

SUMMARY: The unforgivable sin (blasphemy of the Holy Spirit) is to possess or witness the supernatural (miraculous) powers of the Holy Spirit and then to deny in word or act the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a first century situation and cannot be repeated today. (This definition is offered here, it was not copied from another source.)

DISCUSSION:

It does not make sense that simply saying words about the Holy Spirit would be unforgivable, but the same words about Jehovah or Jesus would be forgivable. It must be more significant than simply saying words.

It does not make sense that the unforgivable sin is the unrepentant sin. That means that the unforgivable sin would be forgiven if repented of, making it not unforgivable.

It would make sense that for a person to have received the gift of the Holy Spirit in the form of miraculous powers that he performed, and then turn his back on God would elevate the situation to terminal.

Today the Holy Spirit typically performs activities only thru natural means, so it is probably impossible for a person to have the powers to commit an unpardonable sin at this time.

DEFINITIONS FROM WEBSTER'S NINTH COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY

blasphemy 1.a: the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God b: the act of claiming the attributes of deity 2: irreverence toward something considered sacred or inviolable.

forgive 1: to cease to feel resentment against (an offender) : pardon <~one's enemies> 2 a to give up resentment of or claim to requital for <~and insult> b : to grant relief from payment <~a debt> ~vi: to grant forgiveness

PERTINENT VERSES:

Heb 6:4-6: For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucified to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame. (NAS)

Matt. 12:31-32 "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word

against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come.”

Mark 3:29-30 “Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin – because they were saying , ‘He has an unclean spirit’.”

Luke 12:10 “And everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him.”

Opinions from other papers:

B.W. Johnson in the People’s New Testament teaches “Much discussion has arisen concerning the nature of sin against the Holy Spirit, and nothing is plainer. It was ascribing Christ’s works to demoniac influence. These works were wrought by the power of the Spirit.”

John Clayton in DOES GOD EXIST? teaches “Allowing oneself to be so controlled by Satan that nothing man or God does will be accepted is a condition, and “blaspheme against the Holy Spirit describes that condition. Our refusal to accept God’s grace is what condemns us-not a careless oath.”

COMMENTS FROM THE PEOPLE’S NEW TESTAMENT, BY B.W. JOHNSON

Johnson comments on Matt 12:31: “The blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Compare Mark 8:28 and Luke 12:10. Much discussion has arisen concerning the nature of sin against the Holy Spirit, and nothing is plainer. Mark 8:30 explains it. It was ascribing Christ’s works to demoniac influence. These works were wrought by the power of the Spirit.”

Johnson comments on Matthew 12:32 “Whoever speaketh against the Son of man. Personal injuries will be forgiven upon repentance. Christ prayed for his persecutors. Every sin can be forgiven but that against the Holy Spirit. Speak against the Holy Spirit. Perversely ascribe the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. Neither in this world nor that to come. Judgment shall overtake him both here and hereafter. The Jews divided the two worlds, or, rather, ages of the world, by the coming of Christ. This would then mean that there is forgiveness to such a sin under neither dispensation. No passage in the Bible affirms more emphatically the doctrine of eternal punishment. There is a sin that hath no forgiveness.”

Johnson comments on Mark 3:30: “Because they said he had an unclean spirit. This was a sin against the Holy spirit because Jesus did mighty works in the power of the Holy spirit, and they ascribed the power to an unclean spirit.”

Johnson comments on Luke 12:10: "Blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit. See notes on Matt. 12:31,32.

THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN AND THE NATURE OF GOD

Article by John Clayton from DOES GOD EXIST?, March/April, 2000

One of the techniques that atheists have used over the years has been to attempt to portray the whole concept of God as irrational. There are many methods employed to do this, but one frequently used method is to take a biblical passage or story and interpret in such a way as to make God look like an arrogant, egotistical fool. The whole concept of judgment, heaven, and hell is a frequent target of such attacks. How can anyone do anything that would warrant eternal punishment?

Any thinking person can see answers to this question. If God gave us life and holds us accountable for what we do with it, there is no inconsistency because accountability is logical. There are some questions that can be quite complex to answer, but they can be answered and, in this writer's mind, they can be answered logically and positively.

What is harder to answer is the question of the "unforgivable sin." The biblical reference to this question is:

Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatsoever blasphemies they utter; but whosoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin (Mark 3:28-29, NRSV).

Atheists have cited this passage as a demonstration of God's irrationality, and some believers have struggled with the passage and whether they have committed the unforgivable sin and thus have no hope.

