

Matthew 20-08-23a

Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It's great to see all of your smiling faces and to imagine the ones that I can't see. This is the 23rd of August 2020 and we're continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew.

We are in chapter 12 and we have come to verse 31. You will remember the context. It is important to have that context in our minds as we approach this saying of the Lord Jesus with regard to a sin that will not be forgiven in this age or in the age to come.

That's a sobering thought that there could be a sin that is unforgivable despite the work of Christ, despite the opportunity to approach and to confess. There is some way, somehow an unforgivable sin and Jesus talks about it here. With our contextual clues we will understand exactly what it is and it is at the center of a section that is going to eventually arrive at governing all of our speech.

How do we employ our communication ability in speaking to one another? It grows out of this point. So let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we will begin. Father we thank you for this day.

We thank you for the opportunity to nourish our souls through the bread of your word and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, his actions, his teaching and the ongoing ministry of your Holy Spirit to bring those things to life and to power in our souls. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together that we will find ourselves edified, built up, united and thoroughly equipped for every good work. We ask these things in Jesus name.

Amen. We'll read the passage. I'm going to just remind you that he has been talking about Satan, casting out Satan, being divided against himself.

We talked about the importance of unity. The New Testament has a lot to say about unity among believers. We prize unity above almost everything except the purity of our thoughts and actions when it comes to the essentials of the Christian faith.

There is a time to separate. There is a time to put distance. There is a time to categorize someone as heathen and tax collector and love them from afar.

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who spitefully use you from a distance and if they are spitefully using the Lord Jesus that puts them in a category even more distant than that.

So, he who is not with me and this section actually begins in verse 30 and in my New King James and probably yours they put a topic division between verse 30 and verse 31. I've got a little header between those two verses that says the unpardonable sin. Well, that header in my humble opinion should have been after verse 29.

Verse 30 is a part of this section. It belongs here and you're going to see why due to our old friend the chiasm. We have a chiastic structure here.

Matthew throughout his gospel and certainly in this section is very fond of parallelism and structure and in sections like this the purpose of that structure, the purpose of the parallels, the purpose of the repetition, the purpose of the symmetry here in the form of a chiasm is for memorization, remembering, having it stuck in our heads. They didn't have Bibles that you could open and flip a page, put in a bookmark. I've got a wonderful bookmark here by the way with an American flag on it.

It says land of the free. I'm using it regularly and I really appreciate that reminder. This is supposed to be the land of the free.

If anybody's trying to make it not the land of the free, they're un-American. Having said that, I remove my bookmark here so I can read my page, but people in those days didn't have it. When they did have a written document, what was it? A scroll.

The book was invented by Christians to make a more portable version and a more accessible version of what was originally contained in scrolls. People chopped up the scroll and bound the back edge and that became your early Bibles. The Bible was the forerunner in pretty much all cases of every book that has come since.

Well, they didn't have books. They might have a little fragment that they would put inside a mezuzah or something and stick on the doorpost in a literal obedience to the Old Testament command, but memory and mental hooks that would hang this on the wall of your heart was aided by structure and by symmetry. That's what we have here.

This begins in verse 30. If you do like I do in your Bible, just put a big paragraph marker. It looks like a reverse capital P with a hollow upright.

That's the paragraph marker and this is where the paragraph begins. He's already talked about plundering the goods in the house of the strong man. The strong man has to be bound first.

The power of Satan has been broken by the Lord Jesus Christ. He has plundered the house and we are the beneficiaries of that opportunity, that bounty. Now, a new topic in verse 30.

He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters. It doesn't have anything to do with Beelzebub, strong men, binding or any of the rest of it does it. It's a new idea.

It's related. It flows. There's a continuation here of discussion, but it's a new thought.

It's a new paragraph and we're going to find the other end of this structure, this

symmetry, this parallelism in verse 37. When we get to it, by your words, you will be justified and by your words, you will be condemned. Those who are justified by their words are those who are with the Lord Jesus.

Those who are condemned by their words are against him and scattered. Everything else is going to be parallel and you'll see it. So, he who is not with me is against me.

He who does not gather with me scatters abroad. Now, this doesn't say is gathered, right? It's not a passive. He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather to me scatters.

If reform theology were true, if foreordination and predestination and election and God doing it was in fact the biblical truth, this would be a passive, would it not? He who is not gathered to me scatters, right? But we gather, we decide, we choose, and this is why in this section, the idea of responsibility for what you choose and what you say, what you believe and what you express. Remember in Romans 10, 9 and 10, if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. And you can read that whole section there, 8 through 13 in Romans 10.

