

Sin that Leads to Death

James Smyda

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I think we're all aware that the Bible clearly tells us that *the wages of sin is death*. All sin is deserving of the death penalty. But the Bible also makes a rather intriguing statement in that regard. It tells us that:

There is a sin that leads unto death and there is a sin that doesn't lead unto death.

How do we reconcile that with the statement that *the wages of sin is death*, just as a general statement? Today we are going to look into that subject to understand the nuances of what is being talked about. If you would like a title for this sermon, it's:

Sin that Leads to Death

We're going to look into this subject and understand why the Bible would talk about a *sin that leads to death* and a *sin that doesn't lead to death* when the Bible clearly tells us that all sin deserves the death penalty. To start looking at this subject let's first turn to 1 John 5—that's where this particular statement is made. Let's start by reading this in context and we'll start analyzing this subject to understand the full ramifications of everything this is getting at.

1 John 5:14 *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*

15) *And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.* (NKJV)

Keep in mind the context here is referring to prayer. We can go to God the Father in prayer and speak directly to Him and He hears us. We have that relationship with Him; that is the context here.

16) *If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.*

There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.

17) *All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.* (NKJV)

We have a puzzling statement from what this is telling us—*there is sin that ultimately leads to death and there is sin that doesn't*. So how are we to understand that? What we're going to see as we go through the sermon—I'll give you a little spoiler alert—what we are talking about is *sin that leads to the sin that leads to the second death in the lake of fire*. This is really what we are getting at, a sin that can be forgiven or is not forgiven and that is the subject we are going to unpack here. Ultimately, not in the specific context, but in the broader view of this subject, there are a couple of categories where

we can wind up in situations where *sin that leads to winding up in the lake of fire*, versus *sin that is forgiven and covered by the sacrifice of Christ*.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the Bible directly tells us that *the wages of sin is death*; that all sin deserves the death penalty. Let's notice that familiar scripture, turn to Romans 6, I'm sure this is a memory scripture.

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NKJV)*

It clearly tells us that all sin deserves the death penalty, but there is a disclaimer saying there is an offering of forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ that could ultimately give even the people of sin, they can still receive eternal life—because of this sacrifice. That is an important concept here and fundamental to the very reason why Christ came to earth and lived His physical life on earth—to be a sacrifice for us. There were numerous purposes that He accomplished in all that He did but this was the primary big picture of what it was about. Turn to John 3:16.

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
17) For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (NKJV)*

In other words, the purpose of sending Christ to earth to live as a physical human being and to die as a sacrifice for us was to take on the sins of mankind and to enable the ability for forgiveness of sin so that we would have the opportunity for eternal life. As we know, just because it's offered doesn't mean everyone receives eternal life. There are a significant number of people who are going to wind up in the lake of fire. So how do we sort this out? We mentioned there is sin that leads to death and sin that doesn't lead to death, so what are we getting at here?

The key is sin that is done in just blatant defiance to God. We're going to see that, yes, the sacrifice of Christ offers forgiveness—we can be forgiven for sins because all sin deserves the death penalty—but there are basically two categories of sin that fall into being able to be forgiven by the sacrifice of Christ. But then there is blatant, defiant sin which does not fall into that category. What I mean by the two categories of sin that can be forgiven, one is just sin that is done in ignorance. When you just didn't know any better. If you think about it, especially if you are a first generation Christian and called into the truth as an adult and you have lived a good bit of your life not understanding the truth at all. Then at some point later in life God opened your eyes and called you into the truth, I'm sure you grew up being taught, you're not supposed to steal, you don't kill people, you don't cheat on your spouse—everybody knows those common-sense rules. But there was a point where you realize, I'm supposed to be keeping the Sabbath and if I don't, that's a sin. I didn't know. No one had told me that was a rule, I didn't understand that. Then you realize you're supposed to be keeping the Holy Days and abstaining from unclean meats—you just didn't know any of that. You were committing

those sins and it was sin to do that but you weren't doing it deliberately, you just weren't even aware of the rules. You did it in ignorance. Look in 1 Timothy, we hear the Apostle Paul talking about this very thing because he applies it to his own life. Paul was a Pharisee and there was a point in his life where he was very actively involved in persecuting the church. He was a nasty guy. When he gets called into the church in the book of Acts, the church members are looking at him with suspicion because he's has a nasty reputation and is known for his persecution and being an enemy. "We don't trust this guy for how he's acted." He talks about all this and the fact that God is willing to forgive him because he didn't know any better. He wasn't defiantly trying to disobey God; he just didn't understand what he was supposed to be doing.

