

Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. I hope you enjoy this study.

TRAVIS: All right. Well, welcome back, everybody, to the Bible study podcast.

WES: Welcome. No, I shouldn't be welcoming you; you're welcoming me. Thank you for welcoming me.

TRAVIS: You're welcome to the studio, where all are welcome here to study the Bible.

WES: This is your office, so you really are literally welcoming me into your office.

TRAVIS: I'm happy to have you here.

WES: Nice. Well, thank you for hosting us.

TRAVIS: And we have a guest today.

WES: We do.

TRAVIS: Mr. Caleb Kirkwood.

CALEB: Hello, happy to be here.

TRAVIS: Happy to have you here.

WES: Is this your first time? Did you do a podcast with --

CALEB: I was doing -- I was in Travis' seat --

WES: Yes.

CALEB: -- for an interview that you did with -- I don't remember his name, and I had just stayed there in the background completely silent. I only showed up at the very end of the raw recording going, "That was

about an hour, guys. All right. I'll go edit that down to size."

WES: So you edited yourself out of it. I forgot that you did that. So Caleb was the preaching intern here at McDermott Road for a summer, and he did all kinds of things with me, and I couldn't remember if you were ever on the podcast, but now you get to be on the podcast -- or have to be, I don't know. "Get to be"? From my perspective, it's "get to be."

CALEB: Yeah, I think it's "get to be."

WES: I'm excited to have you on.

TRAVIS: Have to be? If you -- blink once if you have to be here.

WES: Yeah, I didn't twist his arm, I don't think. I did kind of put him on the spot because I just asked him yesterday so I sprung it on him. But just to kind of give everybody an introduction to Caleb, Caleb is a student at Harding --

CALEB: Harding School of Theology. The campus is out in Memphis, Tennessee, where the Harding's main campus is in Searcy, Arkansas. I'm getting my master's in divinity. My undergrad came from Lubbock Christian University and --

WES: That's right. I was thinking you went to Harding, but I forgot you went to Lubbock. Okay.

CALEB: Yep. I was the odd man out, so to speak, of -- most everyone at McDermott usually go to either OC or Harding. There's only like one or two each year that go to LCU. I was one of the one or two that -- in my graduating year.

WES: Caleb likes to take the unique path. I like it. That's one reason I

like Caleb; he takes the unique path. Well, we're excited to have you, Caleb. I'm excited to hear the thoughts that you're going to bring to the questions that have been sent in for us. It's been a while since we -- did we do a question last week, maybe? Yeah, we did. Well, actually, thankfully, the person who submitted the question to me that we talked about either last time or the time before that -- she messaged me on Twitter, and the mystery was solved because it was a Twitter question; that's why I couldn't find it.

TRAVIS: Oh, okay.

WES: And so she said, "That was me," and so she revealed herself and I apologized for forgetting who she was. But I was glad that we could talk about her question, and we've got a couple more questions that have been submitted that we're going to talk about over the next couple of weeks.

Today we're going to talk about the question of the unforgivable sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which, as Travis said a few minutes ago, is a great way to start your day. So if you're listening to this in the morning, this is what we're going to talk about. I do think that there's going to be some practical application to this, and I think where we're headed with this conversation will be positive. And I think, as I thought through it, there's some positive things -- and when I say "positive," I don't necessarily mean like warm and fuzzy, but I think there's some good warnings here that we can watch out for.

So here's the question. It is from a friend of mine, John Shipley, who's a great guy, and a shout-out to John and thanks for this question and

thanks for being such a great brother in Christ. He says, "Hi, Wes. Loving the Bible study podcast, as I travel a great deal for work. I enjoy listening to thoughts, conversations on the Word. I'd like to throw in a question for the podcast, if I may, or, I guess, more of a topic to cover. In an adult discussion class recently we came upon the, quote, unforgivable sin, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. It was a unique moment to have a class so full of discussion become so quiet. I'd love to hear you talk it through for us. Thanks, Brother, for your continued work for the Lord and for the family."

So thank you, John, for that question, and I hope that we don't experience the same quiet in this room as we bring up that question. But I do think it -- I can see how it would lead to a quiet room because I have heard -- number one, I've heard a lot of different opinions on this idea of the unforgivable sin. I've heard people say, well, it's suicide or it's murder, or all kinds of things that don't fit the context that I wonder, where did that come from? Why do people throw that in there? And I've also heard a lot of fear, people that are afraid that maybe before they became a Christian they might have accidentally committed this blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, that they might have blasphemed the Spirit and therefore are unforgivable, and so I've known people that have struggled with this, wondering if they've been guilty of an unforgivable sin, or the unforgivable sin, and have seriously feared for their salvation. And so I think that this will be a good thing for us to talk through and talk about the context and work through it.

So any thoughts from either Travis or Caleb before we jump into the

text about this?

CALEB: Oh, goodness. Yeah, I think, for the most part, I've gotten the same kind of feedback that you've got, Wes, about the, quote-unquote, unforgivable sin, is that, usually, I get this kind of conversation of, "Have I done this" --

WES: Right.

CALEB: -- "in some form or fashion?" Even in saying the hypothetical question, "Have I blasphemed the Holy Spirit in saying" -- and then insert some kind of hypothetical statement. "Have I just committed the said unforgivable sin," but...

WES: Yeah, yeah. And maybe some people worry about profanity. Maybe they have used profanity. Maybe they've said -- I won't even say the initials, but maybe they've said something that was profane and maybe it was before they became a Christian, or maybe it was when they were younger and they were struggling and they kind of fell away for a little while, or whatever the case may be, and they think back to the way they used to talk and some of the things that they might have said that have been profane or blasphemous and wondered, "Is God going to forgive me for those things that I said?"

TRAVIS: Yeah, I think -- I think, as we start talking about it, I always think about this subject, like there's a lot to unpack, and, first -- because I think the Spirit part really freaks us out because we already have a -- you know, a very rough understanding --

WES: That's a good point.

TRAVIS: -- of the Holy Spirit. So then you add blasphemy into that,

which we also don't have probably a great understanding of, certainly in a modern context, and I think that freaks us out. I remember in high school asking a Bible class teacher -- we got into a discussion about it and I remember he said something that was very comforting. It was sort of -- for me, it felt like, okay, this is a good start on this topic for me. He said, kind of to the point about accidents, worrying about accidentally doing that, he was like, "If you're worried about accidentally doing it, chances are you probably haven't," because while you're worried about it, there's -- and I'm sure we'll get into this, but there's almost an implicit intention involved in this.

WES: Yeah, I would agree with that.

TRAVIS: And that was like a comforting thing to get me started, but, man, I'm looking forward to unpacking it.

WES: That's a great point, and I want to kind of hold on to that because I've often said things that are very similar to that, and I think that there's a lot of truth to that because I do think that this is something that is a unique hardness of heart. And that's a phrase, "hardness of heart," that's been on my heart for the last little bit and so it's something I want to talk about. So I think it's unique, but I also think it's something we need to be aware of, be warned of, and so let's kind of keep that in the back of our mind, "Can you accidentally do it?" Because I think that that's an interesting question. I don't know that I have an answer to it, but I agree that I think that people that are concerned that they've done it and that have a sensitivity to it, they're the least likely to fall into this condemnation because they have a sensitivity to it, and it's the people

that don't have a sensitivity to it that should be most concerned but, ironically, are not.

So let's look at the text. Matthew 12 -- we'll look at Matthew's version of this account. Matthew 12, starting in verse 22, just to kind of get some context, it says, "Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, 'Can this be the son of David?' But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.'" So I think we have to stop right there and recognize this is the context. This is what's going on. And what Jesus is doing, he's doing, we believe, based on truth, based on what we're reading in the scripture and based on the fact that we're disciples of Jesus, that what he's doing he's doing by the power of the Spirit. And some people saw what Jesus was doing and recognized him for who he was and said, "This must be the son of David. This must be the Messiah. This must be the Christ," and they recognized the work and the power of the Spirit. And I like the way that the ESV reads.

Are you reading from the ESV?

CALEB: I am, yes.

WES: Of course. Only right choice. No, I'm just kidding.

TRAVIS: I am, too.

WES: Oh, good. I'm glad we're all on the same page here. But I like the way the ESV says, "It is only by Beelzebul," so it's this very dismissive way of saying, "No, he's not the Messiah. This must be the work of Satan. This must be the work of the prince of demons that he's casting out the

demons." So they saw the work of the Spirit, and it wasn't that they denied it. They weren't saying, "Oh, it must be a trick of the eyes. He didn't really -- it was all a set up." You know, they didn't say any of that. They ascribed what Jesus was doing to Satan. They took something that was good, the work of the Spirit and the manifestation of the Spirit's work, and they ascribed that work not to some other good or even to trickery, but they ascribed it to Satan. So I think just recognizing that context is really important going into this discussion.

