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**A Summary Workbook on
"The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel"
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Point 24

The twentieth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit is described as if it could not be forgiven because it is such a terrible sin.

Only the Law condemns sin; the Gospel announces full forgiveness of all sins, with no exceptions. God promises this in many places, for example:

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20)

Now, let us consider what Jesus said about the sin against the Holy Spirit:

"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. 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." (Matthew 12:30-32)

It is certain that the Holy Spirit is not a more glorious and exalted person than the Father and the Son. They are equal in majesty and power. It would make no sense, then, to say that speaking against the Holy Spirit is a greater sin, compared to speaking against the Father or the Son. The difference, then, is this: to speak against the Holy Spirit is to speak against His office. In other words, it is speaking against the WORK that the Holy Spirit does. The work of the Holy Spirit is to call men to faith in Christ through the Word of God:

"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Jesus says that "whoever SPEAKS against the Holy Spirit..." This is not talking about thoughts within the heart, but rather words spoken out loud. Consider this same incident from the Gospel of Mark:

"The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul,' and 'by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.' ...[Jesus said] 'Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'-- for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'" (Mark 3:28-30)

Here we have an actual example of this sin against the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was casting out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit, his enemies said that this work of the Holy Spirit was actually the work of the devil. By his miracles Jesus had proved to them that he was the Son of God, but their own unbelief and hatred blinded them. It was then that they spoke out loud their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Unless the Holy Spirit brings us to faith and keeps us in faith, we will never gain eternal life in heaven. If someone openly declares that the work of the Holy Spirit is an evil thing, he is already lost and condemned.

This is what happened to Jesus' enemies who saw his divine miracles, and the power of the Holy Spirit at work, and said "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." This is the kind of sin that cannot be forgiven, and the reason is that a person curses the work of the Holy Spirit, which is the only thing that can work faith in his heart. John writes about this sin in his first epistle:

"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that." (1 John 5:16)

This is a most serious matter, yet we cannot know for certain whether a person has committed this sin. We cannot see into another person's heart in order to know whether they are acting out of weakness or ignorance, or whether they have truly cursed the work of the Holy Spirit.

This teaching about the sin against the Holy Spirit is a fearsome thing. However, you must be ready to bring comfort to anyone who comes to you and says, "I think I must be lost and condemned, because I think I committed this unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit!" This person might tell you about some terrible things he has done. Whenever this happens you should bring comfort to such a person. The comfort is this: "If you are worried about this sin, and desire to be free from the guilt of it, then this CANNOT be the sin against the Holy Spirit. Your own repentance over the sin you have committed is the proof that it is NOT the sin against the Holy Spirit. If you had truly blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, you would not be worried about it at all. Your own repentance over your sin proves that the Holy Spirit is at work in you, and you have not driven him from your heart."

It is true that the sin against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven—Jesus said so. However, this is not because it is such a LARGE sin. After all, Jesus died for every sin without exception. No, the reason why this sin cannot be forgiven is because the person who truly commits it drives the Holy Spirit from his heart, and without the Holy Spirit no one can believe in Jesus. Only an unbeliever who has hardened his heart against God is guilty of this sin. Any Christian who feels guilty about his sin and wishes to be free from it needs to hear the comforting Gospel of God's forgiveness in Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. How do we know that Jesus paid the price for every sin, including the sin against the Holy Spirit?
2. Why is the work of the Holy Spirit so important to us?
3. How did Jesus prove to people that he was the Son of God, and that the power of the Holy Spirit was working in him?
4. What exactly did Jesus' enemies say which showed that they had committed this unforgivable sin?
5. Why is it that saying evil things about the work of the Holy Spirit is a sin that cannot be forgiven?
6. How should we bring comfort to someone who is in great distress because they think they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit?