

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON III : BEGINNING OF THE SECOND TOUR OF GALILEE / THE "BUSY DAY" / BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
12:22-37	3:19-30	8:1-3		Matt 9:27-34; Luke 11:14-36

The harmonies I use differ at this point:

- A. T. Robertson parallels Mt 12:22-37 || Mk 3:20-30 but makes Luke 11:14-36 a separate occasion which he says takes place in Judea. "It is perfectly natural that the blasphemous accusation made in Galilee, and probably more than once (Matt 9:34), should be repeated a year or so afterward in Judea or Perea, and that Jesus should make substantially the same argument in reply. This sort of thing occurs to every traveling religious teacher. Our Lord does not here [in Lk 11] give the solemn warning that such an accusation is really blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, and is unpardonable. And the subsequent occurrences are quite different in the two cases. In Matt 12 || Mk 3 He afterwards goes out by the lake-side and gives the great group of parables, presently explaining some of them to the disciples in a house, and then crosses the lake to Gerasa, etc. Here in Luke 11 He breakfasts with a Pharisee, and utters such solemn woes against the Pharisees as are found only in the closing months of His ministry, and then gives to vast multitudes a series of instructions wholly unlike the great group of parables. So it is quite unsuitable to identify this occurrence with that of Matt 12 || Mk 3." [Robertson, *Harmony*] Edersheim agrees the Luke passage relates a later incidence.
- Stevens and Burton's Harmony all three occasions: Matt 12 || Mk 3 || Lk 11, although they put the Luke passage in parenthesis indicating a similar yet not necessarily a parallel passage. No explanation is given to their reasons.
- Baker's Harmony makes all three passages parallel. "The narrative of Luke is obviously parallel, although given by him in a different place." [Baker, *Harmony*] Hendriksen lists the accounts as all parallel.

I confess I have no superior knowledge as to which of these three harmonies is correct. When they have previously differed I have followed Robertson so (right or wrong) I will do so in this case as well.

Luke 8:1-3 *And it came to pass afterward, that He went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with Him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance.* : throughout every city and village; i.e. of Galilee. This begins what is called Jesus' Second Tour in Galilee.

Mary Magdalene: her name probably derived from her native city Magdala, a Sabbath-day's journey from Tiberias and celebrated for its dye-works and fine woolen textures. Jewish tradition states the city was one of great wealth but also great moral corruption, of which the rabbis attributed its final destruction. "Mary Magdalene is commonly thought to have been a prostitute before she came to the knowledge of Christ, and then to have been a remarkable penitent. So historians and painters represent her: but neither from this passage, nor from any other of the NT, can such a supposition be legitimately drawn.... Poor Mary Magdalene is made the patroness of penitent prostitutes, both by Papists and Protestants; and to the scandal of her name, and the reproach of the Gospel, houses fitted up for the reception of such are termed Magdalene hospitals! and the persons themselves Magdalenes! There is not only no proof that this person was such as commentators represent her, but there is the strongest presumptive proof against it: for, if she ever had been such, it would have been contrary to every rule of prudence, and every dictate of wisdom, for Christ and His apostles to have permitted such a person to associate with them, however fully she might have been converted to God, and however exemplary her life, at that time, might have been. As the world, who had seen her conduct, and knew her character (had she been such as is insinuated) could not see the inward change, and as they sought to overwhelm Christ and His disciples with obloquy and reproach on every occasion, they would certainly have availed themselves of so favorable an opportunity to subject the character and ministry of Christ to the blackest censure, had He permitted even a converted prostitute to minister to Him and His disciples. They were ready enough to say that He was the friend of publicans and sinners, because He conversed with them in order to instruct and save their souls; but they could never say He was a friend of prostitutes, because it does not appear that such persons ever came to Christ; or that He, in the way of His ministry, ever went to them. I conclude therefore that the common opinion is a vile slander on the character of one of the best women mentioned in the Gospel of God; and a reproach cast on the character and conduct of Christ and his disciples. From the whole account of Mary Magdalene, it is highly probable that she was a person of great respectability in that place; such a person as the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, could associate with, and a person on whose conduct or character the calumniating Jews could cast no aspersions." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Joanna: some state this was the wife of the court official whose son Jesus had healed by the word spoken in Cana (Jn 4:46-54). Possible but not likely, the absence of any reference to the event seems rather to oppose this supposition. Herod's steward: though the original word signifies sometimes the inspector or overseer of a province, and sometimes a tutor of children, yet here it seems

to signify the overseer of Herod's domestic affairs: the steward of his household.