CALEB: Something that I kind of noticed when I did a little bit of preliminary study last night was that -- we'll get into this a little bit with the differences between blasphemies against the Son and the Spirit. Between the two persons of the Trinity, they knew the Holy Spirit. He was mentioned all the way back in Genesis 1 with the Spirit of God hovering over the waters.

WES: Good point, yeah.

CALEB: The Jews, the Israelites, have seen the Holy Spirit move throughout the entire Torah of going upon the prophets, speaking through the prophets, and coming upon kings and judges, so they know who the Spirit is and what's his deal and how he operates.

WES: Yeah.

CALEB: And this seems to -- and releasing a blind, mute man from a -- by releasing a man by a blind and mute demon, if I can say that correctly, is in line with the character of the Holy Spirit, so...

WES: That's a terrific point. That's exactly right. And he's bringing healing; he's bringing restoration; he's doing what the Spirit does.

That's what the Spirit does, he recreates, he restores, he renews, he brings these good things. And, ironically, and what's interesting, and it just now stuck out to me as we were reading it in this moment, is that here's a man who's demon-oppressed and it makes him blind, and the irony is that his blindness is healed and the Pharisees continue to be blind. That's the biggest problem that they have is that they have eyes to see, but they don't see. They have ears to hear, but they don't hear. And, really, they are, in a very different sense, demon-possessed. They are enslaved to Satan.

Okay. So let's keep reading. Verse 25, "Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself' -- so this is Jesus talking. "Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he's divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.'" So Jesus kind of hypothetically says, "Okay. So if that's what's going on here and Satan is casting out Satan, demonic forces are casting out demonic forces, then Satan is working against himself, and that doesn't work. A kingdom can't work that way." And so he's showing the absurdity of their accusation by saying that Satan wouldn't be at war with his own kingdom because, obviously, as you pointed out, Caleb, that he -- what's going on here is Satan's work is being demolished. When someone who is blind can now see, when someone who is mute can now speak, Satan's work is being taken away. It's being

broken down, and so that's obviously what's happening. And they didn't even deny that. They didn't deny that a demon had been cast out of this man; what they deny is the power behind it and because they weren't willing to ascribe it to the Spirit, they were willing to ascribe it to Satan.

CALEB: That was -- yeah, that was what I was trying to get at at the beginning, but -- I just lost my train of thought. My bad.

WES: No, but I think you're exactly right. I mean, there's no excuse -- there's no excuse for these religious leaders to not recognize the Spirit for who he is and what he does.

And you brought up an interesting point earlier, Travis, about how we have become very uncomfortable with talking about the Spirit. We've become very uncomfortable with the idea of the Spirit, and so that's another reason why we struggle with passages like this because we don't like to talk about the Spirit or think about the Spirit, but I think that understanding that the Spirit's work, although it's different at different times -- and that's a part of it that I think that makes us struggle or contributes to our struggle with the Spirit's work, but I don't think it should because Paul is very, very explicit about the fact that the Spirit works differently in different people at different times, and so just because he worked through the prophets in a certain way -- or, like you pointed out, Caleb, the judges or the kings in a certain way, or the apostles in a certain way, or Jesus in a certain way, doesn't mean that the Spirit will continue to manifest himself in those ways.

I think we are given exactly how the Spirit manifests himself: Paul, Galatians 5, in love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and

goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. This is the ongoing manifestation and fruit/work of the Spirit. But I think that if we define -- if we define the Spirit's work as something like what God is doing in the world to bring about goodness, to bring about healing, to bring about restoration, to bring about all the things that God wants to bring about, that he is invisibly -- and I think that's part of -- like the wind, because "spirit" and "wind" are similar both in Hebrew and in Greek, and just like the wind is invisible but you can see its work, that's the way the Spirit works, and we can see what he is doing. We can see what the Spirit is doing, not because we see the Spirit, but because we see the work of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, the manifestation of the Spirit.

And I think you're exactly right, Caleb, that this should have been obvious to the religious leaders because of their familiarity with the Torah, because of their familiarity with the prophets, because of their familiarity with the writings, because of everything that they knew about God and his Spirit and the way that he works in and through his Spirit in the world. It should have been obvious what was going on here, and the fact that they couldn't see the Spirit's work for what it was shows their spiritual blindness.

