



Blog

New Insights into the Unpardonable Sin, or Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit

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January 9, 2020 | By: Sam Storms

Of all the questions I'm asked by other Christians, one tops the list: what is the meaning of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, or the unpardonable sin, and have I committed it?

In earlier articles and in the chapter on this subject in my book, *Tough Topics* (Crossway), I labored to point out that this is not some inadvertent, singular, or even occasional sin. I also made it clear that those who live in fear and anxiety that they have committed this sin are the least likely to have done so. Here is the text, as found in Matthew's gospel:

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." 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 is 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. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 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. 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 12:22-32](#))

Let me briefly state six relevant points without going to the trouble of citing my entire treatment of the text.

(1) This ominous declaration by Jesus doesn't occur in a vacuum. Something happened to provoke it. The religious leaders had just witnessed Jesus cast out a demon from someone and they concluded from it that Jesus was himself possessed by Beelzebul or Satan and that it was in fact Satan himself who enabled Jesus to do this.

(2) Contrary to popular opinion, the unpardonable sin is not murder or adultery or suicide.

(3) Their sin was against the Holy Spirit because it was by the power of the Spirit that Jesus performed his healings and miracles. Jesus himself said in **Matthew 12:28** that it was "by the Spirit of God" that he "cast out demons."

(3) The repudiation of Jesus by the religious leaders was not the result of ignorance or lack of evidence or because they believed the negative report of someone else who didn't like Jesus. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is willful, wide-eyed slandering of the work of the Spirit, attributing to the devil what was undeniably divine. These people had seen as clearly as anyone could see and understood as lucidly as anyone could understand that Jesus performed his miracles by the power of the Spirit. Yet they defiantly insisted, contrary to what they knew to be true, that it was Satan who empowered him. The miracles Jesus performed were credentials of heaven. The religious leaders declared them to be the credentials of hell.

(4) As noted, this, then, was not a one-time, momentary slip or inadvertent mistake in judgment. This was a persistent, life-long rebellion in the face of inescapable and undeniable truth. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not a careless act committed only once in a moment of rage or rebellion, but a calloused attitude over time; a persistent defiance that hardens and calcifies the heart.

The Pharisees had been present when Jesus healed the sick. They saw him perform miracles up close and personal. They witnessed him raise the dead. They watched with their very eyes as skin infected with leprosy suddenly and decisively became clean and smooth and whole. They had heard him teach with power and authority. They had watched as demons fled his presence as he set free those in bondage. They watched with their own eyes as he gave sight to the blind. Notwithstanding all this, they openly and persistently and angrily and arrogantly declared that he did it all by the power of the Devil!

(5) Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, therefore, is not just unbelief; the sort of unbelief or rejection or doubt that is so typical in our world. This is defiance of what one knows beyond any shadow of doubt to be true. It is not mere denial, but determined denial; not mere rejection but wanton, willful, wicked, wide-eyed rejection. This sin, therefore, isn't unforgiveable because there is a

defect in the atoning death of Jesus. It isn't unforgiveable because there is a limit to God's grace and mercy or because of some other shortcoming in the character of God.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgiveable because it puts you beyond repentance, and therefore beyond forgiveness. All blasphemies that you repent of will be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven because by its very nature it puts you beyond repentance. It is the sort of sin that issues from a heart so incorrigibly calloused that a person simply isn't able to repent of it. If a sin makes it impossible for you to repent, then that is an unforgivable sin, because forgiveness is promised only to those sins from which we genuinely repent (cf. 4:12).

(6) This sin precludes pardon because by its very nature it precludes repentance. A sin of which one may repent is not the unpardonable sin. Therefore, those who are most worried that they may have committed the unpardonable sin have not. This is a sin for which there is no concern, no conviction, no anxiety, and thus no repentance. It is a sin that is so hard-hearted and willful and persistent and defiant that the one committing it couldn't care less that he or she is committing it.

As you can see, the crucial point in this scenario is that those who commit this sin are people who have repeatedly attributed the miracle-working power of Jesus to a demon, or perhaps to Satan himself. It isn't the case that the religious leaders and many in the crowd watched this miracle of healing and deliverance in Matthew 12 and said to themselves, "Well, I hadn't thought about it before now, but I think he must be availing himself of the power of Satan to accomplish such supernatural feats." No. What we see in Matthew 12 is simply the culmination or climax of an attitude that had been building up over time and had, as it were, pushed these people across the line from which there is no turning back.

And this is the added insight that I want to bring to your attention. The proof that this was not a one-time happenstance but a settled seething of hatred and contempt for Jesus is found in the fact that on numerous prior occasions these people had accused Jesus of being demonized. It wasn't an idea that popped into their heads for the first time in Matthew 12.

I saw this as I was preaching through John 8 recently. I couldn't help but notice that the religious leaders in Israel who opposed our Lord had accused him on several occasions of being demonized. Consider these instances:

“The crowd answered, ‘You have a demon!’” ([John 7:20](#)).

“The Jews answered him, ‘Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?’” ([John 8:48](#)).

“The Jews said to him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon!’” ([John 8:52](#)).

“Many of them said, ‘He has a demon, and is insane’” ([John 10:20](#)).

“for they were saying [evidently, repeatedly, as the imperfect tense of the verb suggests], ‘He has an unclean spirit’” ([Mark 3:30](#)).

My point in directing your attention to these other texts is to demonstrate that, when Jesus declares that blaspheming the Holy Spirit by attributing to a demon or Satan the work of the Spirit is unforgiveable, it is not the first time they had committed this offense. They had on numerous occasions accused Jesus of being possessed by a demon. The sin committed in Matthew 12, then, is merely the apex of an extended, unrepentant, open-eyed repetition of this egregious slander of our Lord.

This all serves to confirm what I said earlier, that this unpardonable or unforgiveable sin is not a one-time slip of the tongue or a sin you commit from which you subsequently repent. Rather, it is a willful mindset of hard-hearted, recalcitrant, defiant repudiation of Jesus and the work of the Spirit by which he accomplished his ministry and miracles.

It is truly remarkable that these people who witnessed for themselves (and not based solely on the testimony of others) the undeniable miracles and healings of Jesus would attribute to Satan the power employed rather than the Holy Spirit. Theirs was a settled, stubborn, high-handed disdain and contempt for the power of the Spirit operating through Jesus that they repeatedly, on numerous occasions over time, displayed. They had crossed a line of no return. They had hardened their hearts beyond the possibility of repentance. We can only conclude that God had simply given them over to their willful choices.

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3 Comments

Ryan Flanders | Jan 17, 2020 at 11:44 am

Thank you for your insight, Brother. Is any distinction to be made between the persons being slandered, or more specifically, the cause which resulted in blasphemy? The instances cited in

John are in reaction to Jesus' words while the the instances cited in Matthew and Mark are in reaction to the Spirit's power made manifest through healing.

Doug Sayers | Jan 12, 2020 at 6:39 pm

I think it's fair here to note the obvious: If the Calvinistic doctrine of "Unconditional Election" (and it's partner "Irresistible Reprobation") is true than this whole question is moot.

The only people who would commit the unpardonable sin are people who were born reprobate. They never would have had an actual opportunity to be forgiven because they were born "non elect". They would have been predestined to perish from eternity past. It wouldn't matter what sins brought about their damnation. It would have been inevitable.

Still hoping my Calvinistic brothers and sisters will look again at the flaws in their system.

Dave Thomas | Jan 12, 2020 at 2:44 pm

Another great insight Sam, thank you for your faithfulness in wisdom and revelation!!! Keep it coming by the gift of Your Spirit and testimony Jesus! Amen!

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