Susanna: the last to be mentioned by name to have served Christ and His disciples. Her name means "lily". The other names are not written on the page of earth's history but only on that of the 'Lamb's book of Life.'

Mark 3:20,21 And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when His friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself. : We're back in Mark for the first time since the calling of the apostles. What followed was the Sermon on the Mount, but Mark being a gospel of action does not specialize in discourse material.

Jesus was apparently at "home" in Capernaum His headquarters, again with a large crowd outside the house. So many were they that came, Christ and the disciples could not even sit at meal. "Eat bread" is the equivalent of eating a meal, eating.

Who were those who came thinking Christ was insane and desired to take Him? They were οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ (hoi par' autou) meaning literally "*those belong to him, those from his side*". The meaning is rather ambiguous. The typical interpretation is that it refers to Jesus' immediate family; i.e. to Mary and His half-brothers. In support of this (from Hendriksen):

- "Family" (parents and other relatives) is the meaning of the phrase in Prov 21:21 and the apocryphal writing of Susanna 33. In contrast to this however, there are many other occurrences where the word has other meanings: 1 Macc 9:44; 11:73; 12:27; 13:52; 15:15 gives the meaning of "his men", "his envoys", "his company", "his adherents or followers". It is used elsewhere to mean neighbors, agents, friends, etc.
- Jn 7:5 says "even His brothers did not believe in Him". In contrast to this, although unbelievers it does not say they thought Him crazed. Whether His family was included in this verse is unknown, but at least Jn 7:5 provides no support.
- Later in the context of Mark Jesus' family is mentioned (v31-35). In contrast to this however "it is doubtful if Mark meant to anticipate v31 in this way". [F. C. Grant, *Gospel According to Mark*; quoted in Hendriksen, *Mark*]
- The tension later in the chapter could easily be explained by His family originating — or at least giving credence to — the opinion that Jesus was out of His mind. In contrast to this it must be noticed that later those involved are His half-brothers and mother. "With respect to Mary: even though it is true that she erred at times and that her criticisms and attempts at interference with Christ's program were always firmly reproofed, yet we have no reason to doubt that the relation between Mary and Jesus was ever one of tenderness and respect, proceeding from both sides. There is no reason to believe that Mary's faith in God's revelation regarding her 'firstborn son' was ever obliterated to the extent that she regarded Jesus as having lost His mind. The burden of proof rests entirely on those who think otherwise." [Hendriksen, *Mark*]

In agreement with the interpretation that it refers to His family is several modern translations that translates the phrase "His family" (Beck, Good News for Modern Man, NEB, etc) or "His relatives" (Goodspeed, Phillips, Berkeley, Weymouth, Jerusalem Bible) or something similar. Wuest: "*And having heard, those nearest to Him among His kinsfolk...*". "Either disciples or relatives are intended, and as the former were on the spot, [those belonging to Him] could hardly apply to them. We are thus led to think of His family at Nazareth, whose coming is announced in Mk 3:31." [Swete, *Mark*] "His friends: Literally *they who were from beside him*, i.e., by origin or birth. His mother and brethren. Wycliffe's: *kinsmen*. Tyndale: *they that belonged unto him*. Not His disciples, since they were in the house with Him." [Vincent, *Word Studies*] In opposition to that interpretation other translations give the rendering as "His friends" (KJV, ARV, RSV, Living NT, etc).

Why would His associates (whoever they were) think Jesus was on the verge of insanity? Possible reasons: at times Jesus acted strangely according to man's concepts, like when everyone wanted to return to Capernaum to the crowds and Jesus said "Let's go elsewhere". Jesus was also always against the "established" religious leaders, unwise for one who wanted to get ahead in this world. He pronounces pardon as if He were God Himself. He associates with sinners and tax collectors, those outside of social acceptance. **"Let a Christian but neglect the care of his body for a time, in striving to enter in at the strait gate; let a minister of Christ but impair his health by his pastoral labors; presently 'he is distracted'; he has 'not the least conduct nor discretion'. But let a man forget his soul, let him destroy his health by debaucheries, let him expose his life through ambition, and he may, notwithstanding, pass for a very prudent and sensible man!"** [Clarke, *Commentary*] "The main consideration that led those who stood in some undefined relation to Him to arrive at this judgment may well have to be found in the immediate context. That context indicates that it was especially Christ's willingness to move from one large crowd to another, teaching, healing, casting out demons, and now His presence among a throng so large that He and His disciples did not even have an opportunity to eat, that led to the remark, 'He is out of His mind.' It was — at least seems to have been — what looked to his friends as His slighting of rest, recreation, and refreshment, that occasioned the exclamation.... Is it not possible that all of this caused the friends to think, 'He is altogether too hard on Himself,' and to say, 'He is mentally unbalanced, is being consumed by religious frenzy'? Granted that this judgement, no matter how well intentioned, was untrue and unjust, is it not understandable? If even The Twelve, who benefitted from close and constant fellowship with Jesus, were often confused, we can well imagine that those friends of Jesus who were further removed from Him might indeed have interpreted His behavior, so strange by human standards, to be that of a person who had lost his mind." [Hendriksen, *Mark*]