CALEB: I would probably just correct the verbiage just a little bit by saying they -- instead of saying they "couldn't" see the Spirit's work for what it is, they "wouldn't," would not, refused to see the Holy Spirit's work for what it is, because it's this -- whenever I hear stuff like this, it kind of reminds me of like the Pharaoh in Egypt, of -- he hardened his

heart and would not break, would not yield to a very obvious act of God times nine plagues, and only on the tenth did he go, "Okay, fine. I'll let you go," only to refuse again. And we kind of see that kind of hardness of absolutely, under no circumstances, refusing to listen to what God's very obvious work is.

WES: Yeah. And I think that's an interesting point. We could probably spend a whole episode talking about that, because I think it's both. I think you're exactly right and I think that's a great point in bringing that up. I think it's both a decision that we make and a condition in which we find ourselves, and I think that because of our stubbornness we can -- as the Hebrew writer puts it, we can be deceived by sin and fall into this hardness of heart so it becomes a condition that we find ourselves in, not because God put us in that condition or because someone else put us in that condition, but because we put ourselves in that condition.

So I think the Pharisees here find themselves in a situation where they wouldn't and they couldn't because of the condition of their heart. And I think that's -- I think, as we go to the end, I think that's where we're going to find ourselves, is that they were in a spiritual condition of blindness because, as you said, they made a choice not to see. Even though they had eyes to see, they wouldn't see, and because of their refusal to see they found themselves in a condition in which they couldn't see. And so I think it's both, and I think sometimes that's our struggle, and I love that you brought up Pharoah. You know, when the scripture says that God hardened his heart or that he hardened his own heart or that he had a hard heart, I mean, it's all the same thing and it all

contributes to one another. And I think we have to guard against this tendency that we might have to fall into -- through a refusal to see, through a refusal to listen, we have to be careful that we don't fall into a condition where we can't.

Because here were people, these religious people that Jesus dealt with all throughout his ministry -- I mean, if you had asked them, "Will you listen to the Spirit? Will you pay attention to the Spirit? Will you" -- I mean, consciously, they would have said, "Oh, yeah, absolutely. Oh, yeah, absolutely, I'll do whatever God wants me to do. I'm open to his will." But they weren't. The manifestation of it was that they weren't and so they became -- like Jesus' parables, they became like the soil that was hard, and so, yeah, I think that's a great distinction to bring up, both the "couldn't" and the "wouldn't." Interesting.

I apologize for the interruption, but if you're enjoying this Bible study you might also enjoy the audio version of my book *Beyond the Verse*. If you're not already an Audible subscriber, you can get the book for free with a 30-day free trial of Audible. Just visit radicallychristian.com/audible. Now back to the Bible study.

TRAVIS: One thing I keep thinking about as we keep reading this passage is that like this is a reverence issue, and in the sense that -- to Jesus' point, he says, "A house divided against itself cannot stand. Why would Satan be driving out Satan?" That doesn't make any sense. It makes a lot more sense that Satan is -- he's attacking you. He's attacking something good in you, and I think -- you know, we're talking about the

religious leaders at that time. I think they had fallen into the same trap that is easy for us today as Christians to fall into, as well, and that is they're serving the Lord, but --

WES: Or they think they are.

TRAVIS: -- or they think they are because their picture of that, of what it is to serve the Lord, has been reduced into -- you know, I mean, what is Jesus always, you know, fighting with them about? It's, you know, the minute details and the rules about the Sabbath that they had come up with.

And I remember hearing a preacher talk one time about how, over the years, that probably started as reverence, you know, when they kept adding to their rules. It started as, "We don't want to break this rule so bad that we're going to build a fence around it," and then the next generation, same sort of reverence. "We don't want to break this rule so bad we're going to build a fence around the fence." And then, by the time you get to Jesus' time, they had all these rules that they didn't even know what they were about. You know, it was blind following.

And I think, in the case of seeing -- looking for the Spirit, looking for the Spirit's work in the world, in yourself, what is called on you by the Spirit to do, that takes some imagination. It takes perspective. And that takes, I think, some humility just to first accept maybe I don't have all the right answers. Maybe I don't even know how to serve God, and that's -- it seems like kind of a counterintuitive thing to do when you've been serving the Lord for so many years, but I think, again, like that's where I see this as a humility issue, as, you know, not being open to the

Spirit. Like we keep saying, coming back to this issue, the hardness of heart. It's like that -- I think that happens when I feel like I've got all the answers, you know?