1 Timothy 1:12 *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,
13) although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. (NKJV)*

In other words, I just didn't know any better. I wasn't trying to be a bonehead; I wasn't trying to disobey God. I thought I was being faithful to God; I just didn't know.

14) And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

15) This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

16) However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

17) Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (NKJV)

What he's clearly referring to is, sin that is done in ignorance. When you just didn't know any better, you weren't trying to break the rules, you just didn't realize you were breaking the rules because you didn't know what the rules were. That's one category of sin but as we know, we also commit sins even after we are called into the church. We know and understand what the basic rules are but we still have to overcome our carnal human nature. That's a struggle and a battle and there are times in our lives when we fall into and give into our weakness and we commit sins. We knew better but we just don't successfully overcome our human nature.

A really good example of this is King David. I'm sure everyone is familiar with this story. One of the most commonly known stories about David is the story that the Bible refers to as *the matter of Uriah the Hittite*. We often refer to it as the David and Bathsheba story, but the Bible refers to it as *the matter of Uriah the Hittite*. One of the reasons I think it's referred to like that is because Uriah is really the only innocent victim in this story, who doesn't really hold some guilt in what took place. He is the innocent bystander who didn't do anything wrong in this and is just on the receiving end of everything.

What happened was, one night, David is out on his balcony and looking down and Bathsheba is out taking a bath on the roof of her house in eye shot of David's balcony. The reason I say there is no other innocent victims in this story is, I have a hard time believing that Bathsheba was totally clueless to the idea that the king's balcony has a view of her roof. That if she is out there naked taking a bath, that other people can see her; I have a hard time believing she is totally clueless to this. I think she was aware of that and aware of what she's doing. David looks down on this and he doesn't turn away, he lets his lust get ahold of him. He's not clueless to the fact that she's married. Her husband works for him. David is not clueless to the fact that he's married too. It's not like, "I didn't know this was a problem, I didn't know adultery was a sin". He is fully aware that adultery is a sin. He just let his carnality getting ahold of him, ignores his conscience and winds up committing adultery with her. Then she gets pregnant and now he's in a pickle because her husband has been out fighting in the war and everybody is going to know it's not his kid and this is about to get exposed. So, then he sets Uriah up to get killed. There is no ignorance defense in any of this for David; he knew about it the whole time and just gave in to his carnal human nature.

Fortunately, when all this gets brought to his attention and gets confronted by Nathan the prophet, he realizes, "I messed up and I need to repent because I royally messed up and I need to beg God for forgiveness". He does and does so very sincerely. Let's turn to Psalm 51 and see the very heartfelt repentance that David gives here, begging for his forgiveness. David is clearly not defiant here. He obviously sinned knowingly—it wasn't like he didn't know that adultery was a problem, he was very aware, he just let his carnality get ahold of him. Once he realized this, he bitterly repents and sees his sin and wants to change.

Psalm 51:1 *Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.*
2) *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.*
3) *For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.*
(NKJV)

In other words, he's not making any excuses, he's not saying, "I'm the victim, it's somebody else's fault" and trying to pass the blame. He says, "No, I knew better, I messed up, I fully accept responsibility, please forgive me".