The first point that needs to be made is that Jesus' statement in Mark was made in response to the scribes' claim that Jesus had cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub (the prince of demons). What these people were doing was attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. These people have seen an incredible demonstration of the power of Jesus, but rather than being open to the evidence that was provided, they took a sustained stance of denial. This was not a one-time denial or single statement against Christ and God; it was an ongoing denial of God by attributing the good done by God to evil.

There are many examples in the Bible of people who deny God and/or Christ. The classic example in Peter:

Then he [Peter] began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them "I don't know the man" [Jesus] (Matthew 26:74).

In Luke 12:8-11, Jesus had made a contrast between acknowledging Jesus, denying Jesus, and sinning against the Holy Spirit.

I tell you, whosoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (NIV).

No one would suggest that Peter blasphemed the Holy Spirit, but he certainly spoke against Jesus. Jesus predicted Peter would deny Him and yet He promised Peter He would pray for him. In Luke 24:34, we see that Jesus made a special appearance after his death to Peter.

The contrast to Peter, Thomas, and the others who denied Jesus is Judas. Judas saw all the miracles of Jesus. He was a witness to the good Jesus did, the power of His teachings, and His perfect life. In spite of all of the evidence and all the good he saw, Judas deliberately and consciously turned himself over to Satan. He denied the Holy Spirit, denied the divinity of Christ, denied the power of God, and was so committed to evil that nothing short of the death of Christ would convince him of who Jesus was. When he was convinced, instead of turning his life over to God and seeking forgiveness, he killed himself. This was not a flash in the night, knee-jerk reaction to Jesus. This was a deep immersion into evil that was so complete that no return to God's way was possible. The people in Mark 3:28-29 were making a sustained stance toward Jesus that denied the power of God as the force that was working in Him. None of the gospels say that a person cannot alter this stance once it has been taken, but Judas shows how difficult it can be to change it. A person who is worried about whether he has committed blaspheme against the Holy Spirit has already changed that stance and is not guilty of blaspheme.

God does not want anyone to be lost (2 Peter 3:9) and because of this is willing to extend forgiveness to an unbelievable extent. The word used to describe this is grace. Those who do not have forgiveness are those who refuse it. Allowing oneself to be so controlled by Satan that nothing man or God does will be accepted is a condition, and "blaspheme against the Holy Spirit" describes that condition. Our refusal to accept God's grace is what condemns us--not a careless oath. --JNC

BOLES COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW – PAGES 269-272

31, 32 "Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy."

—This is Jesus' conclusion and application of his teaching. "Blasphemy" is injurious and malicious speaking against God or his attributes; to blaspheme in the scripture sense denotes improper and unworthy speeches against God, his attributes, works, or temple; it means to ascribe to God the weaknesses of men, or to attribute to men the perfections and works of God. Here Jesus fixes a limit of divine mercy. What is "the blasphemy against the Spirit"? Mark 3: 30 tells us that the Pharisees had been guilty of blasphemy "because they said, He hath an unclean spirit." This sin was maliciously ascribing a miracle of divine power to the power of Beelzebub. It is not said here "a sin against," but "blasphemy against," which

is explained by “speak against the Holy Spirit.” The “blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven,” but “every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men” but the one “against the Holy Spirit.” Man may speak “a word against the Son of man” and “it shall be forgiven him,” but “whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.” There has been much speculation about “the unpardonable sin” and “the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” Jesus came in the flesh, dwelt among men, and revealed the will of God to man. God the Father revealed his will to the Jews through Moses, and Jesus revealed the will of God to us. The Holy Spirit was to come in person and complete the work of Jesus. He said, “It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you. And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John 16: 7, 8.) Many misunderstood Jesus, his teachings, and his kingdom while he was on earth, and even denied him as being the Messiah, who afterwards repented and were pardoned, and became Christians. (Acts 2: 37, 38; Acts 9: 1, 17.) Many could and did reject Jesus while he was on earth, but when the Holy Spirit came and testified of him, they accepted Christ. But when the Holy Spirit came and gave the complete will of God, if men rejected this, there was no other evidence to be furnished, no other divine agency to be given, and if they finally rejected the Holy Spirit, there was no forgiveness for them. There was no forgiveness “neither in this world, nor in that which is to come” Mark says “hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.” (Mark 3: 29.) No sin unforgiven here or in this world will be pardoned or forgiven hereafter. [Note: At that point, every sin is the unpardonable sin so the term becomes meaningless]

