

## THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN

**Pastor, that is a very hard line, don't you think?**

Well, welcome back, Ben. It's been far too long since you've interrupted one of my messages. But here you are, one year of seminary under your belt, nearly a year of marriage behind you -- a wiser, more experienced Ben Petersen.

**I am your humble servant.**

And still the right attitude. Well done. Anyway, you were saying?

**I said, that is a very hard line, don't you think?**

Which?

**The Bible text you just read -- which says there is such a thing as an eternal sin -- a sin which is NOT forgiven.**

Why do you say that it's a hard line?

**Well, we are very used to God's mercy being shown to everyone in the Bible -- from adulterers to tax collectors -- to sinners of every sort. Saul of Tarsus, for instance, was going about gathering Christians for persecution -- he was a first century torturer of God's people -- and yet God rescues him and transforms him into the great Apostle Paul. Then there was the woman caught in adultery and ready to be stoned by the angry mob. Again, Jesus brings forgiveness and grace to her -- and sends the mob away. Over and over again we see God reaching out to people who have strayed -- from the wayward Jacob to the sinful people of Nineveh. It seems -- well -- out of character to hear Jesus say that there is a sin that can't be forgiven.**

I get you. And yet, certainly it seems clear from the Bible that not all are saved -- that not everyone receives the gift of eternal life? It seems clear that there are some that reject the Gospel.

**Yes, I realize that. But this seems a little different. It seems here like Jesus is warning against a particular sin that leads to certain destruction -- certain damnation; and I wonder what it is about this particular sin that makes it unforgivable. Is it possible that I could commit this sin, or you, or someone else in this room?**

Alright, Ben, so let me tell you about my tiling project.

**What? I'm talking eternal life and death and you want to talk about home improvement?**

Humor me. I have a point.

**Oh, well there's a new thing. Go on.**

You've been in my house and seen how I laid down that tile in my hallway, laundry room and downstairs bathroom, right?

**Yes.**

Pretty nice job, don't you think? Did you like the way the lines all came together?

**Lovely, Pastor. Just lovely.**

Alright, so the other day we smoothed in the grout. That is, we took this bucket of stuff and used a trowel and a sponge to gently ease the cement-like substance into the seams of the tile. It was kind of easy to do.

**Didn't I hear that your wife did all that?**

You're getting distracted, Ben. Let's stay on target.

**Alright, but is there a point in our future?**

So, the grout was so soft and pliant that it worked its way easily into the lines, and then we...

**...you mean Amy**

Whatever... and then we sponged it off and let it sit for three days until it completely hardened. Today you're not going to move that stuff with a trowel. To get it out of the seams you would have to chip away at it with a chisel and hammer, and even then it would be very hard to remove.

**So what's that have to do with the unforgivable sin.**

Well, I want you to picture a person's heart much like that soft, pliant grout that is being smoothed onto the tiles.

**Okay.**

The soft heart is the heart which has been moved by the Holy Spirit and is ready to be molded and shaped by God – ready to let His will and His plans lead it into the places he wants it to go. It is the heart that says, "Though I may feel differently, desire something else, yearn to do what my sinful flesh tells me to do, I submit my will to the Father's and am ready to let His Spirit work His way with my life."

**And God works with such an attitude to accomplish great things in His people.**

Exactly. Moses, for instance, despite his fervent desire that God choose someone else to be the voice of Deliverance before Pharaoh, ultimately goes forward unto Egypt and does what he's called to do. Many of the prophets were initially reluctant, but were empowered by God to do what He wanted.

**So, a soft heart can be used mightily by God.**

Yes. But... there is something that works against the soft heart to seek to turn it to stone – something that works against the Spirit of God and wants to steal our hearts to be nearly impenetrable to God's love.

**What's that, Pastor?**

It's living in persistent and unrepentant sin. That is, when someone knows what God wants and makes the constant and persistent choice to do the opposite despite his conviction that God desires differently.

**That's the sin against the Holy Spirit?**

Not quite. But it certainly can lead to the sin against the Holy Spirit. You see, when we choose to deliberately act in disobedience to God even when we are convinced that God opposes what we are doing or how we are living, then we are living, every day, in opposition to Him who saved us.