4) *Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.*
5) *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.*
6) *Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.*
7) *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*
8) *Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice.*

- 9) *Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.*
- 10) *Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*
- 11) *Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*
- 12) *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*
- 13) *Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.*
- 14) *Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.*
- 15) *O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.*
- 16) *For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.*
- 17) *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise. (NKJV)*

The difference here is, yes David sinned knowingly—he can't plead an ignorance defense, he can't claim, "I didn't know adultery was wrong. I didn't know setting somebody up to murder them to cover up my sin was a problem". He was fully aware that was a problem and he knew he was breaking the rules, he just let his carnality get a hold of him, he let his power corrupt him. He was in a dangerous situation for a human being. What I mean by that is, human beings with too much power, that power can go to our heads and we think we can get away with it because "I've got the power to do it". That's a dangerous spot for a carnal human being to be in. We can let our carnality run wild. That is unfortunately what happened. Fortunately, he wakes up and realizes it and bitterly repents and asks God forgiveness for it.

The other category we need to look at is someone who sins knowingly and willfully and doesn't care. There is a difference between going into sin because we lost the battle with our weakness and then realize later, "I messed up". Then there is the person who says, "I know I messed up and I don't care". I'm not going to ask forgiveness because I'm happy I did it and I'll do it again. That's the kind of attitude where God goes, don't worry about praying for that individual because they aren't going to get forgiveness because they aren't sorry for what they did. This is addressed in Hebrews 10:26. The key here is an attitude of defiance.

- Hebrews 10:26** *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*
- 27) *but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*
- 28) *Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.*
- 29) *Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?*

30) *For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people."*
31) *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* (NKJV)

Let me share with you the definition of the Greek word as *willfully*. In verse 26 it talks about *sinning willfully*. The Greek word is transliterated into English as *hekousios* and is Strong's #1596 and the definition I'm about to give is from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. It defines this as:

"Voluntarily intentionally, refers to sins committed willingly; those done decidedly and deliberately in the fact of better knowledge."

In other words, the focus is to realize we are talking about *defiance*. It's not just a matter of knowing the difference between right and wrong. In David's example, he clearly knew that adultery was wrong. It wasn't like no one had told him that adultery was a problem. The issue is an attitude of *defiance*. You notice in this verse that it talks about there being *no longer a sacrifice for sin*. This is obviously referring to the sacrifice of Christ and it not applying to that. If you look at the Old Testament sacrificial system, as the book of Hebrews explains in great detail, the whole point of the sacrificial system was to teach us the need for the sacrifice of Christ and what that pointed to—what Christ would ultimately fulfill—when He became the sacrifice for our sins.

The same basic principle plays out in the sacrificial system as well. Turn to Numbers 15:30. We're not going to go through all the details of the sacrificial system, but if you go through the first couple of chapters of Leviticus, it lays out a variety of different types of sacrifices that God commanded Ancient Israel to do. There are different circumstances of what each one is for. There are a lot of unique details, but there is one thing that is excluded from all of this and that is sin that is done in defiance. When there is *willful defiance*, there is not a sacrifice for that.

There are sacrifices for sins that you did in ignorance—you didn't realize what you were doing.

There are sacrifices for, "I knew better but I messed up and I'm sorry I messed up. I let my carnality get ahold of me. Please forgive me".

There are sacrifices for all of that but if you knowingly *defiantly* sin, there is not a sacrifice for that. That is outside of the system because it's pointing to the symbolism here and exactly points to what we just read in Hebrews.

Numbers 15:30 *But the person who does anything presumptuously ...* (NKJV)

That word *presumptuously*—I'm reading from the New King James translation and there is a little (numeral) one in my Bible next to that and if you look in the margin it says *defiantly*. So we are dealing with that issue of *defiance*.

30 continued) ... whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people.

31) Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him." '(NKJV)

What it's saying with the words *being completely cut off*, means "he shall receive the death penalty"—that's what this is getting at. There isn't a sacrifice for this individual. There's not anything symbolic or any kind of forgiveness because he did it blatantly and *defiantly*. He isn't asking for forgiveness. Just to see, as I mentioned before, this is similar to what we talked about from a New Covenant perspective of, there is sin that we do that we knew was wrong but we let our carnality get ahold of us—to see an example of this turn to Leviticus 6 and read the first few verses. What I want you to see is, the sins it's referring to here, these sacrifices can provide a symbolic atonement for. You'll see as we read through the details, there is no way that someone can do these things and plead ignorance. They can't say, "I just didn't know, no one had told me about the rules and now that I know I won't do it". That's not the case. There's no way you can do these things and plead ignorance. You knew when you did them it was wrong.

