

The Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit

Galilean Ministry Part 18

Mark 3:20-30 (Matthew 12:22-37) 3/24/2018

Summary: Jesus' family's verdict on Jesus: he's insane. The scribes' verdict: he is satanic. The rejection of Christ reveals nothing about Jesus but everything about the rejector's heart. Jesus responds to the scribes with logic (Satan couldn't cast himself anywhere, and if he could, he would be destroying himself. The fact that he's being cast out shows a stronger force is doing it. Then Jesus warns of the unforgivable sin (resisting the Spirit to the point where repentance is impossible, making the sin an eternal one). Beware of the beginnings of that sin (any resistance to the Spirit's influence).

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Mark 3:20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

23 So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.

28 I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. 29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." 30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

Jesus Examined

I've titled this message "Jesus in the Dock" – a slight adjustment of the title to C.S. Lewis' book "God in the Dock." In England, they use the word "dock" to refer to the enclosure the defendant sits in during a trial. So the idea is that Jesus was on trial – in the dock. Jesus was always being examined – and not with friendly eyes.

Mark 3:2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.

Rooting for Failure

That shows what's in their hearts. Why did the Pharisees get so upset about Jesus breaking their Sabbath rules? Was it because they wanted people to honor God? No. They were actually hoping Jesus would break the Sabbath so they could have an accusation against him.

Any time you find yourself hoping that someone fails – you're the one failing. That can be a temptation. Someone is merciless toward you because of something in your past, holding it against you, it's easy to start thinking, "I hope he falls off his high horse one of these days." And you can actually find yourself rooting for them to fall. If that ever happens, repent because that is a heart that is very far from the heart of God.

If someone is like that toward you, Jesus can sympathize. Jesus was always being critically examined, and still is to this day. There has not been a generation in the human race since his time who has not examined and reexamined Jesus looking for some flaw. He is the most examined person who ever lived, and yet he remains the most admired person who has ever lived. And he is also the most rejected man who ever lived. And that's what we see here. We're going to see two different forms of rejection, based on two different verdicts about Jesus – one by Jesus' family, and another by the scribes.

Family Verdict

Jesus comes down from the mountain after appointing the Twelve, and he's right back into the chaos of the crowds.

Mark 3:20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

The crowds have become unmanageable. They almost crushed him before he went up on the mountain. Now he comes back down, goes in a house, and the crowds just follow him right in the house. Someone in the news might have reporters camping out in his front yard. But these crowds weren't in Jesus' front yard. He would go inside for dinner, and they would follow him right into the house, and press around him so much that he couldn't even eat a meal. The whole thing was absolutely out of control.

21 When his family¹ heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

¹ The word *family* does not appear in the Greek. Literally it's **When the beside him ones heard about this...** The most natural way to interpret the phrase "the beside him ones" would probably be "his associates or ." However, it would not make sense to take this as a reference to his disciples, because they were already with him. They wouldn't have heard about the crowds – they were right there to see them. Also, it's not likely they would be his followers if they thought he was insane. The phrase is used in other places to refer to family, and that is the only interpretation that makes sense in this context (especially since his mother and brothers arrive 10 verses later). It is an unusual way to refer to family, but it would be an unusual way to refer to disciples or anyone else as well. Perhaps Mark uses this word here because he doesn't want to emphasize the family relationship. He simply want to describe the various conclusions that were being made about him.

The word for **take charge** of means *to seize, or to arrest, or to take into custody*. It's used in Mark of Jesus' arrest and the arrest of John the Baptist. They are going to take hold of Jesus and bring him home – whether he wants to come or not, because this is getting out of control. He's got the authorities so upset they are trying to kill him, and he keeps throwing more kindling on the fire and stirring up more frenzied crowds. And that has ramifications for his family.