It talks about the mouth and it talks about the heart. We'll see it a little bit later, but this is the idea. The mouth is expressing what's in the heart and what's in the heart is accountable.

We are accountable for what we choose to think, what we choose to believe, and that is going to come out and be expressed in our speaking. Are you with him or are you against him? Are you gathering to him or are you scattered? Therefore, see how the 31 therefore makes good sense now? Therefore, because you are choosing whether to gather or scatter, whether to be with him or against him, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or the one to come.

Either make the tree good and its fruit good or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers, how can you being evil speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. He who is not with me is against me.

He who does not gather with me scatters abroad. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give an account of it in the day of judgment. So bring thought every idle word, for by your words you will be

justified, and by your words you will be condemned. Now if you line this up, you know the beauty of a chiasm is in the center, you've got the the heart of the matter.

So beginning at verse 30 and looking at verse 37, we can put these together. We did this in the Psalms, I thought to great profit to put those thoughts together side by side. It's a memory aid.

We have difficulty with this, we don't have the mental training, we don't have the experience, we don't have the common use of and recognition of these structures, but we're really good at reading. Well those people, many could not read, but they could remember what they heard, and this is why the testimony that was set down by Mark, by Luke, by those who composed the narrative sections of especially the New Testament Scripture were able to do so so faithfully even years after the fact, because their minds were like tape recorders, or video recorders, or DVD, or DVR, or whatever you want to compare it to now. They had incredible powers of recollection because they were trained in it, they had to remember, they didn't jot down the grocery list and then go to the market, they had to remember it.

And so these memory aids and devices were in such common use that they were immediately recognized, and the content of even extended discourses like the teaching on the hill or the sermon on the mount were remembered, and remembered in detail, and remembered faithfully, and then augmented even more so in this particular case by the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. So verse 30 goes with verse 37. Are you with me or against me? Are you gathering or scattering? Your words are the basis of justification, your words are the basis of condemnation.

If you are with Jesus in your heart, it's going to come out in your words. If you are against him and scattering, i.e. not unified, we talked about that unity of the Spirit last time, we talked about the ministry of the Spirit last time, and how important and central his ministries are in the life of a believer. We reviewed those in detail, many different ways to try to systematize or remember those.

A lot of my early training, they would say there's a five-fold ministry of regeneration and baptism and indwelling and filling and gifting, but that's kind of like the essence box. If you remember, people tried to put God in a box. I don't think you can do that, but it's a convenient memory aid for some of his most prominent attributes of sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, and veracity.

It's a convenient summary, but it's by no means exhaustive. God's sense of humor is not in there, and all of us know that he has one. I can look at myself and tell that God has a sense of humor.

But his compassion, it falls under love, but compassion is a specific kind of love. In the

same way that, and the scripture talks about it, even the Lord Jesus, Jesus moved with compassion. It says several different times.

And in the same way, we have a convenient summary of the ministries of the Spirit, but it's not exhaustive. Those five do not exhaust it. For example, convicting.

That's an important functional attribute, and it comes from his indwelling and certainly his filling, but he has a convicting ministry. He has a reminding ministry. And you look at those five attributes, and you can say, well, he's there in different senses, and he has done certain things, but where is the leading us into all truth and bringing to our minds the things that we've learned? That's essential, and it's not in that five-fold summary.

So I'm not a big fan, as you know, of lists and trying to shoehorn things into convenient little boxes. But by your words, you will be justified. By your words, you will be condemned.

This is how it will be determined whether you have gathered and are with the Lord Jesus or whether you have not gathered and are scattered. Your words. Why? Because words express what's in the heart.

Words matter. Words mean things. I find this a wonderfully comforting thought when it comes to the promises of God.

God's words mean things. The hope on which we rest our anticipation of the future, our faith, our love, are all grounded in the words of God. The word of God.

Therefore, verse 31, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. To an English major, this seems like a bit of a contradiction, but this is the kind of passage that reminds you that context is important. What if you just proof-texted 31a, printed out, handed out to people? Jesus said every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men.

What does every mean? It means all of them, but B, the second part of the verse, says there's one that isn't forgiven. So in the context, rather than taking this literally, we understand that every other sin, every other blasphemy will be forgiven, but this one will not. And I only point this out as a caution.