God bore testimony to men through the Old Testament Scriptures; Jesus Christ bore testimony in person, given in the New Testament; and he stated that his testimony was incomplete, and he would send the Holy Spirit to complete or perfect that testimony. (John 16: 7, 8, 13, 14.) (Read also John 14: 14, 20-27; 15: 26; 16: 8.) They all teach that neither the revelations of the Father nor the Son were complete to guide into life eternal, save as people received the teachings of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would come; perfect the testimony, 8 and guide into all truth. Without this guidance being followed, they could not know the full faith of God. It is in perfect harmony with all these scriptures and with all the facts recorded in the Bible for Jesus, when they charged him with acting by the power of the devil, to warn them that they might do this now to him and find forgiveness; but if they so rejected and treated the Holy Spirit when he came, there would be no forgiveness, for there would be no more testimony and no more opportunity to repent: It refers, of course, to the final rejection of the will of God. To reject the will of God was to sin against God, to reject the words of Jesus was to sin against him, and to reject the teachings of the Holy Spirit was to sin against the Holy Spirit.

To blaspheme is to oppose and speak against. Many construe this to mean that Jesus defined the attributing the works of Jesus to the evil power as the sin against the Holy Spirit;

but the Bible does not say so, nor anything that implies this. Read Mark 3: 28-30; Luke 12: 10. All classes and kinds of men, those that maligned, persecuted, and abused Jesus in every form and manner were warned and exhorted by the Holy Spirit to turn to Jesus and live. Paul was a persecutor and blasphemer of the Lord Jesus and sought the destruction of the whole church of God. Jesus did not mean to say that those who blasphemed and rejected Christ Jesus and regarded him as a servant of Satan might not turn to God when the Holy Spirit brought its message of love and power. He only meant to tell them: "You may reject my teachings, malign and abuse me as you are now doing; but when the Holy Spirit is come and bears his testimony, if you reject that, there will be no further offices(sic) of love and mercy, either in this world or the world to come." To disobey and reject God was to blaspheme him; to reject and disobey Jesus was to blaspheme him; to reject and disobey the teachings of the Holy Spirit was to blaspheme him; and when the Holy Spirit performed his work to teach and save men, God's provisions of mercy were exhausted.

BOLES COMMENTARY ON MARK – PAGES 86-89

"unto you, All their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and their blasphemies wherewith soever(sic) they shall blaspheme: 29 but whosoever"

28 "Verily I say, unto you, All their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men," This embraces all responsible sons and daughters of men. All sins committed by the different members of the human race will be forgiven, upon proper repentance and obedience, except the one mentioned in next verse.

"and their blasphemies wherewith soever(sic) they shall blaspheme:" Blasphemy is any kind of injurious speech about another. The scribes blasphemed when they attributed Christ's power to work miracles to the power of the devil. The statement that all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men is not an affirmation of universal pardon. But that all manner of sin and blasphemy, with the exception stated in the text, will be forgiven through the blood of Christ, some to one man and some to another, every conceivable sin will be forgiven except the one in question. [Sin is to violate the law or rule given by God to men. Violation of law is sin, and brings the penalty of sin. Intentional and conscious sin intensifies the guilt of sin. Paul sinned and obtained forgiveness because he did it ignorantly in unbelief (1 Tim. 1: 13), thinking he was doing God's service. To violate the law, thinking he did God's service, was a sin. To violate it, knowing it was God's law, would have been a greater sin. Blaspheme is to rail upon, to speak evil of. This verse intimates that speaking evil of all other beings, including God and Jesus Christ, should be forgiven men—on their repentance, of course, is meant. In this distinction drawn, to violate the law given by God to sin against God, to violate a law given by Jesus is to sin against him, to violate a law given by the Holy Spirit is to sin against the Spirit.]

29 “but whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit”

—There seems to be three grades or degrees of blasphemy. (1) That against the Holy Spirit. This seems to be the greatest and the most dangerous. (2) That against the Son. (Matt. 12: 32.) (3) That against God, the Father.

