds: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (the King James say, “Whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord”) will be saved.”

That’s what is meant by a “whosoever will” Gospel. It means there are no hidden conditions or unspoken exceptions to this promise. Anybody at any time and in any place who’s willing to call upon the name of Jesus for salvation will be saved. And because that’s true, the unpardonable sin cannot be committed today. Why not? Because if it could be committed, then we wouldn’t be able to say, “Whosoever will may come!” Every time we share the Gospel we’d have to add, “Whosoever will may come except those who have blasphemed the

Holy Spirit and committed the unpardonable sin.” But we haven’t been told to do that. We’ve been told to preach the Gospel to every creature promising them, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” End of statement. Transaction finished. No strings attached. That’s the first thing we need to understand about the Gospel—that “whosoever will may come!”

The second thing we need to understand about the Gospel is what happens when a person truly believes. You see, what is it we’re actually promising people when we tell them to believe in Christ and be saved? Eternal fire insurance and a free ticket to heaven? Is that all that’s involved in becoming a Christian? Of course not! But many people do not seem to understand that.

Some time ago, I was listening to a Bible teacher on the radio, when suddenly he said something that he gave me the distinct impression that he believed that Christians could lose their salvation. And that bothered me. But rather than stewing about it, I decided to write him a letter and politely ask him, “Do you think Christians are eternally secure?” To his credit, he wrote me back. Here is what he wrote: “Yes, I believe in eternal security, but not unconditionally.” And to this day, I still haven’t been able to figure that out—how a security that’s conditional can be considered eternally for sure.

You see, not everybody appreciates this, but becoming a Christian means more than receiving a free ticket to heaven paid for by the blood of Christ. Because, if that’s all there were to it, what would keep you and me from having it torn away from us in a moment of temptation? Because just as none of us was powerful enough to earn our salvation, none of us is strong enough to keep it either. The truth of the matter is that becoming a Christian involves not only receiving His free gift of salvation, it also involves a basic change in our inner nature. Peter says in his epistle that we have become “partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Paul adds in his epistle that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.” And John goes so far in his Gospel to say that “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

You see, becoming a Christian means a basic change in our inner nature—being transformed from a child of Satan into a son or daughter of the Most High King. And therefore, what would have to happen, in order for us to lose our salvation?

God would have to change us back. But friends, that's one thing our Heavenly Father has promised that He will never do.

Like father, like daughter, Rebecca had a tough time gaining an assurance of her salvation, when she was first saved. She asked Jesus in her heart at an early age, but the devil did everything in his power to keep her from gaining an assurance of her salvation. The high point of the drama came one night as we watched "The 10 Commandments" as a family. And what grabbed her attention was not the plagues in Egypt or the parting of the Red Sea; it was the idols in Pharaoh's temple.

Right away she wanted to know, "Mommy, Daddy, could I do that if I'm not careful? Could I bow down to idols like Pharaoh and go to hell? That was the worst sin her 5-year old mind could think of, and she was worried that if she did it, she might lose her salvation. We prayed with her, read her Bible verses, and tried everything we could to help her. But the thought still nagged her, so much so that the next day I found her marching around the house like a soldier, body stiff as a board, and when I asked, "What's wrong, Honey?" all she could say was: "I'm trying not to bow down to idols."

I mean, this went on for days. In fact, it got so bad that one day I found her scooting around the floor on her bottom, again stiff as a board. And when I asked her, "What are you doing, Honey?" her answer again through clenched teeth and with tears in her eyes was: "I'm trying not to bow down to idols!" So what finally made her worries go away? I started to play a game with her in which I'd hold her hand and then tell her, "Now let go." And for everything in her, she would try, but she wouldn't be able to do it. Why not? Because even though she'd let go, I wouldn't. And invariably it'd turn into a wrestling match in which she'd try to see if she was strong enough to get me to let go of her hand, but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't do it.

And then I'd remind her, "The same thing is true of Jesus, Honey. When you put your life in His hands, He promises that He will never let go, no matter what you do, and He's way stronger than me. So no matter what the devil tries to make you think, you're safe, because now your life is right here in the palm of God's hand."

One of the verses we used to prove that to her was John 10:27, where Jesus promises: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall

anyone pluck them out of my hand. My Father who gave them to me is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." Sometimes people worry, "Well, maybe no one can pluck me out of His hand, but I could fall or jump out, couldn't I?" The answer to that is also: "No," because according to Ephesians 1:13 and other verses, there's something very powerful sealing us in! And what's that? The very Holy Spirit whom we've been talking about all morning. Ephesians says that having believed in Christ, we "were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of His glory."

My conclusion, then, is that a genuine child of God can never be eternally lost. Nor can you and I commit the unpardonable sin. The only sin you and I can commit that could be called unpardonable is rejecting Christ all of our lives and dying without accepting Him as our Savior. But every other sin or blasphemy, the Bible says, will be forgiven us, because the real issue when it comes to our security as believers is not our faithfulness. If that were the issue, none of us would be saved. The real issue is His faithfulness. Jude writes: "To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." So I ask you in closing: Do you have that assurance? Have you called on Jesus for salvation? And can you say beyond a shadow of a doubt that you're a child of God and that one day you too will go to heaven?

When I was a boy, I had two recurring nightmares that terrified me. One involved a little gremlin who would sneak into the house through an upstairs bathroom window in the middle of the night and chase me down the stairs, getting closer and closer with every step I took. Of course, the harder I ran, the slower my feet would go, and always just as I was about to reach my parents' bedroom and he was able to grab me, I would wake up.

That was frightening, but not as frightening as the second dream I had, because in the second dream, I found myself in another world, very similar to this world, but the problem was that once I got there, I could never remember how to get back—until I'd remember, "Oh, all I have to do is wake up." And I know psychologists would have a heyday with that, explaining that the reason I had those dreams was because I was so insecure. And they'd be right! I was insecure, because I wasn't a child of God at that time, and I didn't have the assurance I needed. But now I do. Now I know who I belong to, and I'm absolutely confident that nothing I can do will ever separate me from His love.

I wonder. Can you say that? Do you have an unshakeable assurance of your salvation? Or are you still worrying that one day you may say something or do something that'll cut you off from God's love and make it impossible for you to be forgiven? Friend, I've been there, and I can tell you that's the worst nightmare of all. But the good news is: it's only a nightmare—none of it is true, not if you sincerely know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. So the answer to the first question this morning: Can you commit the unpardonable sin? is: No. That was a sin that could only be committed by those who were eyewitnesses of Christ's miracles, but attributed them to the power of the devil. But the answer to the second question: Can you commit an unpardonable sin? is Yes. You could harden your heart, reject Christ today, and run the risk of dying without accepting Him as your Savior. But don't do that, friend. If you haven't yet committed your life to Jesus Christ, do so today. Open your heart to His Spirit this very moment and be forgiven forever!