Don't let people proof-text you. If you are in a discussion, hopefully a beneficial discussion, where words matter, even as experienced and versed and long in the tooth as I am in handling scripture, if I get into a discussion with someone about something in the Bible, I want my Bible open to that page. I don't want to trust my memory.

I don't want to misrepresent what scripture says. And I want to see the context, because you can't just take a little excerpt and say, well, I don't have to worry. Jesus said every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men.

He didn't even say believers. He says, man, everybody's going to be forgiven every sin and every blasphemy. So what's to worry? Well, you need that jewel of truth in its setting.

So blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven men. Now, when Jesus says blasphemy against the spirit, what's our question? What is it? What is blasphemy against the spirit? Now, Jesus uses this phrase and doesn't explain it, does he? Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, the next verse, it will be forgiven him. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him either in this age or in the age to come.

Why doesn't Jesus say, I mean, this is pretty important, an unforgivable sin, not forgiven now. You look at the parallels in the other gospels and in Mark, the word eternal is in there, *ionios*. It is an eternal sin.

It is a sin, *ionios*. *Hamartia* is the word for sin there. And then you have *ionios*, eternal sin.

Matthew explicates that, if you will, not forgiven in this age or the age to come. Eternal sin. If Jesus is going to go on and talk about trees and snakes and hearts and so on, but he doesn't go back and explain this, what does that tell you? It's already been made clear.

He doesn't need to explain it. We don't have to resort to some other passage or some other source. If he says speak against the Spirit, blaspheme the Spirit, and doesn't explain it, that means we should know from the context what it is.

And this is our immediately preceding context where Jesus heals the demon possessed man who is blind and mute. Notice the emphasis on speaking here. Speaking reflects what's in the heart.

As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, it is no accident that earlier we had Jesus healing a man who was blind and demon possessed. The people say something. The Pharisees say something.

Here we have blind and mute. And he can both see and speak after Jesus heals him. And his speaking is now the issue.

Speaking, it's not an accident. It's not a conflation. It's not a duplication of the earlier miracle that we saw.

So the Pharisees say he does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. This power is from Satan. It's a trick.

Satan puts a demon in there. Then Satan comes and casts it out. And this is to

authenticate a satanic representative.

He's in league with the is what they say. So Jesus says that expression, that idea is a blasphemy of the spirit. Because Jesus says not you have insulted me by saying I'm in league with Satan.

He says you have insulted the power by which if I cast out demons by the spirit of God. So it's not you could say, well, aren't they speaking a word against Jesus because he's in league with Satan. They're basing their idea that he's in league with Satan on the notion that he is invoking the power of Satan instead of the power of God.

Here is the power of God made manifest in healing and authority over demons. They say that power and authority is not from God. It's from Beelzebul denying the work of God, denying the manifestation.

Now, as a review, as something we've learned in many times in the past, what is the purpose of miracles in Jesus ministry and many other places in scripture? But what is the function and purpose of these miracles where the power of God is manifest? Why did God say he raised up Pharaoh? I have raised you up that I can show my power in you. You're there being obstreperous and contrary, not because you're not elect and can't be saved, but you came to the throne of Egypt so that my mighty power can be demonstrated in delivering my people. It will be undeniably, inescapably the power of the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It can't be denied. It can't be mistaken. And your recalcitrant and obstreperous attitude is the means by which God is going to be able to do this a total of 10 times in delivering his people.

It's the power of God. When they came to the land, you remember we reviewed not too long ago, the whitewashing of the cliff and the writing of the law of God on the cliff as a testimony, the word of God as a testimony, an opportunity for the people in the land to recognize that this mighty and powerful God, Rahab says, we've heard about your God. We know all about him.

We heard, and remember this is, you know, 40 years later, but they've not forgotten it's within their lifetime and their parents telling their children, boy, you should have seen what happened down in Egypt. We've heard about it. The caravan people gave us graphic descriptions of the darkness and the lice and the frogs and the blood in the water and the moraine, the boils, and ultimately the death of the firstborn and the marching out of the Israelites.

This electrified the entire civilized world, the known world, the populated world. Everybody knew about this. It was the biggest thing that had happened in centuries, maybe ever since the flood.

So everybody knew about it. And with the word of that God written in the land of Canaan there, Mount Ebal, Mount Gerizim, they were to go in and the first thing is post this word. Anybody that looks at that, understands it, comes to Israel as a proselyte, can join with us.