As the Master, so His followers: St. Francis of Assisi was called "the mad son of Bernadone; Martin Luther was said regarded by even some of his former sympathizers as a fool and one possessed by the devil.

They said: “Imperfect tense. Very graphic, *they kept saying*.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Matt 12:22,23 *Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?* : The people never got familiar with the miracles of Christ and were therefore amazed. Their response is literally “Is this the Son of David?” with the “not” supplied by the translators. Bruce says the Greek is formed in such a way to suggest a negative answer: “They can hardly believe what the fact seems to suggest, ‘can this possibly be?’, etc. Not much capacity for faith in the average Israelite, yet honest-hearted compared with the Pharisee.” [Bruce, *Gk NT*] “The question is introduced in the Greek by *māti*, which expects the answer ‘no’ but allows for the faint possibility that it may be ‘yes’. So RSV and Knox ‘*Can this be?*’” [Tasker, *Matthew*] Wuest: “*This man, is He perchance the son of David?*”

Matt 12:24 *But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.*

Mark 3:22 *And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth He out devils.*

The Pharisees had sent Scribes to spy on Jesus but not lay hold of Him, “Galilee not being under the direct jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin then.” [Bruce, *Gk NT*] They came just as Jesus had healed a demon-possessed man who could neither see nor speak. The crowd was amazed, the Pharisees frustrated. The Pharisees would have loved to have said, “He does not cast out devils at all” but the fact was undeniable. They could not remain silent and allow the crowd to entertain thoughts that Jesus was the Messiah, so they ascribed Jesus’ power to Satan. **Moved by envy that they were losing their crowd to Jesus, the responded wickedly.** “Whether the Pharisees believed this theory may be doubted. It was enough that it was plausible. **To reason with such men is vain.**” [Bruce, *Gk NT*] **Compare this with the attitude of John the Baptist when he was losing his followers to Jesus.**

This tactic was not new to the Pharisees but had been used on John the Baptist as well (Matt 11:18). “This was their former concoction. It was old and stale, yet for lack of a better or more bitter suggestion, they stick to it.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

Beelzebub = Gk βεελζεβοῦλ (beelzeboul), probably from the OT Baal-zebub. Both Beelzebub and Beelzebub seem by derivation to be terms of abuse denoting worthlessness. While there are uncertainties concerning the origin and transmission of the word, one thing is certain: the reference is to the prince of the demons, i.e. Satan. Baal was worshiped at Ekron as Baal-zebub in 1 Kings 1:2,3,6 possibly a reference to “the lord of the carrion-fly”, and therefore the protector against that nuisance. “Beelzebub — the ‘filth god’, — was the name given by Jewish wit and contempt to Beelzebub — ‘the lord of the (royal) habitation’ — a god of the Phoenicians.” [Geikie, *Life and Words*; quoted in Pentecost, *Words and Works*]

More than Jesus receiving His power from Beelzebub, **they ascribed Beelzebub as being inside the soul of Jesus.** “They regarded Jesus, as not only temporarily but permanently possessed by a demon, that is, as the constant vehicle of Satanic influence. And this demon was, according to them, none other than Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. Thus in their view, it was really Satan who acted in and through Him; and Jesus, instead of being recognized as the Son of God, was regarded as an incarnation of Satan; instead of being owned as the Messiah, was denounced and treated as the representative of the Kingdom of Darkness.” [Edersheim, *Life of Messiah*] Christ responds by refuting the charge (*how can Satan cast out Satan?*), by an explanation of Christ’s demon expulsion (*as Christ having bound Satan*), and an exhortation (*consider your hearts*).

Matt 12:25,26 *And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?*

Mark 3:23-26 *And He called them unto Him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.*

Note in the accounts of the Pharisees it is given in the third person (“he”) rather than the second (“you”) meaning they were not directly attacking Jesus but rather working “behind His back.” Jesus knew their thoughts (Matthew’s account) and called them unto Him (Mark’s account) to refute the slander.