“hath never forgiveness,” I take it that Jesus did not charge the scribes had committed the unpardonable sin. He was warning them not to go this far. They had almost reached it when they accused him of casting out demons by the power of the devil, and he warns them not to take the next step of blaspheming the Holy Spirit for this would be the fatal step. Hath never forgiveness because they cannot repent. So long as man can repent he can find forgiveness. This and corresponding passages in Matt. 12: 31 and Luke 12: 10 have been the occasion of much controversy and of much trouble and anxiety to despondent minds. Many think they have committed the sin for which there is no forgiveness, and give themselves much trouble over it. Matthew says (12: 31, 32) “Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.” From this we see that the speaking against the Son of man may be forgiven, but speaking against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. Blasphemy, speaking against, and all manner of sin, are placed on an equality. What is the sin, then, against the Holy Spirit? Many think these people committed that sin. But did they speak against Christ or against the Holy Spirit? Clearly against Christ; Jesus, as we understand it, told them, in this you speak against me. For this there is chance for forgiveness. But when the Holy Spirit is come, if you speak against him, if you reject him, as you now reject me, there will then be no forgiveness. It was a warning given on the occasion of their speaking against him that they cannot so treat the Holy Spirit when he shall come, and find forgiveness. The reason is, they speak against Christ during his life, and when the Holy Spirit shall come he will give additional evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, and opportunities to hear God and turn. But when the Spirit shall have come and given his testimonies and revelations, the testimony will be complete, and he who rejects that will have nothing more to move him to repentance.] [Boles equates speaking against the Holy Spirit with rejecting the Holy Spirit]

“but is guilty of an eternal sin:” That is, a sin never to be forgiven and will be punished eternally. Both the sin and punishment are eternal. The penalty is eternal because the sin is eternal. This is one of the most fearful sentences ever spoken. With sin, penalty. and punishment must ever go; and to be cut off forever from moral remedy, to have no hope of reformation, everyone who is capable of thought knows what that means. The terror of an evil life is its final choice, its fixedness of character. There is nothing more sure than that there is an unpardonable sin—a sin for which there is no space for repentance. It is possible to go beyond the reach of God’s mercy—bounds beyond which forgiveness never reclaims.

“There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request.” (1’John 5: 16.) Then let us heed the wisdom of the stage driver, who, in speaking of a dangerous precipice by the roadside, said: “Instead of seeing how close to its edge I can drive without going over, I try to see how far from it I can get.” So instead of trying to see how close we can get to the unpardonable sin without committing it, let us see how far away from it we can stay. This is wisdom.

30 “because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.” [He gave them this warning because they thus spoke of him; they must not so treat the Holy Spirit.]

BOLES COMMENTARY ON LUKE, PAGE 249

10 “And every one who shall speak a word against the Son”

—From the denial of Jesus, he passes to blasphemy; he brings the two classes of blasphemy into prominence—the blasphemy against the “Son of man” and the blasphemy “against the Holy Spirit.” There are gradations of blasphemy: to blaspheme primarily means “to speak evil of, to rail, or to slander.” Hence the word in scripture, when applied to God, took upon itself the strongest meaning; to blaspheme means to speak irreverently and impiously to God, or of God, or of sacred things. One can speak evil of or to a fellow man; this implies a malicious purpose, so blasphemy presupposes an impious intention to detract from the glory of man or God; it means to alienate the minds of others from the love and reverence of God. An idea of this sin may be seen in Lev. 24: 10-16; other instances are recorded in 2 Kings 18: 28-35; 19: 1-6, where Jehovah and his perfections are maliciously reviled.

What is it to blaspheme “against the Holy Spirit”? Some call it “unpardonable sin”; some call it the “sin unto death.”

God spoke to man through the law of Moses; the time came when he next spoke to man through his Son. (Heb. 1: 1.) Some who heard Christ could and did blaspheme him; they spoke evil to him and of him; they even attributed the power that he used in casting out demons to Beelzebub; this was speaking evil against the “Son of man.” Jesus was crucified, buried, raised from the dead, and ascended back to the Father; he then sent the Holy Spirit. Jesus stated that his testimony was incomplete, and that he would send the Holy Spirit to complete or further perfect the testimony that God furnished. (John 16: 7, 8, 13, 14.) The Holy Spirit came and perfected the testimony by guiding the apostles into all truth, and inspiring those who wrote the New Testament. If one finally rejects the Holy Spirit and the teaching that he gave in the New Testament, there is no hope for that one. The Holy Spirit with his teachings is the last that God has to offer man. If one blasphemes the Holy Spirit by rejecting the words of the New Testament, there is no chance for forgiveness because no other agency from heaven will be given.

SIN LEADING UNTO DEATH

1 John 5:16 “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. (NASB)

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit would seem to fit the description of the unforgivable sin.