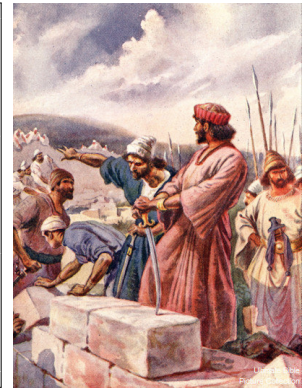


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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Blasphemy Of The Holy Spirit

When I was preaching in West Virginia there was an elderly brother named Vernon Davis at the Marrtown Road church. Brother Davis was around 90 years old and very healthily. He was a widower and still living at home. He still worked as a handyman for a lady who owned several apartment buildings. He was a master craftsman when it came to any number of creations in metal or wood. Brother Davis *never* missed a service while I was there. Furthermore, he was always the first one there every time. He opened the building and turned on all the lights. He read His bible every morning and every evening. He was a real delight. Probably once a month brother Davis asked me to explain the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. I always did so, but I do not think he got it. Hence, he would ask again and again. I always think about Vernon when this subject comes up. He was like a lot of brethren.

There are a lot of people who are curious about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. I am of the conviction that this is due to its being “the unpardonable sin.” Here is the passage: “*Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men*” (Matt. 12:31). Two questions logically follow. What is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? Why is this an unpardonable sin? These certainly are valid questions. Unfortunately, there is a lot of unnecessary speculation surrounding this subject that leads one *away* from answers. This is what is usually accomplished by speculation. We will endeavor, in this article, to avoid speculation and only pursue legitimate answers.

Context

The key to understanding this passage is found by an examination of the context (Matt. 12:22-37). Jesus had healed a demon-possessed man (vv. 22-23). This demonstrated the power of His divinity. The multitudes were amazed at His power. However, the Pharisees (Mark has scribes, Mk. 3:22), who were unable to deny the miracle attributed it the power of Beelzebub, the “*ruler of the demons*” (v. 24).

Jesus told them that this accusation was absurd since it represented Satan divided against himself (vv. 24-25). Why would Satan rob himself of such an achievement? The Pharisees proved themselves inconsistent since some of their own claimed to be able to cast out demons (v. 27). Wouldn’t they be casting them out by Beelzebub?

Their argument was a determined effort to deny truth. Jesus cast out demons, not by Beelzebub, but by “*the Spirit of God*” (v. 28; “*finger of God*”, Lk. 11:20). Through the power of God Jesus had entered a “*strong man’s*” (Satan’s) house and plundered his goods (v. 29). Jesus had overcome Satan and the mighty works Jesus did proved the coming of the kingdom. Jesus demonstrated the truth of His message and neutrality was impossible (v. 30). Nevertheless, the scribes had deliberately attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan despite the overwhelming evidence.

Jesus’ teaching on the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit occurs in the same context in Mark 3:22-30. His statement is found in Luke in a different context. The charge of the Pharisees is in Luke 11:14-26. In Luke 12:10 Jesus warns about blaspheming of the Holy Spirit through denying the one appointed to help in the transmission of the gospel.

Thus, there was still be a rejection and reviling of the one sent to aid and comfort in the preaching of the gospel (Jn. 14:26, KJV).

What Is The Blasphemy Of The Holy Spirit?

I realize that many have heard the word blasphemy before. I am convinced that there is not a complete understanding of what actually constitutes blasphemy. We may acknowledge that it is bad while being unable to accurately explain what it is. Thus, we need to have a workable definition. The word blasphemy (Grk. *Blasphemia*) is defined by Thayer as “*impious and reproachable speech injurious to the divine majesty.*” Albert Barnes wrote, “*When applied to God, it means to speak of him unjustly; to ascribe to him acts and attributes which he does not possess; or to speak impiously or profanely. It also means to say or do anything by which his name or honor is insulted, or which conveys an ‘impression’ unfavorable to God.*” In the context we examined how this constitutes irreverence. The scribes were guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit because they openly and willingly defied and reviled the truth. It was not indifference; it was open contempt as they blasphemously attributed the miracles of Jesus to Satan. Thus, they were guilty of what is described in Isaiah 5:20, “*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*” This displays a hardness of heart at an extreme level. It was not simple unbelief; it was an effort to assign the work of God unto the work of Satan. That certainly fits the definition of blasphemy.

What Is The Unpardonable Sin?