“The reasoning of the Pharisees (Matt 12:24) was not expressed, and Jesus, knowing their thoughts, gave them ample proof of His omniscience. This, with our Lord’s masterly confutation of their reasoning, by a conclusion drawn from their own premises, **one would have supposed might have humbled and convinced these men; but the most conclusive reasoning, and the most astonishing miracles, were lost upon a people who were obstinately determined to disbelieve every thing good, relative to Christ.** How true the saying: *He came unto his own, and his own received him not!*” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Jesus points out the ridiculous nature of the charge. If what the Pharisees were saying was true, Satan would be casting out Satan, how can that be? “If their charge were true, the ruler would be destroying his own realm; the prince, his own principedom. First, he would be sending out his envoys, the demons, to work havoc in the hearts and lives of men, destroying them body and soul, often little by little. Afterward, as it were in base ingratitude and suicidal folly, he would be supplying the very power needed for the shameful defeat and expulsion of his own obedient servants. No kingdom, thus divided against itself, can maintain itself. Under similar conditions any household, too, would go down to ruin.” [Hendriksen, *Mark*]

Leaving the narrative for a second, one might respond what Jesus states *does* in fact happen. “Against the argument it might be

objected: kingdoms and cities do become divided against themselves, regardless of fatal consequences, why not also Satan? Why should not that happen to Satan's kingdom which has happened even to the Christian church? **Jesus seems to have credited Satan with more astuteness than is possessed by states, cities and churches. Satan may be wicked, He says in effect, but he is not a fool.**" [Bruce, *Gk NT*]

Matt 12:27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. : "Your children" could not be a reference to the disciples because the Pharisees' prejudice against Jesus would naturally extend to His disciples as well. Therefore the Pharisees must have practiced exorcism themselves among the Jews. **Jesus puts them in a dilemma: either they had to condemn both or explain why they made a difference.** What they would have said is not hard to imagine however. "The Jewish exorcists operated in conventional fashion by use of herbs and magical formulas, and the results were probably insignificant. The practice was sanctioned by custom, and harmless. But in casting out devils, as in all other things, Jesus was original, and His method was too effectual. His power, manifest to all, was His offense." [Bruce, *Gk NT*] **"Envy causes persons often to condemn in one what they approve in another."** [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Matt 12:28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. : If not by Satan then the power must come from the Spirit of God with a natural inference as to the Worker and His work. "Our Lord in effect says — If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then is a new era begun: the divine power has come into distinct conflict with the evil one, and is manifestly victorious. In My person is 'the kingdom of God' inaugurated, and you are placed in a position of gracious advantage by My being among you. But if the devils be not cast out by the Spirit of God, the throne of God is not among you, and you are grievous losers. The overthrow of evil is a clear proof that the kingdom of grace has come." [Spurgeon, *Matthew*] **"The point at issue was: do the events in question mean Satan's kingdom come or God's kingdom come? It must be one or other; make up your minds which."** [Bruce, *Gk NT*]

is come unto you: "come" denotes *is just coming, is come unexpectedly upon you, to appear suddenly, unexpectedly.* "Here it implies that the kingdom has in a real sense arrived, but not yet in its fullness. Jesus was indeed performing works of the kingdom, but the supreme work of the kingdom, His death and resurrection, still lay in the future." [Tasker, *Matthew*]

"They pretended to be in expectation of the kingdom of God, and consequently of the destruction of the kingdom of Satan. But, by being not prepared to receive Christ in these proofs of His Divine mission, they showed that their expectation was but pretended. They were too carnal to mind spiritual things." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Matt 12:29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

Mark 3:27 No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.

Having shown the absurdity of the Pharisees' accusations, Jesus continues to explain what they are witnessing. The typical home owner does not aid a burglar that has broken into his house. Rather the thief must make sure the home owner's restrained prior to taking what he wants. "The application is: **the demoniac is a captive of Satan; in seeking to cure him I show Myself Satan's enemy; in actually curing him I show Myself Satan's Master.**" [Bruce, *Gk NT*] "Jesus by word and deed is depriving Satan of those values which the evil one regards as his own and over which he has been exercising his sinister control. The Lord is casting out Beelzebul's servants, the demons, and is restoring that which through their agency Satan has been doing to men's souls and bodies. Jesus ... has begun to bind Beelzebul, a process of binding or curtailment of power that was going to be further strengthened by means of His victory over Satan on the cross and in the resurrection, ascension, and coronation.... The devil is being, and is progressively going to be, deprived of his 'goods', his 'furniture', that is, of the souls and bodies of men." [Hendriksen, *Mark*]

of a strong man: "Rev. rightly gives the force of the article, *the strong man*. Christ is not citing a general illustration, but is pointing to a specific enemy — Satan. *How can I despoil Satan without first having conquered him?*" [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

goods: σκεῦη (*skeuā*) meaning *household furniture*. "The word originally means *a vessel*, and so mostly in the NT. But also *the entire equipment of a house, collectively: chattels, house-gear.*" [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Wuest: "*But no one is able, having entered the house of the strong man, thoroughly to ransack his equipment...*".

