

IS THERE AN UNPARDONABLE SIN?

The word unpardonable does not appear in the Bible. However, Jesus said there was a sin which if committed would not be forgiven which means the same thing. (Matthew 12:32; Mark 3:29). The ASV defines it as an “eternal sin” (Mark 3:29). These words came as a result of Jesus casting a demon out of a man which had caused him to be both blind and mute. When Jesus cast the demon out of the man, he “both spoke and saw” (Matthew 12:22). Many of the people seeing this miracle “...were amazed and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’” Obviously, they were asking if Jesus was the coming Messiah.

“When the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons’” (v. 24). While their comments may have been heard by the multitude, Jesus did not hear their words, but He read their thoughts (v. 25). He responded to them first by giving them a parable from which three illustrations can be drawn. The first is the divided house, the second is the divided kingdom, and the third was the strongman’s house. Each of these was referring to Satan, by whom they said Jesus received the power to cast out demons.

A divided house or kingdom cannot stand for division will cause their downfall. The strongman in this illustration is clearly Satan, who controls the kingdom of the world which is in opposition to the Kingdom of God now ruled over by Christ from Heaven (Matthew 12:34; John 12:31, Acts 2:32-36). The property referred to would most likely be the people who were possessed by demons. Jesus invaded Satan’s kingdom and released his captives by casting out the demons. It was at this point that Jesus warned them against committing the unforgivable sin. To understand what this sin was, we need to answer two questions: What had these Pharisees done? What was that sin?

Jesus said the sin was “blasphemy against the Spirit.” Blasphemy is defined as “speaking irreverently or profanely of or to God (or to Deity; SSC), to curse, or to revile” (**Webster’s Dictionary**). It can also be defined as “defiant irreverence,” or “Any remark or act held to be irreverent or disrespectful.” Mark writes that the sin was “because they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit,’” thus attributing the power by which Jesus cast out demons to Satan (Beelzebub) rather than to the Holy Spirit (3:30). Jesus clearly defines the sin Himself when He said “whoever speaks a word

against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:32). This means the sin is one of the tongue. While all sins proceed from the heart, that which comes out of the mouth “defiles a man” (15:18).

Working from this definition we can determine by eliminating some misconceptions what this sin is? Some suggest it is the action rather than the words. Two of those suggested actions they site are that it was either rejecting Christ or rejecting His message. If the sin were either of these, once a person rejected Christ or His message one time, they would be lost and would never receive forgiveness. This is clearly an example of a person failing to receive forgiveness for a sin which is pardonable. Gus Nichols speaking of “persistent unbelief” wrote that it is not just for rejecting the gospel “but it is for rejecting and neglecting pardon graciously extended in the gospel while they live, and not because they have committed the unpardonable sin” (**Lectures on the Holy Spirit**, 1967, p. 236).

Also, since the gospel message in its fulness had not been delivered before Pentecost, this would imply the sin could not be committed before that time when Jesus plainly said it could be committed “in this age (Jewish; SSC) or in the age (Christian; SSC) to come” (Matthew 12:32).

Is this unforgivable sin suicide? If a person committed suicide, self-murder which is sinful, and died before having asked forgiveness, he would be held accountable. Perry B. Cotham wrote, “Any sin unrepented of and unforgiven at the time of death will keep a person out of heaven” (**The Unpardonable Sin**, p. 3). However, if that act resulted from a mental illness of which a person was unable to make the right decisions, I do not believe God would hold one who died in Christ responsible if they otherwise were faithful until death (Rom. 8:1-2; 1 John 1:7-10).

This sin is not just blasphemy of any kind. Jesus stated that “every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men” (Matthew 12:31), and that one could blaspheme men or blaspheme Him, or God and they could be forgiven (v. 31). Paul had been a blasphemer, but he was forgiven because he “did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:13).

The sin against the Holy Spirit is also not backsliding, which refers to one who has been a faithful Christian falling away from the Lord. While such a condition is

very serious (Hebrews 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:20-22), backsliders can be forgiven (Acts 8:22). The Apostle Peter could certainly be called a backslider when he denied Jesus three times out of fear for his own safety, but it clear that Jesus forgave him (Matthew 26:69-75; John 21:15-19). He backslid again several years later when being the one who opened the doors of the kingdom to the Gentiles and defending that, he separated himself from Gentiles fearing some Jews who had come from Jerusalem to Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14). Obviously, after being corrected by Paul, he was forgiven for he continued his work for the Lord for many years.

Our God is a merciful one Who is full of grace and stands ready to forgive anyone who comes to Him through faith and obedience (Exodus 34:6-7; Hebrews 8:12). This brings up the question of whether or not there is a sin so heinous that once committed will condemn one to hell for eternity? While some may say “No,” Jesus said that the sin of “blasphemy against the Spirit” will not ever be forgiven. Why is this particular sin so hideous?

This is one of those places in Scripture when the time this was spoken by Jesus is important in determining the seriousness of this sin. The sin which Jesus warned the Pharisees not to be guilty of was “speaking irreverently of the Holy Spirit” and calling Him and unclean spirit. The sin was directly connected with Jesus and His performing miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. James Meadows wrote, “Thus blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is calling the Holy Spirit an unclean spirit and attributing to the devil the power and glory that belongs to the Holy Spirit” (**A Study of the Holy Spirit**, p. 36). Albert Barnes wrote that because they said Jesus worked miracles by the power of the devil rather than by the power of God through the Holy Spirit, “It was therefore a direct insult, abuse, or evil speaking against the Holy Spirit by which Jesus worked His miracles” (**Barnes Notes** on Matthew 12:31-32, p. 132).

Why was this sin so terrible? If their position had become the dominant one, it would have done serious damage to the ministry of Christ and those who were empowered by the Spirit to perform miracles. The working of miracles was essential to confirming the word of God (Hebrews 2:1-4). Gus Nichols wrote, “Think about it! If the miracles wrought by Jesus had become the commonly accepted view and explanation, Christ would have failed to prove His Deity and Sonship, and His mission on earth would have been a colossal failure; for His

miracles were to confirm His claim to be the Son of God” (**Lectures on the Holy Spirit**, p. 235).

Over my almost 60 years in ministry I have had concerned Christians come to me and ask if they had been guilty of committing the sin against the Holy Spirit? It usually concerned at some point in their lives having spoken something negative against the Holy Spirit. My answer has been that, “I do not believe this sin can be committed today.” Barnard Franklin wrote, “The sin in question was actually committed in the days of our Lord’s ministry on earth, but it does not necessarily follow that it can be committed in His absence” (**Bibliotheca Sacra**, p. 233). Gus Nichols wrote that, “Jesus pronounced such an awful condemnation on the one guilty of this sin as would deter and restrain men from accepting this new doctrine of the Pharisees,” and added, “It seems that all sins committed today are pardonable and that all can be saved, if they will” (p. 239). There is no mention of this sin in the remaining books of the New Testament, and there is no record in Scripture of it being committed after Jesus pronouncement.

Why should a person worry about having committed the unpardonable sin if they are guilty of sins for which pardon is possible and they do not receive it? Marcus Sexton wrote, “I know of no one who is guilty of the sin committed by these people, yet, masses are lost and unpardoned of pardonable sins” (**The Way of Life**, p. 146).

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*Unless otherwise stated all Scriptural references are from the NKJV