

The Unpardonable Sin

By David de Bruyn

(Mat 12:22-32)

Also Mark 3:22-30, Luke 11:14-28; 12:10

Many a Christian comes across these verses and trembles with fear at the thought of a sin that cannot be forgiven. It should grip us with fear. It is frightening that there could be a particular sin that falls outside the realm of God's forgiveness – or at least, so it appears. Since our only hope of being with God in glory is His forgiveness of us through the perfect atoning sacrifice of Christ, to hear Christ Himself say that there is a particular sin that we can do which is not forgivable, is an awesome, terrifying thought.

The unpardonable sin- what is it?

Many believers, not knowing better, have in their dark moments of despair wondered if they have committed this unpardonable sin. They wonder if they have perhaps lost their salvation – even though the Bible makes it clear that true believers are eternally secure. So much false teaching has emerged around the teaching of the unpardonable sin. What is this sin? What does it mean to commit it in today's context?

I. The Situation

We read that Jesus had cast out a demon from somebody, and people were amazed. To heal someone who was both blind and mute was truly incredible. So the people begin asking, "Is not this the Son of David?" By that, they meant – is this not the Messiah? It is interesting that the Jews put two and two together – such supernatural power must mean – the Messiah truly is here.

II. The Accusation

This miracle takes place in what is sometimes called the year of opposition. As we have seen in previous miracles, the Pharisees had made up their minds about Jesus. Firstly, He did not come from one of their schools, or support their Pharisaism. Secondly, He had claimed to forgive sins. Thirdly, He had healed someone on the Sabbath. So they had made up their mind about Him. He could not be the Messiah – not a chance.

But here was the problem – they could not deny that He was performing miracles. They had happened in front of them. It is only obvious that Jesus must be the Messiah. But to avoid the unavoidable conclusion, their hard hearts reason this way: "His power comes from Beelzebub – from Satan. He casts out demons by Satan.

III. Christ's Justification

Jesus didn't always defend Himself before the Pharisees, but on this occasion He does. He answers their accusation with three points which flatten the Pharisees.

The first is *absurdity*. “How can Satan cast out Satan? A kingdom divided cannot stand.” Simply put – this man whom Jesus had healed had obviously been held captive by Satan. The fact that Jesus had now reversed what Satan’s kingdom had done to the man made their argument absurd. Why would Satan empower Jesus to undo what he had done in the first place?

The second argument is *inconsistency*.

He goes on to say “And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges.”

The Pharisees did not deny that their own Jewish exorcists were casting out demons. They knew they were doing it. And they never accused them of being empowered by Satan. So they were being inconsistent. And of course, if Satan was the power behind Jesus’ casting out of a demon, then the same must be true of them.

The third is *superiority*. “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.”

Jesus makes a clear point. Satan had done this to this man. Satan is described as the strong man. To defeat the power and purposes of Satan, Jesus could not be under the power of Satan, He had to be over and above the power of Satan. He has to be able to bind the strong man, and plunder his goods – in this case the demon-possessed man.

So Jesus clears His name regarding what they are saying about Him. But this now is the setting for understanding the crucial words regarding the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

It is now that he says, “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 speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come. “

IV. The Dangerous Implication

Now comes the terrible warning – blasphemy of all kinds will be forgiven, but not blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Now don’t pull this out of context and give it meanings outside of its context.

Who was Jesus addressing? The Pharisees. What had they just done? They had just attributed the work of the Spirit in Jesus to Satan.

‘If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God’. The Holy Spirit was the power in Christ’s ministry. Thus what He did was under the control and power of God the Holy Spirit. You could put it this way- His Deity, His acts as God, were performed through Him by God the Holy Spirit.

Here’s the conclusion. Jesus is saying – if you blaspheme me – Jesus the Son of Man – Jesus in my humanity, this will be forgiven. It is forgivable to see Jesus in a human body that needed water and food and rest, a body that got tired and experienced pain – and conclude – “there is nothing different about this man. He is not the Messiah. He is not God.”

Such words would be blasphemy, but they would be forgiven.