For one thing, anything that brought dishonor on the family was a very big deal in that culture. And beyond that, there was persecution. Not very long after this, things start getting rough for anyone associated with Jesus. They were being excommunicated from the synagogue.² So you can imagine his family's concerns. So this whole escapade has gone too far, something drastic needs to happen, and so they decide they need to do an intervention.

Marken Salad

Well, that's their conclusion at this point, so they set out here in v.21 to go to where Jesus is. But they must be walking slow, because they don't arrive until v.31. It takes them 10 verses to get there. And in those 10 verses, Mark tells us another story. Mark does this a few different times in the book, where he starts a story, then goes to something else, and then comes back to the original story.³ The commentaries refer to these as Marken sandwiches, where he will sandwich one event in between two parts of another event.

Why does Mark do that? He does it because the two events are related, and each one sheds light on the meaning of the other. We learn something by seeing one against the backdrop of the other. So it's really more of a salad than a sandwich. The mixture of the two gives us more insight into both.

So in this case he's got something really important to tell us about what happened when Jesus' family arrived. But first he wants to just take the assessment Jesus' family made about him, and set that right alongside the assessment the Pharisees made.

Honest Reports

So what was the assessment of his family?

21 ... they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

That's sad, isn't it? And surprising. And kind of embarrassing if you're a Christian, isn't it? This man we believe is God, the people closest to him decided he was a lunatic? Why include that in the Gospel account? If you're writing a book trying to persuade people to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, why would you mention that his own family thought he was delusional?

I can tell you one thing – if the story of Jesus were a made-up legend, this verse would not exist. If the accounts of Jesus that we got from the Apostles were exaggerated, embellished, inflated stories, trying to make Jesus look greater than he really was, this verse would not exist. The only explanation for this verse existing is that it happened, and the gospel writers were honest, truthful, reliable witnesses of what really happened. And so they don't hide the truth about people's rejection of Jesus. In fact, they make it a major theme.

Scribes' Verdict

So the verdict of Jesus' family is that he's delusional, and Mark immediately lays that right alongside another verdict. Look at the next verse.

22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said...

² Jn.9:22, 12:42.

³ Mark 5:22-24/35-43; 6:7-13/30-32; 9:37/41; 11:12-14/20-26; 14:1-2/10-11; 14:54/66-72.

Now we're going to get the verdict of the scribes *from Jerusalem*. These aren't the locals anymore, these are the big dogs – sent from the Sanhedrin. This is the official inquiry. They show up with their clipboards, make their assessment, and here's their conclusion in v.22:

22 ..."He has⁴ Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

So they are saying Jesus is inhabited, not just by a demon, but by the king of demons – Satan himself. What an unbelievable conclusion to come to about Jesus Christ. If you watched my life and saw me at my worst, you might conclude that I have some kind of demon influence in me. But Jesus? What did he do? He healed everyone he met. He gave people the words of eternal life. He forgave sins. He welcomed children. He loved outcasts. He performed miracles of compassion. He fulfilled OT prophecy. He upheld the Scriptures. He honored God. He delivered people from demons. John the Baptist vouched for him. God the Father vouched for him. The Holy Spirit came upon him.

And they say, "He so evil, it's not even enough to say he has a demon. He must have the king of demons in him." You can just feel the hatred. And by the way, getting your power from Satan is sorcery, which carried the death penalty in the law of God.

They can't just say he's crazy, because they are trying to explain his ability to cast out demons and perform miracles.⁵ Being crazy doesn't help you walk on water. They are trying to explain his power, and their conclusion is the worst possible conclusion – he's as evil as he can be. And they spread this accusation and convinced a lot of the people – we see that in the Gospel of John, where the crowds repeatedly accuse Jesus of having a demon.⁶ That idea caught on with a lot of people. Later on the crowds would be saying this.

As embarrassing as it might be, the gospel writers tell us things like this because the question of who Jesus is is already settled. That was settled in v.1 of the book. The issue now is how will you respond to that information, and the Holy Spirit puts that question to us by showing us the various responses of different people. Each response shows us something about that person's heart. It tells us nothing about Jesus; it tells us everything about the person who came to that conclusion.