Leviticus 6:1 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:*

2) *If a person sins and commits a trespass against the LORD by lying to his neighbor about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbor,*

3) *or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely—in any one of these things that a man may do in which he sins:*

4) *then it shall be, because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found,*

5) *or all that about which he has sworn falsely. He shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs, on the day of his trespass offering.*

6) *And he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD, a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering, to the priest.*

7) *So the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any one of these things that he may have done in which he trespasses."* (NKJV)

Notice the example here—he gave false testimony or he took somebody else's property. There's no way to claim,

"I didn't know it wasn't my property, I thought it was mine."

"No, you knew it belonged to somebody else and you knew you shouldn't have taken it."

If you gave false testimony, by definition it means you knew what you were saying wasn't the truth. That is just the definition of what that means. There is no ignorance defense in this situation. This is an individual who messed up and later acknowledges, "Yes, I sinned, I'm sorry and accept responsibility, I messed up, please forgive me." Forgiveness is provided for that for someone who is willing to admit to being wrong. The key here is the issue of defiance. The person who is made aware of their situation and just refuses to hear anything, refuses to admit being wrong. That's where there is no forgiveness, symbolic or even through the sacrifice of Christ—that is not made available.

To see an Old Covenant example of this, turn to Deuteronomy 17 and we'll see an individual where it's brought to his attention but he just refuses to hear it. He refuses to admit to being wrong. There is no forgiveness for this.

Deuteronomy 17:8 *"If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses.*

9) And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.

10) You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you.

11) According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you. (NKJV)

Notice the next couple of verses.

12) Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel.

13) And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously. (NKJV)

In other words, you don't tolerate the attitude of *defiance*; the refusal to be wrong, the refusal to accept any responsibility or to repent. That's the key we are getting at here. We started off in 1 John 5 that was talking about, if you see your friend and they are committing a sin that doesn't lead to death, you can pray for their forgiveness and that can be granted. But if you see your friend and they are committing a sin that leads to death, don't waste your time praying for that because that individual isn't going to ask for forgiveness. They aren't going to try and repent because they don't care; they're not asking for forgiveness; they are not trying to repent and change. It's saying not to waste your time being invested in that because that movie isn't going to change. You are wasting your effort.

This whole attitude of clear defiance is actually the key to understanding what we often think of when we refer to the phrase, the unpardonable sin. If you talk about the unpardonable sin, most often people will think you're talking about *blasphemy of the Holy Spirit* and yes, that is actually where we are going. This is mentioned three times in the gospels and Christ directly says, that anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit, there is no forgiveness granted for that. Why is that? We're going to unpack this particular issue and see when we talk about it, that Christ mentions this. He even says, you can talk badly about Me, as the Son of God, as a God being who has come to earth—you can say bad things about Me and be forgiven for that. But if you blaspheme the Holy Spirit, there's no coming back from that one. Why is that? We know the Holy Spirit is just the power of God, it's not a person or an individual. It's just the power of God and Christ is an individual, He is the one who knowingly sacrificed Himself for our sins. So why is it we can talk badly about Christ and forgiveness can be involved in that but you blaspheme the Holy Spirit and you're toast.

Let's look at that subject because once we unpack that and understand the context, what we're going to see is once again, it comes back to this issue of *willful defiance*. There are three times that is mentioned in the gospels and we are going to look at all three of them to see the whole context. Turn to Luke 12; this example doesn't give a lot of context, but we're going to cover this and thoroughly look at the subject.