But when people saw the Holy Spirit working through Him to produce miracles, that was something else. When people saw that man, that carpenter's son, cause the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the lepers to be cleansed, the demon-possessed to be delivered, the dead to be raised, the hungry to be fed – when they saw these things – they were now seeing more than Jesus' humanity – they were seeing His deity, His divinity. They were seeing that He was not merely flesh, He was God in flesh. The Holy Spirit through Him was testifying - this Man is the Son of God, the only way to salvation. When people saw the works of the Holy Spirit done through Jesus and rejected it – it was blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. To say of Jesus that He didn't look like much of a Messiah physically would be blasphemy. but be forgiven. To say of Jesus that His casting out of demons was done by the prince of demons – this was blasphemy of Christ's deity, of His divinity – of the Holy Spirit revealing His divine nature – and it would not be forgiven.

You could see it this way – blasphemy against the Son of Man would be forgiven. Blasphemy against the Son of God – this would not be forgiven. Denying the identity of Jesus as Messiah because of His humanity would be forgiven. Denying the identity of Jesus as Messiah because of His Deity would not be forgiven.

This is backed up in the account in Mark where adds the explanatory phrase in 3:30, “Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.”

They were calling the Spirit of God in Jesus an unclean spirit. To sum it all up - they were calling His Deity demonic.

This is what constituted the unpardonable sin.

The unpardonable sin was attributing the work of the Spirit to Satan, and rejecting the testimony of God the Spirit concerning God the Son.

Now, this leads us to the application. Can this sin be committed today? Can we be guilty of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? The answer is: not in the same way. The unique nature of this sin was that Jesus was present as a human, while His deity was operating through His human frame. To blaspheme the Holy Spirit in the way He meant would mean that the same circumstances would need to be in place. Jesus would need to be amongst us in flesh, with the Holy Spirit performing signs through Him, and then attributing those signs to Satan would be a repeat of that sin. Since Jesus is resurrected and ascended, this is no longer possible. It may again be possible in the millennial kingdom when Jesus is amongst us again.

But someone might say that the principle of attributing the work of the Spirit to Satan is still applicable today. So they go on to say, you should never criticise a ministry that has signs and wonders, because you would be guilty of the same sin.

There are many false teachers who promote their unbiblical, unscriptural supernatural phenomena as biblical and normative. When they are challenged to, “Be careful! If you question my ministry, if you attribute these signs and wonders to anything other than

God, you're doing exactly what the Pharisees did when they said Jesus cast out demons by Satan – you're on shaky ground, you could be committing the unpardonable sin". Uninstructed, nervous believers back off. After all, we don't want to commit the unpardonable sin by inadvertently criticising the work of God.

The end-result of this oft-used technique is that such false teachers keep their ministries beyond scrutiny, above criticism and forever self-justifying. Even the test of Scripture cannot be applied to their ministries for fear of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

Now this is completely false, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, we are told by the Bible to test the spirits." Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."(1 John 4:1)

Test the spirits. In other words, hold the sayings and actions of anyone claiming to be God's servant up to the bar of God's own Word. When someone is operating or speaking unbiblically, we have every right to shine the light of God's Word on that darkness. God the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Word of God, is not in one place of Scripture going to say – test the spirits, and then in another place say – don't ever question a ministry, you might be blaspheming Me. No, it shows that the meaning of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not related to questioning the validity of a ministry.

Secondly, we are warned that many false and deceiving spirits are out there, performing signs that could be mistaken as the Holy Spirit. This is the case now, and will be the case in the future: "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

(2 Thessalonians 2:9-12)

It is very clear here that false signs and wonders do exist. Therefore, if we never question whether or not a work is of God, how will we ever know the work of the Holy Spirit from the work of demonic spirits? Again, this is proof that the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not related to questioning the validity of a ministry.

Thirdly, Jesus Himself said that many who had operated supernatural ministries would not have been empowered by Him. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23)

Notice the supernatural quality of these ministries – prophecy – supernatural, special revelation, casting out of demons, deliverance ministries, wonderful works – signs and wonders, miracles. These things actually happened. Jesus does not say to these unsaved people, "What works? What casting out of demons? What prophecy?" He does not deny these acts took place – He denies *involvement*. He denies that He was the power behind it. He says – "I never knew you." Not, "*I once knew you.*" I *never* knew you. The logical

conclusion is – who was the source of the power behind their acts? It was not God. Once again, this proves – questioning the validity of a ministry is not the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The evidence of Scriptures points strongly towards us being called to do just this – test the spirits.