WES: That's a tremendous word. I think that goes back to what Caleb was talking about, in that humility is so important here, that when we lack humility, when we think we've got it all figured out, when we think we've arrived, then we put ourselves -- and that's a decision that we make. We make a decision whether or not to be humble, but it's not a conscious decision. It's not a decision that we make and we even realize that we're making it.

I always say that, as a preacher, preaching on humility is the hardest subject in the world because everyone who needs it thinks they already have it. Nobody in the world -- nobody -- the people that come out after a sermon on humility and say, "Wow, Wes, I really needed that," they're probably the people that didn't actually need it, right? I mean, they're probably the people that were already humble. And so when you preach about humility, they think, "Yeah, I could use a little bit more humility," but the people that are actually arrogant and proud, they think, "I don't need that." I often joke, you know, "Yeah, when it comes to humility, I'm the best." Or, "I once was given a medal for being humble but I got it taken away because I wore it all the time." We have this tendency to think -- when you bring up humility, arrogant people think "I am humble," and so humility is the hardest subject on which to preach because everyone who needs it thinks they already have it.

And here you have a group of religious people -- I mean, we tend to

hear "Pharisee" and we think bad guys, but in Jesus' day, when you said "Pharisee," they thought the most religious. These are the most humble, the most pious, the people that put God above everything else and that would rather do God's will than they would eat food or drink water. They loved God more than anybody else. But when God actually shows up and the Spirit begins to move and people start being healed and things start to change, they look and they say, "That's Satan because it doesn't fit our box. It doesn't fit our model. It doesn't fit our framework," and they were lacking humility.

So even though there is an element of choice that goes into it, it ends up being a condition in which people find themselves in this position of arrogance, and that's a dangerous place, and that's why Hebrews is all about that danger of being lured into this hardness of heart because when you're in that condition you don't know you're in that condition and you cannot receive the truth, you cannot see the truth, you cannot hear the truth because -- and, again -- and I appreciate the nuance that Caleb brought to that because you don't want to -- it's not that it's not my fault because it is their fault. It's their fault for allowing themselves to be the kind of people that are in a spiritual condition where they can't see the Spirit's work that's right in front of them, they're so blind.

TRAVIS: One thing I've never thought about when reading this passage, but why is Jesus bringing this up? Is he bringing it up because -- like what do you think? Is he bringing it up because in calling what he was doing the work of Beelzebul they were blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, or is this just a teachable moment?

WES: That's a great point because it says he knew what was in their heart. He knew -- "I know what you're thinking. I know what you're thinking here," and I think, for multiple reasons -- I always like to -- when we read gospel accounts I always like to remember that there are two audiences. We always talk about who's the primary audience. Well, there's two because, on the one hand, it's Jesus' primary audience, the people to whom he's speaking, and that's important, you know, about that context, but there's also the context of Matthew's audience. And so I think we also have to keep in mind that Matthew is writing this decades later and he's sharing this story with his audience for a particular reason. So I think, yes, Jesus is chastising and admonishing the people of his generation, saying, "Watch out, because you're going to miss the kingdom. You're going to miss out on forgiveness. You're going to miss out on the Spirit." But Matthew is also warning his primarily Jewish audience, "Don't be like this. Don't be the kind of people that cannot see what the Spirit of God is doing through Jesus and his apostles."

CALEB: And since the primary audience that Matthew had were Jewish -- primarily Jewish Christians, they had the Torah just as much as the Pharisees, so -- at the very least the Torah, the first five books. The others could be hit or miss on some of them. They would have known who the Holy Spirit was and what he was about, and supposedly, as a -- or if you're a Christian, then you have the Holy Spirit within you, then they should know by what Jesus did on the cross of the salvific work, they should know how the Holy Spirit operates or should operate as a Christian in your life, so it was also that. And like you were saying, Wes,

that double hit of not just the Pharisees, but you-all, the people who are reading this, you need to be careful of this.

WES: Right. Yeah, great point. So let's finish the text here and look at what else he says. He says in verse 28, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." And I really like thinking about this in light of what Jesus says to Nicodemus in the book of John, and Jesus is saying very similar things there and says, "Unless you're born again by the Spirit, you cannot see or enter into the kingdom," and that's exactly why these Pharisees were missing the kingdom because they weren't allowing themselves to have their eyes opened by the Spirit, and because their eyes were closed, they could not see the work of the Spirit that was right there in front of them. "If it's by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Things are changing. The kingdom of God is here. It's come upon you. It's a current, present reality, but you can't see it because it's by the Spirit and you're denying the Spirit's work."