Luke 12:8 *Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God.*

9) *But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.*

10) *And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.* (NKJV)

This particular account doesn't give us a lot of contexts to kind of flush this out. I myself would look at this and ask, why would that be the case? Why is it forgivable if you talk badly about Christ, but if you blaspheme the Holy Spirit, it's not? That is puzzling. We have to understand the full context of what He is really getting out. This will give us more detail and we can really understand what the context is. Turn to Mark 3 which is another time where Christ makes this statement.

Mark 3:20 *Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.*

21) *But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."*

22) *And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."* (NKJV)

That's going to be a key here as we're going to see, particularly in the Matthew account we are going to read later. They have witnessed graphic evidence of Christ casting out

demons and it gets everybody's attention. It's that graphic evidence of the Holy Spirit that's going to be a big key factor in understanding this subject.

23) So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

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

25) And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

26) And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end.

27) No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.

28) Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter;

29) but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"—

30) because they said, "He has an unclean spirit." (NKJV)

We have a little more context to work with here. He is specifically referring to casting out demons. As we're going to see in more detail when we read the Matthew account, they literally witness obvious evidence that Christ is casting out demons. They are seeing very powerful, undeniable evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit. We're going to see in the next example, those who have not just a hardened, defiant attitude, look at this and say, "this guy must be somebody special, God must be working with Him, how else do we explain this?". The evidence is so in their face that they have to pay attention and think there is something special going on here, even if they don't fully understand what is happening, it is blatantly obvious the evidence is screaming it right in their face of what is taking place. The reason it can be forgivable to talk badly about Christ is, you can misunderstand who He is. You could just be confused about what's happening, you could be in ignorance and confusion and say bad things without realizing what you are talking about. When He's referring to blaspheming the Holy Spirit is when you are seeing graphic evidence that is undeniable and right in your face and instead of acknowledging the obvious you say, "It's just being done by Satan". It's a hardened, defiant attitude that is taking place. That's the key to differentiating the subject here. To understand this, turn to Matthew 12 because this is the example that gives us the full context and where you can really see this.

Matthew 12:22 *Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.*

23) And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" (NKJV)

This is a guy who is blind and mute, there's demons involved and everybody knows this and all of a sudden, this guy is normal and talking and seeing. They are saying, "Wait a minute, something interesting happened here". Notice their statement, "Could He be the Messiah?". Something is happening here; this isn't normal physical stuff. The evidence

is so graphic that people have to pay attention. They can't just dismiss this; the evidence is so blatantly obvious that you have to pay attention. That's why this is a different thing. The fruits are just right in their face. Let's notice how the Pharisees respond. This is why Christ talks about the unpardonable sin with them.

24) Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." (NKJV)

They don't dispute He's casting out demons. They know something spiritual is happening here, but they are so hardened against Christ they think He is just doing it through the power of Satan. They are denying the very blatant evidence that is right in their face and attributing it to Satan. That's why He is saying, "You are blaspheming the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit is not an individual. To blaspheme the Holy Spirit, you have to be denying the obvious fruits that are right in your face. The evidence that is undeniable. It's not out of, "I didn't understand or I was confused about something." No, it's right in your face, you can't deny it and yet you are still so hardhearted that you won't consider the truth. That's the key to this subject. Pick up in verse 25.

25) But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

26) If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

27) And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.

28) But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

29) Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

30) He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

31) "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.

32) 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 in the age to come. (NKJV)

As I mentioned several times, the key to this whole subject is realizing the *attitude of defiance*. The reason blaspheming the Holy Spirit is such an issue is because to do that—the Holy Spirit is not an individual—the clear graphic evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit is in your face and then you just *defiantly* dismiss it and attribute it to Satan.