spoil: *make a clean sweep of all that is in the house.* "The use of this compound verb points to the thoroughness of the cures wrought on demoniacs, as in the case of the demoniac of Gadara: quiet, clothed, sane." [Bruce, *Gk NT*] "The verb means, primarily, *to tear in pieces; to carry away*, as the wind; *to efface*, as footsteps. So, generally, *to seize as plunder, snatching right and left.*" [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Matt 12:30 He that is not with Me is against Me; and He that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad. : This comment almost seems out of place, seeming more appropriate to a lukewarm disciple or an undecided hearer than a Pharisee who makes no pretense of being on Christ's side. Others take it to mean "he who, like Me, is not with Satan is against Satan". Pentecost takes it in this manner, sort of an invitation to the surrounding crowd. "Christ called on the multitude for a decision. He warned them of the dire judgement that would come on that generation if they accepted the explanation of the Pharisees and rejected His person." [Pentecost, *Words and Works*] This brings the saying in line with the context but presents another problem: if that is what Christ meant He would have surely expressed Himself differently. Others take this to be the fourth concluding argument against the notion of Jesus in league with Satan. Most modern interpreters take "he that is not with Me" to refer to the Pharisees. **"The**

campaign between God and Satan has begun in earnest, and in that campaign neutrality is impossible. Not to be allied with Jesus and the kingdom of God is to be allied with Satan and the kingdom of evil; and to try to prevent men and women from accepting Jesus as their King, as the Pharisees were trying to do (see Matt 12:23,24), is to disintegrate and scatter those who would otherwise be ‘the sons of the kingdom’ enjoying its reign in their hearts, and that is the devil’s main objective.” [Tasker, *Matthew*]

“In vain do men seek for methods to reconcile God and mammon. There is no medium between loving the Lord and being His enemy — between belonging to Christ or to Satan. If we be on the side of the devil, we must expect to go to the devil’s hell; if we be on the side of Christ, we may expect to go to His heaven. When Christ, His truth and His servants are assaulted, he who does not espouse their cause is not on Christ’s side, but incurs the guilt of deserting and betraying Him. There are many (it is to be feared) in the world who are really against Christ, and scatter abroad, who flatter themselves that they are workers together with him, and of the number of His friends!” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Scattereth abroad: “This seems to have been a proverbial form of speech, and may be a metaphor taken from shepherds. He who does not help the true shepherd to gather His flock into the fold is, most likely, one who wishes to scatter them, that he may have the opportunity of stealing and destroying them. I do not find any parallel to this proverbial mode of speech in the Jewish rabbins, if it be one, nor have I met with it among the Greek or Roman writers.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Matt 12:31,32 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Mark 3:28-30 Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation. Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

Unpardonable: “Pardonable means not that which is or must be pardoned, but which may be pardoned on compliance with proper conditions — that while **any sin unrepentant of, leads ultimately to death, yet as long as the sinner lives, a way of escape is offered to him.** But an unpardonable sin is one which from the moment of its committal is forever without a possible remedy. Though such a sinner may be permitted to live many years, yet the very door of hope is closed against him. It is an eternal sin. It hath never forgiveness.... An sin would be eternal if there were no possible way to escape its punishment. A sin becomes eternal, then, when all gracious means of forgiveness are withdrawn.” [Carroll, *Interpretation*]

Blasphemy: “This is strictly a compound Greek word Anglicized. It is transferred bodily to our language. In Greek literature it is quite familiar and often used. Its meaning is thoroughly established. According to strict etymology, it is **an offense of speech, i.e. of spoken words.** Literally, as a verb, it means **to speak ill or injuriously of any one, to revile or defame.** As a noun, it means **detraction or slander.** I say it means to defame anyone whether man or God. Even in the Bible usage of both the LXX and the Greek NT **the word is generally applied to both man and God.**” [Carroll, *Interpretation*] (Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1 Tim 6:4)