**I see. And that can be very dangerous because, when we make such a choice it's as if we are pushing away the very One Who saved us -- cutting ourselves off from the very One who can bring us life.**

Right. And little by little, as we make that choice, the soft heart, like the grout in my tiles, gets harder and harder and harder.

**So, I'm imagining someone like a drug dealer, who, every day is peddling something he knows is harmful to the people he sells to, and yet he deliberately chooses to keep selling.**

Or the sexual predator, who, despite the innate evil in what he does, is more motivated by his own desires and lusts.

**Or the dishonest businessman, who deliberately mistreats his customers, and willfully disregards the way he knows God wants him to treat other people.**

Yes. Willful, deliberate sin can be found in the relationships we choose or how we live within them. It can be found in the way we choose to talk about other people. It can be found in addictions, lies, disrespect for parents and disregard for God.

**But all of that can be forgiven, right? I mean, if a person repents of his willful sin and trusts in Jesus Christ for his or her forgiveness, then even these things can be forgiven, no?**

Yes. As the text says (and the quote on the front of the bulletin) Jesus death on the cross paid the price for all sins, and His Holy Spirit can soften even a very hard heart and lead it back to repentance. He is gracious and merciful and yearns to lead us back into His loving embrace.

**So, I'm still confused. What is this sin against the Holy Spirit?**

Okay. So picture the grout that has completely hardened -- so stiff that there is no turning back -- so set in its place that it not only is immobile but also so determined to be where it is that it will do anything, and I mean anything to stay in its place.

**I see, so you're referring to those whose spiritual hearts have hardened beyond any turning back.**

The Pharisees in our text, for instance, who knew in their heart of hearts that Jesus was faithful to God and truly accomplishing miracles as the Messiah -- who recognized that He was sent from God and doing God's work -- and yet, so set were they in darkness, so steeped were they in their own pride, that rather than praising God for the gift of the Savior, they blaspheme the Holy Spirit by calling His work the work of the Devil Himself.

**In other words, their hearts are so hopelessly set on their own sinful course of action, that they care not a bit about seeking the true God or whether they have honored Him.**

Yes, even though they can see it plainly in the miracles He performs. They are like Old Testament Pharaoh, whose hardened

heart mocked the God of Israel despite the convincing miracles of the plagues. Or King Saul, whose hatred and jealousy against David so hardened his heart that he ultimately seeks guidance from the very place God had forbidden -- a witch.

**So what you're saying, Pastor, is that those who have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit don't actually care that they have committed this sin. They are so hardened in their evil that they only mock God, reject all efforts of His Holy Spirit, and refuse to believe the truths that He makes plain to them.**

Exactly. So if you care that you might have committed this sin, then you haven't. However, if you are living in persistent, unrepentant sin, then it's important to realize that you are giving the Tempter a foothold to harden your heart and chip away at your faith.

**So we should regularly be examining our lives and checking our spiritual pulses to see if there is anything which is steeling our heart against God's plans and purposes for us.**

Yes, and we must ever cling to Jesus and His love for us, trusting in Him to wash away our sin; and trusting in His Holy Spirit to soften our hearts.

**In our baptism we are called, every day, to drown the Old Adam and bring forth the New Man who is brought forth by the Holy Spirit.**

Yes! And in Holy Communion, we are called to receive from Jesus the greatest gifts of His own body and blood to bring us forgiveness and to soften our hearts.

**Well, Pastor, thanks for working on that hard question with me. The unforgivable sin can be kinda confusing.**

No problem, Ben. And it's important for all of us, as God's people, to keep an eye on ourselves and our actions lest we give the Tempter a foothold to try and harden our hearts.

**And to keep our eyes focused always on Him who loved us, who saved us, and who sends us His Holy Spirit.**

Exactly. Well, welcome back, Ben. How long are you staying with us?

**I'm leaving tomorrow.**

Well, as always, great to see you.

**Oh, and, by the way, I'm thinking your new floor of yours will last approximately thirteen years.**

Wow. How can you possibly know that?

**Well, I'm only doing my math, and I'm guessing by then it will be time for you to re-tile.**

Ba dum dum. Ben, you're gonna be a great Pastor someday.