This example also brings up another interesting subject for us. Notice it's the Pharisees saying this and right as they are doing this, Christ is explaining to them is that what they just done is commit the unpardonable sin. That's what He just clearly says to them. The

reason I mention this is because often times in the Church of God, I've heard it taught many times, even myself believed this years ago, the only way that someone could wind up in the lake of fire is they would have to have come into the church, fully understood everything, repented, been baptized, received the Holy Spirit, been committed and then decided to walk away and turn their back on the truth—that would be the only possibility of how this could happen. You can't square that up with what Christ just said here. There's no evidence in the Bible that the Pharisees ever came to Christ and said, we accept you as the Messiah and we want to be forgiven for our sins and be in the church and then later turned around and walked away. No, they rejected Him from the outright; from the very beginning. They have seen all the graphic evidence of who He is just like in this example. They see Him performing miracles, casting out demons but they are defiantly against Him regardless. This tells us it is possible for someone to just defiantly reject the truth when it's been revealed to them with not necessarily having ever gone to the point of repenting and being baptized, receiving the Holy Spirit and then turning away from it. They can just reject what they know up front and wind up in the lake of fire because of that attitude of defiance. We're always judged on what we understand.

Earlier in this sermon, we covered that God doesn't condemn us for stuff we did in ignorance. It's still sin, we still have to repent of it. But He understands that if you didn't understand what you were doing, He's not going to condemn someone to the lake of fire for doing that. He gives them the opportunity to repent and have a better life. If you clearly know what's right at any decent level and you're just defiant and fight it anyway, that's a ticket to the lake of fire. To see this more clearly, turn to Matthew 23. You're probably familiar with this chapter and we won't go through the whole chapter, but it's just a blistering critique of the Pharisees. Christ just rakes them over the coals in the most brutal, blunt language possible. Let's notice some statements that He makes here because He is directly telling them that they are going into the lake of fire.

Matthew 23:13 *But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.*

14) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. (NKJV)

Jump down to verse 24.

24) Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

25) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.

26) Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

28) *Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

29) *‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,*

30) *and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’*

31) *‘Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.*

32) *Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt.*

33) *Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? (NKJV)*

Obviously, He’s not referring to the Protestant concept of hell here, of burning in eternal fire and torment with no end in sight. That’s not what He’s referring to here. When it says the condemnation of hell, in Greek that is *Gehenna*—the condemnation of *Gehenna*. What is the condemnation of *Gehenna*? We’re going to see that He is clearly referring to the lake of fire. To see that, turn to Luke 12:4.

Luke 12:4 *And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.*

5) *But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell [to cast into Gehenna]; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (NKJV)*

Notice we are talking about something beyond physical death. He’s saying:

“Don’t be afraid of those who can just take your physical life; fear Him, fear God because He can do worse to you than that. He can cast you into Gehenna after your physical death.”

This is something more severe. This is why the Bible refers to it as *the second death* because it is spiritual death. Everyone faces physical death in their life, everybody is born with an expiration date, their physical life is going to come to an end. But we don’t have to have the second death, that only comes about if we refuse to obey God and put Him first—that’s how that is going to happen. What this is talking about is, there is physical death and then the condemnation of Gehenna is worse in addition to that. Notice how the lake of fire is referred to as *the second death*, something worse than physical death. Revelation 21:7.

Revelation 21:7 *He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*

8) *But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (NKJV)*

This is referring to the lake of fire. This is what is beyond physical death. This is the second death because it's spiritual death and you're toast at that point; the game is over. There's no second chance or "do over" from this one. That's what He is referring to and is what He is telling the Pharisees. That is the condemnation of Gehenna. In their situation, they were never baptized and received the Holy Spirit, but they understood the truth because He told them,

"You are experts in the law but you refuse to keep it. You put your tradition above that and because you understand all of that and refuse to comply, it doesn't matter whether you have been baptized or not, you have demonstrated where your heart is at, because you refuse to understand and to go along with what you understand and you do it *defiantly*. So, you're going into the lake of fire."

This can also happen to people who have been baptized and have received the Holy Spirit, If later in our lives we turn our backs on the truth and walk away from it. Turn to Hebrews 6 and we can see this. This is also sin that leads to death.

