



Is There a Sin God Does Not Forgive?

The fear of unforgiveness

Both believers and unbelievers sometimes express fear that they have committed a sin that is unforgivable. This steals the joy of their salvation, the assurance of their salvation, or with unbelievers, the hope of ever being saved. They may even think they have committed the so-called “unpardonable sin,” or more biblically, “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.”

It is very clear that Jesus died for all sins (Col. 2:13). This would include sins committed before belief as well as those committed after, and even those which are still future. God will not be surprised by future sins such that He will regret giving eternal life and therefore take it back. Once saved, a believer is secure forever.

It is also clear that even what many consider the most terrible sins are covered by God’s provision through Christ. Fornication, adultery, and homosexuality are among those sins the Corinthians had committed when the apostle Paul reminded them “*And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*” (1 Cor. 6:11). King David was forgiven for committing adultery and murder (2 Sam. 12:13).

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

Jesus said of one—and only one—sin that whoever does it “*never has forgiveness*” (Mark 3:29). But the nature of that sin is not so clear.

Though called “the unpardonable sin,” Jesus actually said, “*but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men*” and “*whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come*” (Matt. 12:31-32). Every sin is pardonable through Christ, but anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never experience that pardon.

“Blasphemy” means to speak evil or injuriously of someone. But even blasphemies against Jesus Christ can be forgiven (Matt.12:32; cf. Mark 3:28). So there must be a difference between blasphemy against Jesus Christ and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Various interpretations

There are several interpretations of this difficult warning:

1. It is Israel’s national rejection of the Messiah. In this view it can only be committed by the nation of Israel at the time of Christ’s presentation of Himself to them as King. Therefore, it can not be committed by individuals, and it can not be committed today. It is true that in Matthew’s account Christ seems to be presenting Himself as Israel’s King who will bring in the kingdom. In the context that follows, Christ calls His generation an “*evil generation*” which deserved condemnation because of their rejection of the King (Matt. 12:39, 41-42). But some doubt this interpretation because Jesus said this warning applies to “*anyone*,” which denotes individuals. It also clearly a sin that involves speech: “*anyone who speaks a word against ...*” (Matt. 12:32).

2. It is accusing Christ of satanic allegiance. In this view someone verbally accuses Christ of satanic origin. The scribes said of Jesus, “*He has Beelzebub*” and “*By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons*” (Mark 3:22). Some would counter that if this was spoken out of ignorance, it would



be a slander against Christ which could be forgiven (Matt. 12:32; Mark 3:28). When Mark 12:30 explains that this warning is “*because they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit,’*” it may imply that Christ is warning them that by slandering Him they are close to committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, though they have not yet done so.

3. It is disbelief in the gospel. Of course someone who does not believe the promise of the gospel can not be forgiven in their unbelief. Also, this view of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit allows it to be committed today by any and all unbelievers. One problem with this view is that the warning seems more specific and serious than this. If this view were true, why not simply call the sin unbelief? But it is also a sin that involves speech and not just a rejection of Christ, but a rejection of the Holy Spirit’s testimony. Besides, unbelief can be forgiven.

4. It is a willful and slanderous rejection of the Holy Spirit’s testimony about Christ. This is a sin that reveals itself in the perverse verbal accusation that Jesus Christ is in league with the devil. The Father witnesses to the Son both through prophecy and His verbal approval at Christ’s baptism. The Son witnesses through His own words and works. These witnesses are external. But the Holy Spirit witnesses through His convicting ministry (John 16:7-11). This witness is internal. When the Spirit convinces an unbeliever who Jesus Christ is, and that person nevertheless accuses Him of being satanic, he has committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Matthew’s discussion that follows this warning emphasizes that one’s words reveal one’s heart condition so that “*by your words you will be condemned*” (Matt. 12:33-37). The accusation that Jesus is of the devil reveals the moral blindness of a person who would call light darkness. It displays a heart hardened beyond hope of forgiveness, because there is nothing left to appeal to the conscience when the Holy Spirit’s testimony is rejected and slandered.

Can it be committed today?

According to the last three interpretations, this sin could be committed today. The last and perhaps most convincing interpretation would say that this sin could be committed by someone who knowingly and maliciously rejects and slanders the Holy Spirit’s convicting ministry about the person of Christ. It would be hard to know when someone knowingly rejects the Holy Spirit’s testimony and is not doing it out of ignorance, but God knows.

Conclusion

Interpreting the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not easy. We would do well to focus on what is clearly taught in these passages. It is clear that Christ’s warning was to unbelievers. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can not be committed by believers. In fact, if a believer worries that he has committed this sin, this is a good argument that he hasn’t because he evidences a conscience.

God’s grace covers every sin, but that grace must be appropriated. God can and will forgive any and every sin, but an unbeliever who blasphemes the Holy Spirit is morally blind to the degree that his heart is hardened by his conscious rejection of Jesus to the point that he will never appropriate His grace of forgiveness. Any unbeliever who believes will be saved. But any unbeliever who blasphemes the Holy Spirit demonstrates a spiritual condition that precludes a receptive attitude toward the gospel.