It is not the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit when you question the validity of someone's ministry – because no one has a ministry like Christ – walking on water, raising the dead, and no one is completely free from sin like Christ. We must question, we must test the spirits. But the Pharisees were not testing, they were rejecting. They had seen more signs, more evidence that the King had arrived than any other people in history. But they refused to believe in Him. They rejected Him, they called Him Son of Satan instead of Son of God.

This was the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

So the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is definitely not when believers doubt the divine origin or character of certain supernatural phenomena taking place today, or even attribute completely unbiblical things to the works of the Evil One. If they are wrong in their conclusions, then they are simply wrong – not guilty of the unpardonable sin.

So, no – it is not the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit to question or even, when enough evidence is in, to declare as false the acts of another claiming to represent Christ.

OK, but what about if someone really does have a ministry empowered by the Spirit and we wrongly attribute it to Satan? Isn't that the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?

The answer is no, it is not the same thing by any means. No matter how Spirit-filled we may be, we are never divine. We are partakers of the divine nature, but that never makes us God. The Spirit indwelling us empowers us to be like Christ, it does not make us Christ. So the situation is not parallel. Someone can reject the work of the Spirit in us and it be forgiven, since we are sinful people, who often confuse the message with our lives. With Jesus this was not the case. He could not and did not sin. To reject signs performed through a perfect life had no excuse.

We do need to be very careful though, and refrain from writing things off as satanic until we clearly see it is against Scripture, and the fruit of the lives of those in it do not reflect Christ.

A second false notion of the unpardonable sin is that it is a particular sin. Now this is an example of ignoring the context in which Christ's words were spoken. Jesus was not connecting the blasphemy of the Spirit with a particular sin, He was connecting it with people's attitude toward Him. But often people get an idea of what they think must be unforgivable sins, and then yank that verse out of context and apply it to one or more of those sins. One such sin that often comes up is suicide. Many believers have the idea that suicide is the unpardonable sin. The faulty logic goes like this: if you commit suicide, then the last thing you do on this earth is a sin, therefore you go to hell. Now this completely misses the Biblical teaching of justification. Justification teaches that God declares us righteous in His sight the day we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. At that moment, the sacrifice of Calvary is applied to our whole life, past, present and future.

Therefore, suicide, as much as it is a sin of murder, is not somehow the unpardonable sin. While it is questionable as to whether a true believer can get to such a state of despair as to take his or her own life, I do not think it is outside of the realm of possibility. And in that case, though that person's last act was displeasing to God, it is no more displeasing than his sins of lust, envy, cheating or filthy speech. And if he had been truly saved, then his justification covers even that hypothetical situation.

You cannot invent categories of sin that the death and resurrection of Christ supposedly does not pay for. Christ's blood covers all sins.

But we can make a modern application. While no one can blaspheme the Holy Spirit since Jesus is not amongst us as a man performing deeds in the power of the Spirit, we can again commit the sin of rejecting the testimony of the Holy Spirit regarding the Deity of Jesus Christ. We have ample witness to it. The empty tomb in Jerusalem. The existence and survival of the true church. The amazing harmony and power of the Word of God. The power of the Gospel in transforming lives. This overwhelmingly says – Jesus Christ is who He said He was – the Son of God.

Will rejection of Jesus' Deity be the unpardonable sin? Not exactly. We all begin by rejecting Jesus Christ at some point. Since we must all be saved at a particular point in our lives, it follows that we were rejecting Christ prior to that, and God forgives us for having done that. But there does come a point, a day when our rejection of Christ is final, and then God's rejection of us is final too.

[Heb 10:26-29](#) For if we sin willfully [if we reject the Gospel] after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. (28) Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (29) Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 10:26-29 approximates a modern-day version of this concept. If we sin wilfully, which in context refers to apostasy – turning your back on Christ and rejecting Him as your Saviour and Lord- this is to reject the Spirit's now clear witness of Christ and to insult Him. There comes a time, when our own rejection, makes it impossible for us to believe. At that point, we have cut off our own mercy, and counted ourselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46).