Hebrews 6:4 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6) if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. 7) For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8) but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. (NKJV)*

He's basically saying, that even if you have come into the church and accepted the sacrifice of Christ, you've been baptized and were faithful for a while, but later were to decide you want to do your own thing, so you turned your back on that and walked away from the truth. Once you commit to that way of life—and I don't mean just have a period in your life and you've stumbled and fallen into sin and then later see you messed up—but if you turn your back on it and decide, I'm going to go do my own thing and walk away, once you're committed to that path, there is no coming back. There's no later, realizing you're going to the lake of fire and then saying, "I'm sorry now. I want to avoid the bad consequences so now I'm going to say sorry". No, once we have shown where our heart is at, God is going to say, the game is over now. If you lost the Holy Spirit, that is the end of the game, it's totally over.

We also have to realize that there is another category that can be sin leading unto death that is not quite as blatant as this. I think we all recognize, if you are in the church and committed to the truth and later decide that was just a weird cult and I don't want anything to do with that. You turn your back on it and go in the other direction and stay committed to that. We recognize that another "game's over". That is just blatant rejecting of the truth.

We have to realize that Christ also makes a number of comments during His ministry that makes it very clear that there is another category too. We can play the game of, “having one foot in the church and one foot in the world” and play that game too long and the clock runs out. He very clearly tells us that we have to be fully committed. We have to be willing to put Him and the Father above everything else in our lives, we have to be willing to endure painful trials and tests, we have to be willing, if we have to, to give up our job, give up our friends, or deal with family members who turn against us because of the truth—we have to be willing to stand for all of that. We can’t just be half committed to the truth and say, “I’ll obey as long as it doesn’t get too painful or I have to give up too much, lose my friends, give up my job, or have to endure some pain.” No, we have to be fully committed. He is quite clear about that. We can keep one foot in the church and one foot in the world and say, I was showing up to services on the Sabbath and Holy Days my whole life. But it wasn’t the top priority of your life. We can wind up in the lake of fire with that as well. Let’s be very clear about this one. Turn to Luke 14, we’re going to see that this sin, if we do it indefinitely and don’t repent of it, this is a sin leading to death as well.

Luke 14:25 *Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,*

26) “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)

There is no ambiguity here; He is saying you must be fully committed because if we are going at it halfheartedly, that isn’t good enough.

27) And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

28) For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—

29) lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,

30) saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish?’

31) Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

32) Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

33) So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)

He’s not unclear about it. He’s quite dogmatic in saying that if we are not fully committed—if we just think we can have a church life and a world life saying,

“I can just play both ends of the fence, enjoy my sin but I still want to make into the Kingdom so I want to play church”.

If you think you can play at that, He says:

“No, that’s not good enough. You have to be fully committed and if you’re not, at some point the clock is going to run out and it is game over, you lose.”

You have to be fully committed, if you’re going to get the ultimate prize. Notice in Luke 9 He makes very similar statements.

Luke 9:57 *Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.” (NKJV)*

Notice he is mouthing the words and saying the right things, but let’s see how this plays out.

58) And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

59) Then He said to another, “Follow Me.”

But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” (NKJV)

In other words, I have other priorities I need to wrap up. I’m interested in following you but there are other things that are more important to me right now. That’s not going to work.

60) Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.”

61) And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.”

62) But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (NKJV)

Clearly, it’s not just the issue of defiant sin that can basically put us in a situation of sin that leads to death, sin that leads to death in the lake of fire—the second death. It’s not just *defiant* sin that can get us in that situation. It’s trying to have our cake and eating it too. Not being fully committed, thinking I want to play church but it’s not the first thing in my life. I want to be in the Kingdom of God but I kind of like my sin. I like playing with the world, I’ll obey as long as it’s comfortable and I don’t have to give up too much and it doesn’t cost me anything. The Kingdom of God sounds good but I’m not fully committed. That’s not going to work; it’s not a game we can play indefinitely because the clock will eventually run out. This concept is very important to understand when we look at what the Bible clearly lays out for us, what I like to refer to as the attrition rate, when it comes to pursuing the Kingdom of God.