Verse 29, "Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." This is an interesting way Jesus puts it here. There's other times where Jesus says, "If they're not against me, then leave them alone," but here he's saying there's no middle ground, right? "If you're not with me, you're against me. If you're not gathering with me, then you're scattering." Any thoughts on that?

CALEB: I did not actually pay attention to this part when I was looking at my studies, so I have no --

WES: Well, I mean, I don't want to spend a whole lot of time there, but I think that this really goes to what he's going to say a little bit in that there is no middle ground here. You either see what the Spirit is doing or you don't. You're either with me and you recognize that this is the moment of the kingdom and you recognize that and you get with it, or you ascribe to -- and that's what's so ironic and horrible about what's happening here, is these religious people, as we've said, that should have recognized the Spirit's work and Spirit's power, they should have been with him. They should have said, "That's the Messiah." "Yes, everyone, that is the son of David. That is the Messiah. That is the Christ. This is the work of the Spirit. The kingdom of God is at hand. Let's join with him and let's be the people God has called us to be."

But instead they said, "No, this is the work of the devil," and they ascribed the Spirit's work to Satan, and he says this isn't just a matter of opinion. It's not like, "Well, there's multiple sides to this." There's some things that have multiple sides. There are some things that, "Well, that's just your view and this is my view," and there's some things that you can kind of take a middle ground on. On this subject, there is no middle ground. It's either you see the work of the Spirit and you get onboard and you become part of the kingdom, or you resist it. And so Jesus is saying you're either with me or you're against me and you're scattering. You're either gathering with me or you're scattering. You can't just say, "Well, I'm going to sit this one out. We'll see how all this pans out." This

is the moment. You either decide -- are you onboard or not?

CALEB: I was looking at the pairing between the "strong man" example and the "with me or scatter." If the strong man is the master of the house, let's say, everyone who is the servant of that house -- the men servants, maid servants of the strong man's house -- if your master is cut down, or bound in this case, then just like sheep without a shepherd, I'm out of here if there's a wolf coming in. So in this example -- so it would make sense in this example to kind of pair them with, "If you're not with me," as in breaking in and binding the strong man by the power of the Holy Spirit, "then you're one of the servants of said strong man, and run. Just run."

WES: Yeah, that's a great point. That's exactly right, because Satan's kingdom is being torn apart limb by limb. Jesus is the new Joshua and he is leading this conquest of Satan's territory and taking it back for God and he's releasing those that are in bondage to Satan. And you're right; Jesus is at war with the demonic forces, and if you're not on his side, if you're not in agreement and see what's happening here, then you're on the other side, and there really is no middle ground here.

TRAVIS: Yeah. One thing I keep thinking about is, you know, we associate it with the Spirit. We associate it a lot with Jesus, you know, the importance of words, the importance of speaking the truth. And I think maybe -- I'm starting to think maybe one point he's making here is stressing the importance of calling things what they are, and, you know, there's probably plenty of good things about these religious leaders and they probably have a lot of good intentions.

WES: Absolutely.

TRAVIS: But calling his work the work of Satan fits an agenda. It fits this agenda of "That's not the messiah we wanted," and I think the problem with that -- and I think we -- you know, we see this a lot in our world today. We've seen it throughout human history, the "My cause is good so I'll do what -- so it can win at all costs." And the danger of that is like, no, you can't win at all costs because you'll do things that undermine the very -- the good morals, the good intentions, the good things behind what you're doing. And if you call things what they are -- if you can look at your enemy and say he's doing good right now, like that's -- that makes you different than him. That makes you different than your enemy if you can say and point out the good when you see it and call it good, call it from God, call it from -- you know, if we believe nothing good comes from God, then when we see good things happening, I think there's definitely an importance on speaking the truth and actually shining the light on what it is, not what would be convenient for it to be.