Two Different Verdicts

So those are the verdicts. His family decided he was insane, and the Scribes decided he was Satanic. Now we're going to see how Jesus responds. He has a very strong response to both groups – his family and the scribes. Both responses are strong, but they are different responses, because they are different assessments of Jesus. We talked about that before – that the people back then didn't just always assume mentally ill people were demonized. They had the sophistication to distinguish between insanity and having an evil spirit. It's the people today who lack that sophistication and over-simplify. They don't want to think in terms of good and evil, so they make everything a mental illness.

Jesus' Rebuttal

Ok, so Jesus is in the dock, and those are the two judgments: insanity and collusion (and not with Russia – even worse, collusion with the devil himself). How does Jesus respond? He responds first to the scribes, because his family still hasn't arrived – they are still walking. He'll respond to them next time. His response to the scribes is devastating. First he crushes their argument with logic, then issues a blistering warning. The logic is in vv.23-26 and it comes at them like a machine gun.

⁴ The NIV says "possessed by" but in the Greek it simply says **He has Beelzebub**. The Bible never speaks of demons possessing someone, even though the English translations say it that way to match the modern colloquialism. When the gospel writers speak of a person inhabited by a demon, they either say the person has a demon, or that the person is demonized.

⁵ The parallel passage in Matthew tells us that this incident happened right after Jesus not only cast out a demon, but instantly healed a guy who was blind and mute – gave him both sight and the ability to talk right on the spot (Mt.12:22).

⁶ John 7:20, 8:48-52, 10:20.

23 So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables:

We'll see the significance of him speaking to them in parables when we get to ch.4. The word translated **called** is that same word from v.13 that I told you refers to a royal summons. He summoned them. That has the feeling of getting called to the principal's office. Jesus doesn't appear to be in the dock anymore, because he's issuing a subpoena. "You, you, you, and you, come here!"

1) Satan Can't Cast Himself Anywhere

He's going to cross examine them, which only takes one question. And, as usual, they can't answer it.

23 ...“How can Satan cast out Satan?”

That question is actually kind of funny if you think about it. Try answering it. How does one go about casting himself somewhere? You try it. Try giving yourself a shove. You can't even do that, much less pick yourself up and cast yourself anywhere.

Well, they keep their losing streak going. Their percentage of times they can answer one of Jesus' questions stays right there at an even 0%. They are already silenced, Jesus' point is proven, the argument is over, and Jesus has no more questions for these witnesses. It's time for his closing arguments. And he gives three of them rapid fire.

2) If He Could, It Would be Suicide

1) 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

2) 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

A kingdom is the largest organization; a household is the smallest – neither one can survive self-destruction. And the point of giving two extremes is to cover everything in between. No organization of any size or kind can survive declaring war on itself.

What about if some pagan witch doctor casts out a demon? That might happen. Satan may occasionally allow one of his people to appear to have success casting out a demon or two just to deceive people. But that's not what Jesus is talking about. He's not casting out one or two demons here and there. Jesus was shattering Satan's kingdom. We're talking scorched earth. The scale on which Jesus was demolishing and dismantling Satan's entire kingdom was something that had never happened before. If you could see the spirit world during Jesus' ministry it would look like a hurricane has swept through Israel. Satan's kingdom was being obliterated. Jesus cast out thousands of demons. And he sent them to hell.

Scripture hardly ever mentions demons inhabiting people before or after Jesus' ministry. But during the life of Jesus they are seen constantly. You wonder if when Satan saw his kingdom facing the son of God, he marshalled all the forces of hell and mustered every demon he could for an all-out attack of God's chosen people in Israel at that time. And Satan's finest were decimated by the Son of God.