He who is not with us is against us. He who does not gather with us is going to be scattered, is going to be judged. It's an Old Testament truth.

It's a New Testament truth. And Jesus states it here. So to construe the manifestation of the power of God as opposite of God, as evil and not good, is to blaspheme the spirit because the active expression of the power of God is done by the Holy Spirit.

This is how I know, and as we've learned over the years and seen many times, Jesus did not do his miracles in his power and status as the second person of the every healing, every knowing the inner thoughts of men, every prophecy, every word that proceeded from his mouth came through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, just as it should for us. We are body of Christ and we should be energized, guided and speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, just as the Lord Jesus did. We know from Philippians 2 that Jesus emptied himself of his divine status.

He took on the form of a servant and came in the likeness of men. And his works were done in the power of the spirit. And he states it here, by the power of the spirit, I cast out demons.

And this is the mark that the kingdom of God has come upon you. The kingdom of God has come upon you. So to say, no, it's not God and it's not the spirit of God, it's evil, is to blaspheme the spirit.

Now, because of this contemporary truth, commentators will say, and I could read you any number of them. You can look this up online or in a commentary, almost universally. I was taught this in seminary, that the unforgivable sin was only possible in the days of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus.

And the Pharisees who claimed that he was casting out demons by Beelzebub, were in fact guilty of this eternal sin. But once Jesus left and went to glory, this sin was no longer possible because blasphemy of the spirit is to say that Jesus is doing his works in the power of Satan, when you have observed them at firsthand. In my view, in my understanding, there is a kernel of truth in that.

There is a truth, but it doesn't require personal observation of Jesus casting out a demon to commit that sin. Anytime someone becomes aware of the Lord Jesus and his person and work, God, the Holy Spirit is there affirming, convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Jesus says in the center of those three of righteousness, because I go to the Father, I'm not here.

So the Holy Spirit is going to affirm who I am, why I came, what the issue is in the same way that he did when I was here. But the Holy Spirit is going to convict the world of righteousness because I go to the Father. So to say it could only be committed by a Pharisee who actually, what about a Pharisee back in the Sanhedrin, two or three of them come out, they see Jesus cast out a demon, they go back and they say, well, you know, that Jesus appeared to cast out a demon, but I think he did by Beelzebul.

And the other guy says, oh, I think you're right. Well, so one of them has committed an eternal sin, but the other has not because he didn't personally see it. What about somebody in the next generation? An old, old Pharisee tells his grandkids, well, there was this Jesus.

And they say, well, I'm sure grandpa's right. And he was a tool of the devil, but grandpa's committed an eternal sin. And the witnesses who believe his testimony and concur are not guilty just because of the sight.

Is there something unique about having seen it that is different than that witness and testimony of scripture with the power of affirmation of God's Holy Spirit? I don't think so. So in my view, the reason we have this in scripture, it wouldn't really make a lot of sense if it only pertains to the Pharisees or to those who were on the scene during Jesus' earthly ministry to deny the Holy Spirit's vetting, his identification, his persuasive testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ doesn't require watching Jesus cast out a demon. It is universal from the time of the Lord Jesus in his first advent, his first coming until now, the Holy Spirit has been testifying about the Lord Jesus and to blaspheme that testimony to say, that is not a good thing.

That is not a true thing. That is not a manifestation of God. That's the opposite.

There are people who all down through history have vilified Christianity and tried to stamp it out and said that it is the cause of the world's ills and it is the corruptor of people's hearts and the church just wants to wield power, which in some cases is true. The church, capital C, has in fact perverted and distorted the Bible and Christianity into something that meets that definition. And in so doing, they have blasphemed the Holy Spirit in the sense of replacing him and setting him aside and saying, we will be the arbiters.

We will be the go-betweens between you and God, the God of the Bible. We will be the priests. We will be the fathers.

We will be the intermediaries. We will represent you. And to elbow aside, not only the Lord Jesus, but the Holy Spirit is an accountable act and says, well, the biblical view that the Holy Spirit is your representative and he communicates your prayers directly to the throne with groanings that cannot be uttered.

And you have the witness of God in your heart through the Holy Spirit, not through the church, capital C. I don't want to be anywhere near that entity or anybody in it, anybody functional who followed that path. In many cases, if not most cases, I think that is going to constitute the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit by negating and denying his work and saying, like the Pharisees did, we are your arbiters. We are your leaders.