WES: I think you bring up a great point that there have been -- there have been so many movements throughout human history that I think we can look back on them -- times of restoration, times of reformation, times of renewal, times of -- all of these times in human history, both in American history and in the world history in the last 2,000 years, just since Jesus, there have been all kinds of religious movements that have called people back to Jesus, that have called people to repent of evil and sin in the world. And, unfortunately -- well, on the fortunately side,

fortunately, there have been men of God and women of God who have recognized the Spirit is in this. This is good, this is Jesus, this is what we ought to be doing, and they've gotten behind that, but there have also been religious people that have opposed it. Every single time there's been a time of restoration, renewal, and repentance, there have been religious people that have said, "No, no, no, that's got to be from Satan," because it's disrupting the status quo, and there have been religious people that have benefited from the status quo. They've benefited from the comfortable. And people of God have come along and said, "No, this is wrong. This needs to change," and instead of getting behind it, they've condemned it as being demonic.

And I want to get to this in a second, but in case we don't, James 3 and Galatians 5 tell us, how do you recognize if a movement is from God or not? How do you recognize if something you see in the world is from the Spirit or if it's demonic? Well, again, hopefully, we'll read it in a second, but this is what's happening in this context, is here is the movement from God. When I say "movement," I mean like the Spirit is moving. Like the wind is moving a flag and you say, "Well, why is that flag moving?" "Why are these people being healed?" And the obvious answer is because the Spirit of God is working, because this is the Messiah. But instead -- because if that was true, if it was true that Jesus is the Messiah and this is the Spirit's work and the kingdom of God has come, well, then that's going to disrupt the Pharisees' whole life. Like everything is going to be turned upside down -- our power, our status, our fortune, our whatever is just going to be turned on its head. And

they were comfortable in the status quo. They were comfortable in the way the ladder was fixed in their favor. They were comfortable with all these things, so it was easier to condemn this as the work of Satan than it was to accept it as the work of God, and therein lies their problem.

And, again, I love what you pointed out, Travis. Therein lies the danger for us, that if we are so arrogant and we are so proud and we are so lacking in humility, that when the Spirit works in the world or in a person or in a sermon or in a whatever, and we are so proud that we look at that and we condemn it as the work of Satan rather than accepting it as the work of God, then we might find ourselves in this type of condition.

So I'm going to read 31 and 32 and we'll kind of wrap up that part of the discussion. He says, "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

Caleb, I know you had something you wanted to say specifically about the difference between the Son of Man and the Spirit, maybe.

CALEB: Yeah. So whenever I looked at this I realized that the Son of Man and the Spirit are both persons of the Trinity.

WES: Right.

CALEB: So you have God himself being blasphemed on two fronts, so to speak, in the Spirit and the son. But the son, it's no big deal; you can be forgiven. But when it comes to the Spirit, that's it. It's very bizarre. But

something that we kind of -- you kind of see in Jesus' ministry is that Jesus, as the Son of Man, is part of the great mystery of God of bringing humanity back into right relationship, into the new creation. So what you -- I mean, we see again and again in the gospels enemies and friends of Jesus not getting the point of the mission of the Son of Man.

WES: Right. There would be nobody that would be forgiven if blasphemy against the Son of Man couldn't be forgiven.

CALEB: Right. And even after the resurrection in the book of Acts we get this climactic scene of Jesus is about to ascend to heaven and the disciples ask, "Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel, like kill all the Romans and set Jerusalem as the kingdom of the world?" "No. I just spent three and a half years with you guys, and no," is what I would say, but thankfully I'm not Jesus because I would probably slap a lot of them. And we see again and again insiders and outsiders of the Christian movement not getting it. And we see it a lot in Acts of Gentile procounsel saying, "There's this weird Jesus movement of a dead guy named Jesus, but these Christians are calling him alive. I don't get it. Can you help?" But the Holy Spirit -- or at least in the context of the Jewish audience, there's no mystery about the Holy Spirit as far as who he is, what he's about, and what is the Holy Spirit's mission in the re-creation of the world, where the Son of Man has to be victorious and die simultaneously. That makes very little sense.

WES: It was scandalous, yeah.

CALEB: It makes very little sense as far as -- until after it actually happens at the resurrection. Then everything makes sense. It's when

it's -- so I would probably go with something along the lines of, if you know that this is an act of God by any of the three persons, Father, Son, or Spirit, and condemn it as demonic magic, basically it's by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow casts out demons, that's where the unforgivableness is from, because you refuse to see the Spirit of truth doing something good and calling it a servant of Satan, the enemy of God. That's where the unforgivableness lies.

If you just don't know what's going on and say it could be good, it could be evil, then okay, we can fix that. Because we have Paul -- or rather Saul, a world-class enemy of Christianity back in the day, and it was only after he saw the spirit and truth of Christ's mission then he was forgiven of his sins and became the apostle Paul that we know today.