We like to look at this from a happy, feel-good perspective and think, only just the most defiant sinners will not make it into the Kingdom of God. Most everybody will make it, it’s just the people that blow off God and insist on going the other way, they are the ones

who won't make it. God is so nice that everybody else will make it, even if they were half-hearted. That's not the picture the Bible paints. The Bible is very, very clear about the attrition rate; there's no way to misunderstand it if we just honestly read the scripture. Turn to Matthew 7:13.

Matthew 7:13 *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*

14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NKJV)

Think about that; you have the many and the few. Many is always more than few, right? That's just common sense. We don't have the exact percentages but everybody knows that many is a bigger number than few. Think about this, I've heard this brushed off many times in my life in the church of God, it's just saying that the majority of the world—it's only the Firstfruits who are called right now. That's not what He's saying. No one can find the path to life unless they are called. He's saying, it's a narrow, difficult path and there are few that endure to the end successfully and make it their first priority. Unfortunately, the majority tend to find an excuse. They either walk away entirely or they are just not willing to be fully committed. This is not the only statement in the Bible that indicates this. Turn to Luke 13:22.

Luke 13:22 *And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.*

23) Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" (NKJV)

Notice the question, what is he asking? Are there only a few who make it into the Kingdom? Are there few who make it to salvation? Is that how it works? Notice Christ's answer; I'll give you the spoiler alert before we read it. Christ's answer can be summed up in one sentence. Yes, there are few who are saved. Let's read what He says.

24) "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

25) When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open for us, ' and He will answer and say to you, I do not know you, where you are from, '

26) then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.'

27) But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'

28) There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. (NKJV)

We can't get any clearer here. He's referring to people being thrust out, not included in the Kingdom of God. There is no ambiguity to what He is talking about.

29) *They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.*

30) *And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”*
(NKJV)

It's very, very clear that there is an ugly attrition rate. The good news is, this is something we can control by our own choices. We don't have to be a part of those that wind up with sin that leads to death and being in the lake of fire. God wants everybody to make it. It's not His desire that anyone ends up in the lake of fire. He wants everybody to receive salvation. He's just realistic about human nature and free moral agency and how it will play out. He's not naive and is just telling us the reality of the basic truth He already knows. For each of us individually, we can make the decision to be committed, to totally commit to obeying Him regardless of the pain level, regardless of what that requires of our lives and to stick it out. We can trust in the fact that He wants us to make it. That He will be with us and help us endure through whatever difficult trials gets thrown at us. Whatever tests come our way and knock us off our feet, He is willing to forgive us and keep working with us, but we have to be fully committed. We can trust in knowing His heart. Turn to 2 Peter 3:9.

2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.* (NKJV)

That's His desire; He wants us all to make it and He's committed to helping us every step of the way, if we choose to work with Him. If we choose to submit, if we choose to put Him first and to commit to that and to realize it may be brutally painful, it may be an absolute endurance rate that you have to struggle through, but there is a wonderful prize at the end and if we stay committed to that, He will be happy to put us in His Kingdom, put a crown on our head and live with us for eternity. If we are half-hearted committed to it and we want to keep one foot in the world and only obey what is comfortable without it being too painful. If we take that attitude, He's going to say, "I told you, you have to be fully committed. If you're not fully committed, that's not going to work."

As we go forward from this Sabbath and living our Christian lives, realize we have to be fully aware that even though we are all sinners, even though we all have to be redeemed from the horrible sinners that we are—we need the sacrifice of Christ to save us—that is available to us. We can claim that sacrifice, we can receive that forgiveness, we can make it into His Kingdom. If we defiantly turn against Him and sin, we will wind up in the lake of fire. Or if we try to have our cake and eat it too, if we just try to play church and be half committed and have our other foot in the world, that is a sin leading unto death as well. That will get us a ticket to the lake of fire. Let's make the conscious decision today to be fully committed, to endure to the end, to be willing to obey Him regardless of what sacrifices may come upon our lives. What pain that may cause, what we may have to endure, because the promise of salvation is worth it.