We'll tell you what God has to say. And this guy isn't it. So it is an eternal sin.

It is an unforgivable sin, both now and in the future. Why? Because to deny the witness of the Spirit is inevitably to deny Christ. Now, what does it mean to speak against the son of man? He says, you can speak against me and it will be forgiven.

Well, this is very fascinating because are not all the members of the Trinity co-equal and co-eternal? If you blaspheme the Spirit, aren't you by definition blaspheming Jesus and the Father? Why is the Father not mentioned in here? Why is it only the son of man and the Spirit? Is it just because these particular guys didn't think they were blaspheming the Father? But in particular, how do you distinguish speaking against Jesus versus speaking against the Spirit? Well, this is something we're going to cover in our second session. But as a point of conclusion and application now, think about this. Think about what we've studied the last few weeks.

What was the thrust? What was the emphasis? A house divided against itself cannot stand. Unity in the faith, unity of the Spirit is important, right? We are unified by the Spirit. We are all baptized by the Spirit into one body.

No part of the body can say to another body part, I have no need of you, right? So, number one principle, unity. Unity in the body of Christ is a high, high priority. You should only let unity go as a last resort.

We endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit and bond of peace at almost all costs. The only cost you cannot pay is that of faithlessness or compromise of essentials. But to the extent that it is up to us, we should live peaceably with all men and in particular with brethren.

If something is a divisive issue, then don't talk about that. Don't bring that up. Let's just lay that aside and agree to disagree.

And we'll all find out when the Lord comes back who got that particular point right. But to divide over small things is unbiblical and dangerous. So unity, number one.

Number two, the testimony of the Spirit is so important that to deny it is an eternal sin. Unity of and in and through the Spirit and coming to truth, identifying truth, believing truth, operating in truth in the presence and power of the Spirit is very important. So, if denying the witness of the Spirit and His ministry of unification is so important, what should we be looking for when we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith? A. How

am I treating my fellow believers? Am I being and doing and thinking those things that promote unity rather than division among believers? I'm not talking about unity with the world or unity with movements or agendas or crusades.

I'm talking about unity with fellow believers who in some way, shape or form seem to be gathering with the Lord Jesus and not scattering. However doctrinally impure or confused someone may be, are they positively disposed toward God and His Son and His Spirit? Then we should be unified, not squabbling over petty things. Take one for the team if you get shorted or insulted or become a victim of inconsideration or abrasion of some sort.

Unity is extremely important. Now, we understand that blaspheming the Spirit is to deny His witness to truth, in this case specifically the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. What is the great confession that Peter is going to make? Who do men say that I am? Well, you might be a prophet, you might be this, you might be that.

Who do you say that I am? You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, right? To deny that truth is to blaspheme the testimony of the Spirit who has affirmed that truth. Now, if that is an eternal and unforgivable sin and will result in a trip to the lake of fire for utter and complete destruction and annihilation because you are denying the witness and testimony of the Spirit, how important do you think it is for us to be sensitive to the witness and the testimony of the Holy Spirit as believers? Does God only consider ignoring the Spirit important in His convicting ministry for salvation? This reminds me of how you treat a president. Trying to assassinate the president is like any other attempted murder crime in one sense, but it's got a whole special category in federal law, right? There is a special punishment, there are special provisions and penalties if you try to assassinate the president.

Why? From the government's point of view, he's about the most important single individual in the country. And so to try to murder him comes with excessive special punishments and persuasions against it. So when we think of the president in other than assassination terms, should we not also realize that because that law emphasizes how important he is, we should be respectful of the office, we should be deferential to the office, we should understand other things about that office because the provisions in the law point out and are another form of testimony to how important that is.

Well, if blaspheming the Spirit is the basis for no salvation and eternal condemnation, does it mean that, well, once we're saved, we just dismiss and are uninterested in the testimony of the Spirit? If God considers the testimony of the Spirit that important, how much attention should we be trying to pay on an ongoing daily basis to the witness and testimony of the Spirit in our souls as he brings to our minds the Word of God, leads us into all truth, helps us in the area of prayer and understanding what the will of the Lord is, provides the power to unify us where human glue won't work? How important should

we consider the testimony of the Holy Spirit looking at a passage like this? Food for thought. Let's pause here and when we come back, we'll pick up and see what the rest of this has to say. How can you make a tree good? We'll find that out.