Verses which are applicable to this passage: “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” (Heb 10:26,27 NIV) “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.” (Isa 5:20,21 NIV) The best I came across that put the concept in a nutshell is B. H. Carroll’s: “**It is a sin of character crystalized in opposition to God.**” [Carroll, *Interpretation*] Thoughts on the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit:

- **this is not something which the Pharisees had done but rather were in danger of committing:** note Mark’s passage. “Jesus warns the Jews against it — He does not say they had already committed it.” [Strong, *Systematic Theology*] This refutes the common interpretation of many today which believe blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was the single act of designating Jesus’ actions as being powered by Satan. For example, I know a believer which does not accept the Charismatic movement yet refused to make a definite stand lest that person might be guilty of attributing to Satan something which the Holy Spirit was doing. While I would not be one to attribute the entirety of the Charismatic movement to Satan, I would also have no problem taking a biblical stand on the subject and not worry about blaspheming the Spirit.

- **a progressive willful hardening against the things of God:** “If a man should put out his eyes, he could not see — nothing could make him see. So if a man should by obstinate wickedness destroy his power to believe in God’s forgiveness, he would be in a hopeless state. Though God would still be gracious, the man could not see it, and so could not take God’s forgiveness to himself. **The sin against the Holy Spirit is not to be regarded simply as an isolated act, but also as the external symptom of a heart so radically and finally set against God that no power which God can consistently use will ever save it. This sin, therefore, can be only the culmination of a long course of self-hardening and self-depraving. He who has committed it must be either profoundly indifferent to his own condition, or actively and bitterly hostile to God; so that anxiety or fear on account of one’s condition is evidence that it has not been committed.** The sin against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven, simply because the soul that has committed it has ceased to be receptive of divine influences, even when those influences are exerted in the utmost strength which God has seen fit to employ in His spiritual administration.

- **The commission of this sin is marked by a loss of spiritual sight;** the blind fish of the Mammoth Cave left light for darkness, and so in time lost their sight.
- **It is marked by a loss of religious sensibility;** the sensitive-plant loses its sensitiveness, in proportion to the frequency with which it is touched.
- **It is marked by a loss of power to will the good;** the lava hardens after it has broken from the crater, and in that state cannot return to its source....

It is not that divine grace is absolutely refused to any one who in true penitence asks forgiveness of this sin; but he who commits it never fulfills the subjective conditions upon which forgiveness is possible, because the aggravation of sin to this ultimatum destroys in him all susceptibility of repentance. The way of return to God is closed against no one who does not close it against himself.... [One] has described the progress of sin in the sinner: ‘First it startles him, then it becomes pleasing, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed; then the man is impenitent, then obstinate, then resolved never to repent, then damned.’” [Strong, *Systematic Theology*]

● **it is the willful rejection of the Holy Spirit’s promptings and conviction:** from the context we see: (a) the scribes crediting Satan that which the Holy Spirit through Jesus was doing; (b) this was wilful, deliberate, in spite of all evidence contrary to their accusations; (c) there is a progression to this sin as may be seen in Mk 2:7; 3:6, 22. To be forgiven requires repentance and sorrow for sin. **“This is the sin of the wilfully blind, who persistently refuse the illumination of the Spirit, oppose the Spirit’s work, and justify themselves in doing so by deliberately misrepresenting Him. For such there can be no forgiveness, for they have refused the only way of forgiveness that God has provided.”** [Cole, *Mark*] “By means of their own criminal and completely inexcusable callousness, they were dooming themselves. Their sin is unpardonable because they were unwilling to tread the path that leads to pardon. The message of the gospel may cause him to cry out, ‘O God be merciful to me, the sinner’. But when a man has become hardened, so that he has made up his mind not to pay any attention to the promptings of the Spirit, not even to listen to his pleading and warning voice, he has placed himself on the road that leads to perdition.... For anyone who is truly penitent, no matter how shameful his transgressions may have been, there is no reason to despair (Ps 103:12; Isa 1:18; 44:22; 55:6,7; Mic 7:18-20; 1 Jn 1:9).” [Hendriksen, *Mark*]