And to suggest Satan would do that to himself is ridiculous. In a war, it would be one thing for a country to pretend to be defeated in an area or to give up certain things to a spy to keep up his credibility, but no nation would bomb its own capital back to the stone age.

So the first question points out the impossibility of what they are suggesting. No one can throw himself anywhere. And the next two statements describe what the outcome would be if he tried. The only possible outcome of fighting yourself is self-destruction.

⁷ This confirms that Beelzebub is Satan.

Apply the Proverb

Abraham Lincoln applied that principle to the civil war in his famous “House Divided” speech. The Apostle Paul applied it to the church in Galatians 5:15.

Galatians 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Even little children intuitively understand this. That’s why they are scared to death when they see mommy and daddy fighting. They know that threatens the family, which is their entire world. It applies to families, it applies to countries, it applies to churches, and it applies to Satan’s kingdom.

Satan’s Kingdom

And by the way, when Jesus talks about Satan’s kingdom, he’s affirming that they were right when they spoke of Satan as the king of the demons. There is a hierarchy among demons, and Satan is the king who rules the whole thing. And not just demons, but people.

1 John 5:19 ... the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

And now Jesus shows up preaching about the kingdom of God being near (1:15). This is the story of the collision of two kingdoms. What’s that war going to look like. Jesus will explain that in ch.4.

Satan is Done

Those are the first two statements, now the clincher:

26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

“If the devil fights himself and wins, he’s done, right? And if he fights himself and loses, he’s done. Either way, you just gave me credit for wiping out the devil. Whether it’s the ridiculous way you guys described it, or if it’s by the finger of God like I said – either way, you just acknowledged that I’m responsible for the demise of the devil, so, you’re welcome.”

3) A Greater Power Must Be Working

I would say at this point Jesus has made his point – and then some. But he’s not finished. In v.27 he gives an allegory that answers the question they couldn’t answer in v.23. How could Satan cast himself out? First of all he can’t, and even if he could, he wouldn’t, which only leaves one possibility. If he’s cast out, it must be the work of someone more powerful than Satan.

27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up⁸ the strong man. Then he can rob his house.

If you wandered in to the house of an MMA champ while he’s home and wanted to take all his stuff, you’d better be pretty tough. You can’t just be a little tougher. You’d have to tie him up. I can’t imagine tying up any adult. It’s not easy to subdue a 2-year-old who doesn’t want to be subdued. Imagine trying

⁸ Amillennialists and Postmillennialists point to this passage as a defense for their view that the binding of Satan in Rev.20 refers to the whole church age, not to a future millennium. I acknowledge that Satan is defeated in the church age, and that he is restrained to a degree⁸ but I don’t think Jesus is trying to describe the entire church age here. He’s describing the devastation he was bringing on Satan’s kingdom by driving out demons during his earthly ministry. The point of this passage is not to describe the weakness of the devil, but rather the awesome power of Christ. The binding here is a binding that enables Jesus to retrieve men’s souls by casting out demons. The binding in Rev.20 has to do with Satan’s ability to deceive the nations, which, according to 1 Cor.10, still seems to be intact during the church age.

to tie up an MMA champ who is pumped full of adrenaline because he is being robbed. It would be hard enough to just pin him, but from there you'd have then hold him down with one hand, and tie him up with your other hand. The point is, to rob someone's house while he's home you have to be much, much stronger than him.

The strong man is Satan. The possessions in his house are all the people his demons have control of. Jesus wanders in to his house whenever he pleases and takes whatever he wants whenever he wants. Jesus can take a human soul out of the clutches of the devil at will. And he was doing so on a massive scale. He wouldn't even let the demons speak. And he could do it by a mere command. Jesus went into Satan's domain, took on all of his hosts, cast them out, and bound and gagged the most powerful created being in existence without even breaking a sweat. And whenever the demons saw him coming they panicked and begged for mercy. Jesus was showing in a visible way his ability to decisively defeat Satan, which he would do in a much greater way on the cross and will do in a final way after he returns.

