

John Piper, Ask Pastor John

(1) Can a true believer, whose salvation is eternally secure in Christ, still be guilty of blasphemy? (2) Is blaspheming the Holy Spirit the same as grieving the Holy Spirit?"

Reading the Text

Let's put a couple of key passages in front of us about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit so we know what we are talking about. Here is Jesus in [Mark 3:28–30](#): “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.’” In other words, they were attributing Jesus’s deeds to the devil instead of God.

“The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a willful, determined opposition to the present power of the Holy Spirit.”

One more text, [Luke 12:10](#): “And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.” Over the span of my ministry there have been several people — probably a lot more people don’t come forward, but these came forward — who came to me deeply convinced they had committed the sin against the Holy Spirit and were therefore beyond forgiveness. They were terrified, as you can imagine.

Sure Salvation

Now, it seems to me that, in helping those people deal with what they are saying, we need to put the statement “blaspheming the Spirit cannot be forgiven” alongside the many statements like “whosoever believes on the Lord Jesus will be saved” — not “whosoever believes, if they haven’t done a few other things.”

For example, [Acts 16:31](#): “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” Paul didn’t ask the jailor, “Now, have you ever blasphemed against the Spirit of God?” He just said, “If you believe, you will be saved.” In [John 6:40](#), Jesus said, “This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

It has always seemed to me that there is something about blaspheming the Spirit, as Jesus intended us to understand it, that has brought a person to the point where they are sinning in such a way that they are unwilling and unable to repent and believe. That is the way I am putting the two together.

Esau’s Tears

Esau would be an example of this. In [Hebrews 12:17](#), it says, “You know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance.” That is a literal translation; I changed what the ESV says. “No place of repentance,” I think, means he couldn’t do it. He couldn’t find a place in his heart of genuine repentance, “though he sought it with tears.”

So, the point here is not that Esau repented and could not be forgiven, but that he couldn’t find the place of repentance. He had come to such hardness of heart against God, such love for the world — his bowl of cereal against his inheritance. He loved the world so much, he couldn’t stop loving the world. He could find no genuine repentance. And so he perished. His tears were not tears of repentance. They were tears of remorse that he couldn’t repent.

Clarifying the Issue

Let me give a quote from one of my favorite commentators, Henry Alford, about the unforgivable sin of blaspheming against the Spirit. Here is what he said: “It is not a particular species of sin which is here condemned” — like, oh, have I done that one thing? — “but a definite act showing a *state* of sin, and that state a willful determined opposition to the present power of the Holy Spirit; and this as shown by its fruit, blasphemy. The declaration, in substance, often occurs in the New Testament” ([The New Testament for English Readers](#), 89).

“A Christian cannot commit what Jesus calls blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.”

Here is the key phrase: it is a “state [of] willful determined opposition to the present power of the Holy Spirit.” Then he gives (as one of those other places in the New Testament) [1 John 5:16](#), which says, “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; and I do not say that one should pray for that.”

This is not, “there is *a sin* that leads to death,” but “there is *sin*.” That is the way it should be translated. There is *sinning*; there is a kind of willful, determined, settled opposition to God and his Spirit.

Blasphemy Against the Spirit

So, here are my answers to the two questions.

Can a true believer, whose salvation is eternally secure in Christ, still be guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit? No. Because I think the meaning of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, as Alford says, is a willful, determined opposition to the present power of the Holy Spirit. And Christians cannot commit that kind of sin. They don’t settle in like that with a settled, determined, willful opposition.

Christians can commit all kinds of sin, but what marks a Christian is that they don’t settle in long term. They hate it and they repent of it. They feel bad about it. They turn to God for fresh forgiveness. So no, a Christian cannot commit what Jesus calls blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Grieving the Spirit

Is blasphemy of the Spirit the same as grieving the Spirit? No. They are not the same, and you can see the difference in [Ephesians 4:29–31](#), where Paul says, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

“When we grieve the Holy Spirit, we are grieving the one who has sealed us for the day of redemption.”

When we grieve the Holy Spirit, Paul says, we are grieving the one who has sealed us for the day of redemption, which means that, in the very same breath as saying you can grieve him, he is saying, “You are secure. You are sealed. He will not break that seal. He has you, and he is keeping you for the day of redemption.”

The other thing to notice is specifically what it is that does grieve the Spirit. What grieves him is bitterness and wrath and anger against other people. These are the things that Christians do and regret doing and have to repent of doing and ask forgiveness for doing. And that very repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit in great mercy to awaken the children of God to repentance so that we will make it to the day of redemption.