● **it is the willful rejection of truth as compared with rejecting due to ignorance:** “Jesus distinguishes between a word against the Son of Man and a word against the Holy Ghost. The reference in the former is to Himself, presumably, though Mark at the corresponding place has ‘the sons of men’ and no special mention of a particular son of man. Christ gives the Pharisees to understand that the *gravamen* [the substantial part of the charge or accusation] of their offense is not that they have spoken evil of Him. Jesus had no exceptional sensitiveness as to personal offences. Nor did He mean to suggest that offences of the kind against Him were more serious or less easily pardonable than such offences against other men, say, the prophets or John the Baptist.... Jesus was as liable to honest misunderstanding as other good men, in some respects more liable than any because of the exceptional originality of His character and conduct. All new things are liable to be misunderstood and decried, and the best for a while to be treated as the worst. Jesus knew this, and allowed for it. Men might therefore honestly misunderstand Him, and be in no danger of the sin against the Holy Ghost (e.g. Saul of Tarsus). On the other hand, men might dishonestly calumniate any ordinary good man, and be very near the unpardonable sin. It is not the *man* that makes the difference, but the source of the blasphemy. If the source be ignorance, misconception, ill-informed prejudice, blasphemy against the Son of Man will be equally pardonable with other sins. If the source be malice, rooted dislike of the good, selfish preference of wrong, because of the advantage it brings, to the right which the good seek to establish, then the sin is not against the man but against the cause, and the Divine Spirit who inspires him, and though the agent be but a humble, imperfect man, the sinner is perilously near the unpardonable point.” [Bruce, *Gk NT*]

● **it is a sin against grace but it does not appear to be limited to the NT times:** support of that could be “*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever*” (Gen 6:3); “*Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone*” (Hosea 4:17); “*But if just one person sins unintentionally, he must bring a year-old female goat for a sin offering... but anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the Lord and that person must be cut off from his people. Because he has despised the Lord’s word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him.*” (Num 15:27, 30, 31) “The Bible teaches two things: (1) that in every age of the past, men were liable to commit the unpardonable sin and that as a matter of fact, some did commit it. (2) that there is now not only the same liability, but that some do now actually commit it. There is something in man which tells him that these scriptures possess for him an awful admonition whose truth is eternal.” [Carroll, *Interpretation*]

In opposition to this teaching are those who believe this cannot happen today. “It is claimed by many intelligent expositors that this sin cannot be committed apart from an age of miracles, nor apart from the specific miracle of casting out demons, nor apart from attributing the supernatural, miraculous power of the Holy Spirit in said miracle to Beelzebub, the prince of demons.” [Carroll, *Interpretation*] B. H. Carroll then refutes this teaching. There are those who declare this was a sin limited to the time of Christ because of their doctrine of salvation. “*If God is sovereign and imparts salvation to the elect by means of irresistible grace, then there cannot be an unpardonable sin which is dependent upon man. To make blasphemy of the Holy Spirit a sin capable of being committed today is to accept Arminian theology in which man makes the choice.*” I accepted that thinking for years but now

“lean upon the unknown”. **While I still accept the sovereign election of God in the salvation of sinners, and still accept the providential guidance of every aspect of life, I also accept the paradox involved of human responsibility.** To accept this does not alter my Calvinistic theology; note the authors quoted above: B. H. Carroll, R. Alan Cole, A. H. Strong (“The Baptist Theologian”), Charles Spurgeon (“The Prince of Preachers”), A. B. Bruce, William Hendriksen, etc. *All of these men hold the Calvinistic doctrines of grace* yet still believe man is responsible to respond to the working of the Holy Spirit. I cannot nor can any man explain all the details but I accept it as a paradoxical truth.

A similar teaching with an eschatological twist is Pentecost who makes the sin national rather than personal. “It is evident that this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could only be committed while Christ was personally present on earth. The sin could only be committed when the nation was being given evidences as to the person of Christ through the miracles which He performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The necessary circumstances do not exist today and consequently this same sin cannot be committed today. Christ was warning that generation in Israel that if they rejected the Father’s testimony and the Spirit’s testimony to His person and His work, there was to be no further evidence that could be given. Their sins would stand unforgiven and result in temporal judgement on that generation. That judgement ultimately fell in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. This sin, then, was not viewed as the sin of an individual but rather as the sin of the nation, and this sin brought that whole generation under divine judgement.” [Pentecost, *Words and Works*]

The summation of this teaching is given in “*Alexander’s Hymn*”, quoted in B. H. Carroll:

*There is a time, we know not when, A point, we know not where,
That marks the destiny of men, To glory or despair.*

*There is a line by us unseen, That crosses every path,
The hidden boundary between God’s patience and His wrath.*

*To pass that limit is to die ~ To die as if by stealth;
It does not quench the beaming eye, Nor pale the glow of health.*

*The conscience may be still at ease, The spirit light and gay;
That which is pleasing still may please, And care be thrust away.*

*But on that forehead God hath set Indelibly a mark.
Unseen by man, for man as yet Is blind and in the dark.*

*And yet the doomed man’s path below, Like Eden may have bloomed;
He did not, does not, will not know Or feel that he is doomed.*

*He knows, he feels that all is well, And every fear is calmed;
He lives, he dies, he wakes in hell, Not only doomed, but damned.*

*Oh! where is this mysterious bourne, By which our path is crossed?
Beyond which God Himself hath sworn, That he who goes is lost?*

*How far may we go on in sin? How long will God forbear?
Where does hope end, and where begin The confines of despair?*

*An answer from the skies is sent; Ye that from God depart,
While it is call to-day, repent, And harden not your heart.*

not in this world, nor world to come: the double negative being given for emphasis. Several commentators quotes the author Lightfoot as explaining it as a reference to the Jewish legal doctrine of the day. According to Lightfoot, the Jews believed certain sins would be forgiven at death; e.g., the profaning of God’s name was unforgivable in this life but for the Jew would have been something expiated at death. Jesus was therefore placing the emphasis upon the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit being such a great

sin that even in the world to come it would not be forgiven.

Matt 12:33 *Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.* : With the word concerning blasphemy the self-defense of Jesus against Pharisees probably ended as recorded in Mark's gospel. Matthew follows with related statements which logically fit the narrative. This verse may be found in Luke's portion of the Sermon on the Mount (Lk 6:45; see lesson 47). **The essential meaning is the nature or heart of man determines his speech and action. "Given the tree, the fruit follow".**

make: used in the sense of *judge, pronounce*. Call both the tree and fruit good or evil, they must both be one of a kind. "Still He argues with the Pharisees, and as good as says, 'Be consistent; accept Me and My works, or reject Me and My works; for by My works only can you judge me. But do not admit the work to be a good one, and then charge Me with being in league with the devil in the doing of it. If I were in league with the devil, I should do works such as the devil does, and not works which shake his kingdom.' The expostulation is most powerful, because it is founded in righteousness: we judge a tree by its fruits, and a man by his actions, and there is no other truthful mode of judging." [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

The saying was applicable to either Christ or the Pharisees. To Christ if the statement is connected with what precedes; to the Pharisees if connected with what follows.

Matt 12:34,35 *O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.* : Jesus and John the Baptist agreed in thinking the Pharisees were vipers, conceiving them as morally hopeless. "John the Baptist wonders that they should come to a baptism of repentance. **Jesus thinks them far on the way to final impenitence. But the point He makes here is that, being what they are, they cannot but speak evil. The poison of their nature must come out in their words.**" [Bruce, *Gk NT*]

treasure: the heart here is conceived in v34 as a fountain of which speech is the overflow, in v35 as a treasure storehouse out of which comes our thoughts and feelings which the mouth freely distributes.

bringeth forth: the word "suggests speech characterized by energy, passion. There was no lack of emphasis in Pharisaic comments on Jesus. **They hissed out their malevolent words at Him, being not heartless but bad-hearted.**" [Bruce, *Gk NT*]
"The word means *to throw or fling out*. The good or evil things come forth out of the treasure of the heart. 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' **The issues of the heart are thrown out, as if under pressure of the abundance within.**" [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Matt 12:36,37 *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.* : since speech originates in the heart, not a word is therefore insignificant, not even that which is idle = *ineffectual, careless, thoughtless, without distinctiveness or interest*. "The word is compounded of *not* + *work*. An idle word is a *non-working word, inoperative word*. It has no legitimate work, no office, no business, but is morally useless and unprofitable." [Vincent, *Word Studies*] **The reference is to all words, those of deliberate thought and those spoken without consideration.**

The judgement spoke of here involves our words, in Matt 25 the judgement involves our works, deeds. This involves no contradiction for words are an index of a good or bad heart.

"They might think that they had done no great wrong when they scattered their black phrases among the people: they had only given their opinion with more or less of levity; at the worst, they had only spoken 'idle words'. Thus they would make light of what they had done now that the Lord had most completely crushed them. But our Lord drives them out of this retreat. He deals strictly with such gross offenders. **Words are to be accounted for at the last great day. Words prove men just, or worthy of condemnation. Their very works may be judged by their words. There is a something very heart-revealing about men's language, and especially about those words which spring from deep-seated passion.** We may, when we are convicted of unjust speech, shield ourselves behind the notion that our bark was worse than our bite, and that we merely said so and so, and hardly meant it to be taken so seriously; but the plea will not avail us. We must mind what we say about godly men, and especially about their Lord; for libelous words will live, and will be swift witnesses against us in the day of judgment, when we shall find that they were all recorded in the book of God." [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]