Jesus' Warning

Who is in the Dock?

So now that Jesus has demolished their argument, he issues one of the most chilling, frightening warnings in the whole Bible. At this point we find out that Jesus is not the one in the dock. He's not even the prosecutor. He's the judge on the bench and the scribes are in the dock, and Jesus the judge gives them a bone-chilling warning in response to their assessment of him.

29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." 30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

Not many verses in the Bible scarier than that one, are there? It's such a hard statement, because the rest of Scripture makes it sound like God will forgive anything. In fact, isn't that what Jesus says in this very passage? Look at v.28. Verse 28 should be one of the most comforting verses in the whole Bible.

28 I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them.

What Can Be Forgiven

Don't just skip over that. It is crucial to understand the vastness of God's forgiveness. The Bible presents forgiveness as something that is right near the core of God's nature. When Moses asked to see God, God said, "OK, here you go..."

Exodus 34:6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

That is God's nature. Of all the thousands of things he could say about himself, when God boils it down to a few sentences, that's what he says. And that description of God is repeated more often in the OT than any other description. He is a God who forgives wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

Of course it is conditional. You have to come to Christ in faith and repent of your sin, but where there is faith in Christ there is always forgiveness.

When people find out that there is a sin that is unforgivable, they usually assume it must be some especially evil sin. And so they are haunted by some horrible thing in their past.

Is that what the unforgivable sin is? When you just do something that is especially evil? What would be the worst possible sin to commit? How about murdering the Son of God? What could be more evil than that? But was that unforgivable? What did Jesus say on the cross? **Father forgive them** (Lk.23:34). No sin so evil it can't be forgiven.

Others think they can't be forgiven because their sins are too numerous. But that doesn't work, because in Luke 7 Jesus forgave the "many" sins of the woman who anointed him, and then made the point that her numerous sins made her love him more than others. Volume of sin is no hindrance to forgiveness when there is repentance.

Jesus said, **whoever comes to me I will never drive away** (Jn.6:37).

1 John 1:7 ... the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 9 ... he is faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The Bible is a record of God forgiving incestuous drunks like Noah, pagans and adulterers like Abraham, prostitutes like Rahab, murderers and liars like David, Christ deniers like Peter, immoral wretches like Matthew, violent blasphemers like Paul – all forgiven. "My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part, but the whole. Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more, praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, oh, my soul!"

God is so incredibly forgiving, that is actually one of the great offenses of the Gospel. God is too forgiving to suit a lot of folks. Some people reject the Gospel because they say, "I can't believe in a religion where Hitler could go to heaven if he just repented." If Hitler would have repented of his sin and turn to Christ in faith on his deathbed, he would not have been punished for a single one of his sins. Every last one would have been cancelled, and he would have enjoyed eternal blessedness in heaven. That is way too much forgiveness for some people to swallow. God's forgiveness is vast beyond our ability to comprehend.

If you think you are beyond forgiveness, all that's not humility. All you're doing is minimizing Christ's work on the cross. You are saying, "You didn't suffer enough, Jesus. That was a nice effort you made on the cross, but you fell short in my case." What kind of blasphemy is that? No matter what you've done, your sins are no match for the cross.

What Cannot Be Forgiven

However, there is one sin that is unforgivable. And if that verse frightens you, that's good. That's exactly what Jesus intended it to do.

Take Heed!

I say that because I was so disheartened this week as I listened to one sermon after another on this passage, and almost every one of them downplayed this warning. "If you're worried about this, don't worry. You're fine. You haven't committed the unpardonable sin." And then they go on to define it in ways that make it innocuous.

A lot of preachers say all the unforgivable sin is, is rejecting Christ. But that can't be it. All of us rejected the Lord up until we finally accepted him. That's not unforgivable. So then they say, "Well, it's not unforgivable unless you die while committing it." So then the unforgivable sin would be dying. That doesn't work either. All sin is unforgivable if you die as an unbeliever.