That's where I was kind of --

WES: Yeah. No, I totally agree. I think you're exactly right. I think that nobody could have recognized Jesus for who he was initially except through the work of the Spirit, except through the revealing that the Spirit of truth -- and I love that you brought out the Spirit of truth -- that the revealing that the Spirit of truth was doing should have revealed who Jesus was, but by himself, as the Son of Man, I mean, you wouldn't have known who he was, and no one recognized him for what he was or what he was doing but they should have recognized the work of the Spirit.

And a discerning person -- a discerning person recognizes the difference between good and evil. That's what it means to discern, is to be able to look at something and say that's good or that's evil. A person

who is lacking in that basic discernment is in a condition of being unforgivable. Now, whether or not that person can be restored to a spirit of discernment where they can see good and evil, I think that's for a whole 'nother discussion, but if you are in a condition of being blind -- and, again, I like the way Caleb pointed that out, both the "couldn't" and "wouldn't," but if you're closing your eyes to the truth, at least in that condition, in that Spirit, in that setting, you can't be forgiven. You cannot be forgiven in the spirit of condemning as evil the work of the Spirit.

And I think that yes, we need to be concerned about these Pharisees and where they're going to spend the age to come, but we also need to take this as a warning. And I love, going back to what Travis said in the very beginning, that I don't think you can accidentally do this. I think if you're being careful -- if you're being careful, if you're being aware, if you're being humble, you're not going to look at the work that God is doing and say that's evil. But I also think that you have to be careful. You have to take this as a warning. And, again, James 3 -- James says, "What is wisdom that comes from above?" How do you know if something is earthly wisdom, something is demonic wisdom, versus wisdom that's from above? He says, "Wisdom that's from above" -- this is James 3:17 -- "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere, and a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

So if somebody is not peaceable, if a movement is not peaceable, if it's not pure, if it's not gentle, if it's not open to reason, if it's not full of mercy, if it's not full of good fruits, we can look at that and say, "Well,

that's not the Spirit's work." That's not to say they're wrong on everything. It's not to say that everything they're saying or everything they're trying to accomplish is wrong, but I can say that's not the Spirit that's working there. Same with what Paul says in Galatians 5:22 and 23, and he says, "Here's what the fruit of the Spirit looks like: Love and joy and peace and patience," and he also talks, in contrast, about the works of the flesh: Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, things like these, and he's talking in Galatians about religious people, religious people that are very caught up in circumcision and think that circumcision is what marks a person as God's family. And Paul is saying, "No, what marks a person as God's family is faith in Jesus."

And all of these passages help us to develop spiritual discernment so that we don't look at good things and say that's the work of Satan or look at bad things and say that's the work of God. But I think we have to -- we have to recognize that if religious people like the Pharisees or religious people like the churches in Galatia could become so hard of heart, so lacking in discernment, so blind to the truth that they could look at the work of the Spirit right in front of them and say that's the work of Satan -- if that could happen to them, it could happen to me. And this is the way we tell what is the work of the Spirit and what is the work of Satan is if it has this type of fruit: Love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control, we need to look at that and say maybe the Spirit is doing something

here.

CALEB: When you were talking I kind of remembered -- I can't remember where in the gospel of John, but it's after the episode of the man born blind. He goes to the Pharisees, teachers of the law, and we get his great statement of "Sinner or not, I do not know. I once was blind, but now I see," gets kicked out of the synagogue. And then we have this little episode where Jesus talks to the formerly blind man and basically says, "Blessed are those who are blind but now see, and woe to the ones who claim to see but are blind." And then the Pharisees who happened -- who were probably out to lunch trying to -- after condemning this poor formerly blind man, said rather arrogantly, "What, are we blind, too?" And Jesus says, in so many words, "Yes, you are." So it's -- that episode played in my mind while you were pointing out that you're claiming to be so wise and discerning that you can tell the difference between good and evil, and you see something that is fundamentally good and a blind and mute man can now see and speak, and calling it -- that that healing was powered by the spirit of destruction, you're the blind one.

WES: Yeah. And that -- that's the unforgivable sin.

I really hope you enjoyed this Bible study and I hope you'll subscribe to hear future episodes of the podcast. A big thank you to Travis Pauley, as well as our McDermott Road church family, for helping to make this podcast possible, and a special thanks to all of you for listening. We love you, God loves you, and we hope you have a wonderful day.