

The Unpardonable Sin

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CAN A MAN commit such a terrible sin that God cannot forgive it?

The Bible gives clear promises of forgiveness for every sin we may commit. If we sincerely repent and ask God to forgive us, He assures us He will.

“Come now, and let us reason together, said the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isaiah 1: 18). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9).

Yet God's Word also makes it plain that there is a sin which God cannot forgive. “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaks against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.” (Matthew 12:31, 32).

Jesus said that a person who blasphemes Him, the Son of man, can receive forgiveness, but a person who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven. What is blasphemy? How do we blaspheme the Holy Spirit? How can we avoid this terrible sin which even God Himself cannot forgive?

Blasphemy is an intentional indignity offered to God or sacred things. To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, then, is to willfully disparage or reject Him and His work. The Bible shows several ways a man may do this.

Once while Jesus taught in a house, the people packed in so tightly and so many others stood outside in the yard listening that no one else could get close. A paralytic man, who had four friends to carry him on a pallet, wanted so badly to see Jesus and receive healing that he asked his friends to take him up on the roof of the house and tear away the clay tiles above Jesus until they could lower him down beside the Master.

The Scripture says, “When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why does this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 15-7).

The Jews accused Christ of blasphemy because He claimed to forgive sins; they said He had assumed a function that only God possessed. Of course Jesus was God even though they refused to believe it, but for a man to assume a function which belongs to God is blasphemy.

Another time the Jews tried to kill Jesus because He plainly stated that He and the Father were equally divine. The Jews wanted to stone Him for blasphemy because that thou, being a man, makes thyself God.” (John 10:33). So blasphemy includes claiming to be God when one is only a human creature.

On another occasion as Jesus cast unclean spirits from demon-possessed individuals, some of the religious leaders cried, “He is in league with Satan, and by the Devil's power He casts out demons.”

Because they attributed the power of the Holy Spirit to the power of Satan, Jesus warned them, “He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness.” (Mark 3:29).

So we see that a man may blaspheme against the Holy Ghost by claiming to be equal with Him (“I will be the God of my own life instead of letting the Holy Spirit be”), by assuming functions which belong to the Spirit alone (“I'll decide what is sin in spite of the Holy Spirit's counsel), or by attributing to Satan the work done by the Holy Spirit (“that conviction of sin in my life doesn't come from the Holy Spirit. I'll ignore it”).

To understand clearly just how one can sin against the third member of the Godhead, we need to understand the special work the Holy Spirit does.

Jesus tells us, "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." (John 16:8). The marginal reading of this scripture says "to convict, or convince" the world of sin. John declares sin to be the transgression of God's law, the Ten Commandments (1 John 3:4). So the work of the Holy Spirit is to point out sin, violations of the commandments, in the lives of men. If the name of the Lord has been taken in vain, the Holy Spirit, God's omnipresent representative, comes and in that still, small voice, commands, "Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." (Exodus 20:7).

Likewise He will come to the heart of the thief, the adulterer, the Sabbath breaker, the covetous man-to any who disregard the claims of the Ten Commandments. He comes to convince, or to convict, of sin and to plead with the individual to give up the evil and to turn to Christ the Savior.

Christ further describes the work of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come."

The Spirit of truth is to guide us into all truth. Christ declares the Word of God to be truth (John 17:17). The Holy Spirit is sent to help men to understand the truth of the Bible. He is to bring to remembrance the teachings of Jesus (John 14:26).

As the Spirit of God reveals the truth of Jesus, we will hear His voice saying, "This is the way, walk you in it." (Isaiah 30:21).

Men do not receive all of God's truth at one time. The Lord reveals His will progressively so that His followers might faithfully follow the pathway that leads them closer and closer to the Master, becoming more and more like the Perfect Pattern. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day." (Proverbs 4:18).

Sometimes when the Holy Spirit points out a certain truth to a person, that individual will protest, "I've been a good Christian for many years, and I've never felt that this particular thing is important. Why should I start doing it now?" He rejects the light sent to him by the Holy Spirit. He says, "I will take over the function of the Spirit and choose truth for myself."

If a person has tried to serve God faithfully, God honors his diligence by sending him more light through the Holy Spirit. But if a person rejects God's truth and refuses to permit the Holy Spirit to guide him into all truth, the light, for him, cannot shine "more and more." His light will inevitably become darkness.