Others say, "Unbelief is the unforgivable sin, but it's unforgivable only as long as it persists." In that case Jesus' words are meaningless. The unforgivable sin is a sin that is unforgivable, but only while it remains unforgiven? Saying that is the same as saying nothing.

Others say this is a sin that could only be committed when Jesus was on earth. But that doesn't work, because the sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, not Jesus. And the Holy Spirit still active even in this age.

I could go on, but it's enough to say this – if the Lord Jesus Christ gives a strong warning ("Watch out! Beware of this! This is a real danger – be alert and make sure you don't fall into it.") – if Jesus says that, and some preacher comes along and says, "Don't sweat it. That doesn't apply to you. You don't have to take that warning to heart." – beware of that preacher.

There is a reason why the warnings in the Bible are in the Bible. And it's not so we can ignore them or disregard them. Beware of any preacher who tells you that you don't need to beware. Jesus prefaced this warning by saying I tell you the truth (literally, "amen"). Jesus is the only person in the Bible who says amen to his own words. Everything he said is important, but if he starts it out with "amen," then it's supremely important and you'd better take it to heart.

OT Roots

Ok, so what is the unforgivable sin? The reason so many have struggled with this concept is that they don't understand that there are other passages of Scripture that help us understand this issue. The unforgivable sin is spoken of numerous places in Scripture, and if we look at those passages, we can get a clear understanding of what it is. It first appears here in Numbers 15.

Numbers 15:30 But anyone who sins defiantly (lit. with an upraised fist)⁹ ... blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people.

In the modern vernacular we might use the phrase "in your face."

Deuteronomy 29:18 Make sure there is no man or woman ... whose heart turns away from the LORD our God ... 19 When such a person ... thinks, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." This will bring disaster ... 20 The LORD will never be willing to forgive him

So the unforgivable sin is nothing new. God warned His people about it from the very beginning.

So, has anyone ever committed this sin? Yes. Eli's sons did. After their defiant desecration of the Temple, God said their sin could never be atoned for by any sacrifice (1 Sam.3:14).

Why It Is Unforgiveable

So Jesus isn't coming up with this out of the blue. It's right out of the OT Scriptures. But Jesus does reveal something new. He reveals why the unforgivable sin is unforgivable. It's because it's committed against the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the one who enables the human heart to understand and accept truth from God (1 Cor.2:14). When the Spirit does that, and the person still resists the truth, if he continues that long enough, the Holy Spirit will withdraw from him and there will be no more possibility of repentance, because the human heart cannot repent without the work of the Holy Spirit.

Eternal Sin

That's why Jesus calls it **an eternal sin**.

29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.

It can't be forgiven because it's the sin that never ends. It never ends because you cut yourself off from the one and only thing that can bring any sin to an end, namely, repentance. When you commit any sin, you're really continuing in that sin until you repent. But when you cut yourself off from the Holy Spirit altogether, then you will never repent, and your sin will be eternal.

⁹ This phrase occurs only 2 other times, and it's translated "defiantly": **Exodus 14:8 The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out defiantly.**
Numbers 33:3 ...They marched out defiantly in full view of all the Egyptians

Hebrews

We are warned about this repeatedly in the book of Hebrews. There was a group of people in ch.6 who had been enlightened by the Holy Spirit and still turned away. And he says it is impossible for them to ever come to repentance.

Hebrews 6:4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the miracles of the coming age, 6 and who have fallen away,¹⁰ to be brought back to repentance.

Hebrews 10 warns about the same thing and uses a word right out of the Numbers 15 passage that first taught about the unforgivable sin. Now look at Heb.10:26.