Jesus said that every other sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, *“Therefore I say unto you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men...”* (Matt. 12:31a). Even words spoken against Jesus will be forgiven (Matt. 12:32a). Of course, this takes into account that repentance must take place first before forgiveness (Lk. 13:3). Paul admits that he was once himself a blasphemer (1 Tim. 1:13). Yet he obtained mercy. This shows us that not *every* act of blasphemy is unpardonable. What is under consideration in the context is a specialized form of blasphemy committed by the scribes at this time.

This is not applicable to blasphemy committed through ignorance, misconception, or misinformed prejudice. Men can repent of their careless or mistaken opposition to Jesus. Peter denied Jesus (Mk. 14:71-72, but he later found forgiveness, and when he was restored he was able to strengthen others (Lk. 22:31-32). Paul’s calling himself the *“chief of sinners”* (1 Tim. 1:15) serves as an example of the extent of God’s forgiveness.

God is gracious and will to extend mercy and forgiveness to sinners (Psa. 103:8; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Notwithstanding, his mercy is not unconditional. In order to receive mercy and forgiveness the terms of pardon must be met. There needs to be an admission of sin and the action of repentance (1 Jn. 1:9; Matt. 3:8; 21:28-20). That being said, one who so heinously blasphemes God as these scribes does not seem to exhibit either. It is not a case of God hardening His face and refusing to forgive. They have hardened their hearts to the point where pardon will not be forthcoming. I am hoping that we realize that the reason this is unpardonable *does not rest with God*; it rests upon man and his stubborn and impenitent heart!

I find compelling a quote from a commentary by Kenneth Chumbley, *“The sin against the Holy Spirit is not a case of God refusing to forgive, but of a person refusing to be forgiven. The only sin that is unforgivable is the rejection of forgiveness.”* What brother Chumbley has written is very thought

provoking. I believe he has struck at the central point Jesus is making. It is not that every act of blasphemy is unforgivable. He clearly says so in Matthew 12:31. However, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is an act of stubborn resistance. No one could deny that a miracle had taken place. So they attack Jesus and in doing so attribute the source of His power to Satan. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable because its source is a heart of malice, selfish preference of wrong over right and evil over good, and a willful refusal to believe. As long as a person persists in this state, genuine repentance is impossible. There is no room in this person’s heart for penitence, which is a prerequisite for forgiveness. His sin is unpardonable simply because he is unwilling to travel the road that leads to pardon. The only time God is unable to forgive is when there is an unwillingness to seek forgiveness.

In Mark’s account we find what is called the imperfect tense in 3:30, *“because they were saying”*. The imperfect tense implies a continued and persistent rejection of truth on the part of the scribes. In essence it ought to read, *“they kept on saying”* that Jesus had an unclean spirit. A continuous refusal to respond to the guidance of the Spirit of God as revealed in His word may eventually lead to a state of moral insensitivity. One might think of this in terms of grieving (Eph. 4:30), resisting (Acts 7:51), and quenching (1 Thess. 5:19) the Holy Spirit. This continual refusal may ultimately cause one to become so calloused that he will not even hear the truth.

Conclusion

There is such a thing as opposition to divine influence that is so persistent and deliberate, because of continual preference of darkness to light, that repentance, and therefore forgiveness become impossible. The Law of Moses made a distinction between sins committed unintentionally, for which atonement could be made, and sins committed in open defiance of God. The person who acts *“defiantly...is blaspheming the Lord..., has despised the word of the Lord and has broken his commandment..., shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be*

on him” (Num. 15:30-31). The Hebrews writer said it is impossible to renew to repentance those who crucify the Son of God afresh, placing themselves in a state of open repudiation of the only way of salvation (Heb. 6:4-6). For them *“there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”* (Heb. 10:26ff).

The gospel is God’s power to salvation. But we must have an honest and good heart to receive it. *“He who has ears, let him hear.”*

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What Is The Sin Unto Death?

In 1 John 5:16 we read, *“If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.”* The ESV has, *“There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.”*

Here is an interesting point. There is no article in the Greek language (in English this would be “a” or “an”). These are supplied by the translators. So that would make this read *“There is sin unto death.”* This makes it general rather than specific. In other words, it does not mean that there is a particular sin unto death.

Furthermore, all sin is unto death. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 6:23). This is true for all mankind. John is addressing Christians in this latter. Christians who become entangled in sin must repent, confess, and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 Jn. 1:9). If someone repents and confesses their sin, we are to pray with them and for them. Should they refuse to repent and confess, then prayer on the part of anyone would be futile.

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