Paul writes in Romans 8:14: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." But if any will not be led by the Spirit, they are not the sons of God. If the Spirit is to guide, men must be willing to follow. Notice the earnest admonition of the Savior: "Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walks in darkness knows not whither he goes. While you have light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light. These things spoke Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them." (John 12:35, 36).

"Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you." Can the Lord mean that there will come a time when the light of His Word will no longer shine upon the pathway; when His Spirit will no longer plead with the hearts of men and convict them of sin? He means just that. There is a time coming when, too late, men will cry out for the Word they now spurn, but they will not find it (Amos 8:11, 12).

With these solemn thoughts in mind, we should consider the appeals of the Holy Spirit to our hearts. Is God pleading for us to give up worldliness? Is He appealing to us to walk in new light He has more recently brought? Has He revealed the privilege and the duty of keeping all the Lord's commandments?

It is a serious thing to fail to obey the Spirit's leading as He guides into new truth. If any fail to follow the light He shines upon their pathway, Inspiration says they "have no excuse," for transgression and "sin remains." Paul reminds the willfully disobedient that "the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23).

What does this have to do with the sin that God cannot forgive? A great deal. You see, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not any single sin. It is not suicide, or sex perversion, or murder. God can and will forgive all those things. The sin God cannot forgive is the sin of repeatedly rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit when He convicts us of sin and when He points out further truth. If the Holy Spirit convicts us that something in our life is a sin, and we refuse to give it up and ask for forgiveness, we are blaspheming

against Him. We have taken into our own hands the work of the Holy Spirit. The same is true if we refuse to follow new truth the Holy Spirit presents to our mind.

If the Holy Spirit speaks to us and we send Him away, He comes back and tries again, for He longs for us to follow. The second time, though, He cannot impress us as strongly as the first because our conscience has been hardened. The third appeal is weaker yet, and each time He returns His appeal grows fainter until we can no longer hear His voice at all.

Gradually we build up a wall of resistance in the mind, which the Holy Spirit cannot penetrate. We have committed the sin God cannot forgive not because He doesn't want to, but because we don't want Him to. We have no desire to repent. At last, after innumerable entreaties have been spurned, the voice of conscience becomes still. The obstinate sinner goes his way, and the appeals of the Holy Spirit become drowned beneath selfishness and sin. God cannot forgive this continued transgression.

There is only one reason why God will not pardon this sin against the Holy Spirit. The sinner has no desire to be forgiven. God will forgive every confessed sin (1 John 1:9), but without repentance, forgiveness would be mere mockery.

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:44). The Holy Spirit is the only agent God uses to bring men to repentance and to the forsaking of sin. If He is grieved away, the sinner is lost. If God can no longer get an appeal through to the sinner's heart, all hope is gone. The person has sinned away his day of grace.

It is a sad, sad thing when the Spirit of God leaves a man and his conscience no longer troubles him over his sins or rejected light. Paul declares that the time may come when an individual's conscience may be "seared with a hot iron." (1 Timothy 4:2).

A loving, compassionate Father in heaven pleads with us to "grieve not the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 4:30), resist not the Spirit (Acts 7:51), "quench not the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

A young man went to live in a different town and rented a room in a pleasant looking boardinghouse. He moved in his belongings, and since he felt tired, he had no trouble at all going to sleep. However, the owner of the boardinghouse had neglected to tell him that an express freight train passed just behind the house each morning at 2:30. When the train came roaring by with whistle blowing, the young man sat bolt upright in bed, paralyzed momentarily with fear. He spent a restless hour getting back to sleep.

The next evening the train came screaming past, startling the young man awake again. The third evening he expected the train, and though it awakened him, it didn't frighten him as it had previously. After a few more nights, he heard the train but only in the twilight zone between sleep and consciousness. At the end of the second week, the train rumbled past with whistle blowing as loudly as ever, but the young man slept peacefully on.

That's what happens when we blaspheme the Holy Spirit. We reject His appeals until we can no longer hear His voice. We go about our life of sin in peaceful satisfaction with no desire to repent, and God cannot forgive us.

Jesus asked, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 9:36).

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