Hebrews 10:26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

That word deliberately is the opposite of the word used in Numbers 15:29 that describes the sins that can be forgiven.¹¹ Sins that are non-defiant against the Spirit can be forgiven, but once you lift your upraised fist and harden your heart to the enlightening work of the Spirit in your heart, if that continues long enough, you get to the point where no sacrifice remains for your sin which means you can never be forgiven because you will never repent. You are now a permanent enemy of God and will receive nothing but judgment and raging fire.

I heard one preacher after another this week say that this sin is exceedingly rare. But the Bible doesn't say it's rare. In fact, I think there are signs of it in numerous places.

It sure does seem to me like Judas committed this sin. Years with Jesus and nothing could penetrate his heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart to the point where God finally hardened it. If God is hardening your heart, you're not going to repent. We'll see later in Mark that Herod's heart was impenetrable. It says he liked to listen to John the Baptist preach, but he wouldn't accept the message. And so when Jesus finally appears before him, Jesus has nothing to say to Herod. His opportunity was over. I see it also in Acts 7, where Stephen preaches a whole, long sermon to the Sanhedrin, but doesn't make a call to repentance.

Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

They had gotten to the point of always resisting him. That actually seems to me to be quite common.

Conclusion: Don't Resist the Spirit

In fact, I would go so far as to say that this sin exists in embryonic form in all of us. We all resist the Holy Spirit to some degree. You're reading the Bible or listening to a sermon, and God's light begins to shine in your mind, and the Spirit touches your heart with that tug of conviction. The Holy Spirit is testifying to your heart and saying, "Yes, that is the truth. And it's for you. You need to respond to that." But if it's a truth I don't want to accept, or it calls for a response I don't want to make, then I resist. Usually by just ignoring it. The Spirit tugs on my heart with conviction, and instead of doing the hard work, I just say, "Yeah, whatever" and turn on the TV, or go check Facebook. That's the embryonic form of the unforgivable sin. That's where it starts.

¹⁰ The NIV says, "If they fall away..." but in the Greek it says "and have fallen away..." It's referring to something that has actually happened.

¹¹ In the Greek translation of Nm.15: the word is *a-kousios*. The "a" is a negative (meaning "non"), and the *kousios* means defiantly. Sin committed *akousios* (non-defiantly) can be atoned for by a sacrifice. The word translated **deliberately** here is *ekousios* – the opposite of *a-kousios*.

The Spirit, in his mercy, will keep pressing, and keep giving me more chances to repent. But if I keep resisting, resisting will become easier and easier. And finally, to get rid of that nagging conviction altogether, I'll come to the point of calling it evil. He will shine his light in my heart and I'll call that light darkness. I'll become hostile against it. I'll come to the point where I can explain everything away and no amount of evidence or proof will be enough to convince me.

Repent

If you're worried that you might have committed the unforgivable sin, I'm not going to sit here and assure you that you haven't, because I don't know that. But I will say this: If you want to know for sure that you haven't, then just repent. If you repent, then I can assure you that 100% of your sins will be forgiven, which means none of your sin is unforgivable.

Once you've repented, the past is no longer an issue. The issue is the present and the future. And that's the concern of the book of Hebrews. Three different times he says, **Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.**¹² It doesn't begin with calling Jesus satanic. It begins with little moments of resisting the Spirit. Hebrews has warnings about this sprinkled all through the book, and it's interesting to watch those, because they begin small and become more and more extreme. I read you the one from ch.10 about the impossibility of forgiveness and the judgment and raging fire. That's the last one, but listen to the first one:

Hebrews 2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift.

That's how it starts. Not with hard hearted, stiff-necked, hostile rebellion against God. It starts with just ... drifting. Jesus Christ is like an island in a river, and you are a fish that has to swim against the current to stay near him. All you have to do to get far from him is stop fighting the current and just drift. The sin in your heart and the enemy will do the rest. So today, if you hear his voice, do not resist it. Welcome it. Submit to it. Obey. And repent where needed. And you will never fall into the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

¹² Heb.3:7,15, 4:7.