

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

What Does It Mean to Blaspheme the Holy Spirit?

An unforgivable sin is described in Mark 3 and Matthew 12. These passages involve Jesus Christ's repeated and widespread public defeat of Satan and his demons. Many readers and theologians have been confused about the true nature of this sin. As you read these verses for yourself (below), bear in mind part of the purpose of Jesus Christ's ministry was to directly confront darkness with the light of truth in a public battle of pure good versus pure evil. The only being in the universe that is more powerful than the Evil One, is God. He is the only one with enough power to bind Satan himself and forcibly dispossess him.

Mark 3:22-30 states, "And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebub,' and, 'By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.' ... 'Assuredly, I [Jesus] say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation;' because they said, 'He has an unclean spirit'" (NKJV) Note: The Pharisees made the same charge in Mat 9:34.).

In **Matthew 12:31-32**, Jesus says to the Pharisees, "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come" (NKJV).

What is the context of these statements, and what is the exact sin described?

The Pharisees had long observed the sinless Jesus Christ. They observed him doing undeniable and powerful miracles that were, at the very least, clear evidence of power supplied by God.

These impressive miracles were freely given in pure kindness and love to release people from obvious suffering and the oppression of horrible evil.

However, the Pharisees had so firmly set their hearts against accepting Jesus as the Messiah that they rejected the obvious truth before them and perversely twisted it to influence the crowds. They publicly credited the most ultimately evil being in the universe with these precious, godly miracles. In other words, they called the precious and holy Spirit of God, the unclean spirit of Satan.

In effect, they charged Jesus Christ with sorcery; one who is in league with Satan. These charges are not only appalling and extremely serious, but clearly absurd.

As Jesus immediately responded, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house" (Mark 3:23-27; also see Luke 11:14-23).

Note that... "Jesus does not deny the existence of other exorcists here. [See: Matthew 7:22-23] ...Exorcists often invoked a higher spirit to get rid of a lower one. ...But a demon's retreat that meanwhile drew attention to another of Satan's servants would only be a strategic retreat; such possible activity contrasts with the wholesale exorcizing of the masses that Jesus undertakes, which clearly signifies a defeat of Satan [Matthew 12:29; 4:24; 8:16; Mark 1:34, 39; 5:12, 15; Luke 9:1] ...the parable about tying up a protective householder means that Jesus had defeated Satan and could therefore plunder his possessions--free the demon-possessed"

Author Dr. Henry Morris insightfully clarifies the true nature of Pharisees' sin: "The unforgivable sin of speaking against the Holy Spirit has been interpreted in various ways, but the true meaning cannot contradict other Scripture. It is unequivocally clear that the one unforgivable sin is permanently rejecting Christ (John 3:18; 3:36). Thus, speaking against the Holy Spirit is equivalent to rejecting Christ with such finality that no future repentance is possible. 'My spirit shall not always strive with man,' God said long ago (Genesis 6:3).

In the context of this particular passage (Matthew 12:22-32), Jesus had performed a great miracle of creation, involving both healing and casting out a demon, but the Pharisees rejected this clear witness of the Holy Spirit. Instead they attributed His powers to Satan, thus demonstrating an attitude permanently resistant to the Spirit, and to the deity and saving Gospel of Christ"

What is the difference between the two types of blasphemy described in Matthew 12?

Why is the sacrifice of Christ ineffective as an atonement for the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

Respected Christian theologian Dr. F.F. Bruce writes, "...Speaking against the Son of man might be due to a failure to recognize Him for what He is. So Paul recalls how in his pre-Christian days he thought it his duty to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. But if, having seen the light on the Damascus road, he had deliberately closed his eyes to it and kicked out against the goad which was directing him into the true path, that would have been the sin against the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit persuades and enables men to accept Christ and enjoy the saving benefits of the gospel [John 16:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14; Acts 7:51], but if anyone refuses to submit to the Spirit's gracious constraint, preferring to call good evil and evil good, how can the gospel

avail for him? The deliberate refusal of the grace of God is the one sin which by its very nature is irremediable"

"Anyone who rejects the Holy Spirit's convicting influence and does not repent will not be forgiven, 'neither in this world, neither in the world to come' (Matthew 12:32)"

"Jesus thus regards blasphemy against the Spirit—permanently rejecting his identity (Matthew 12:18) as attested by the Spirit's works (12:28)—as the worst of sins"

Can a Christian commit "the unpardonable sin"?

Authorities agree that the answer is no.

Here's why. "If we refuse to accept the testimony given to us by the Holy Spirit, fight off His conviction of our sin, and never accept the truth, we will never come to Christ for salvation. In Christ, all our sins are forgiven. Therefore, no Christian can commit the unpardonable sin. Only an unregenerate person who refuses to come to Christ will die in his or her sins"

"...once you accept Jesus, that part of the Holy Spirit's job is complete, thus you can't blaspheme His work. Naturally, He continues to work with you, and you can be stubborn and resist Him as a Christian, but you can't blaspheme Him. Live unproductively, carnal and unspiritual, possible. But commit the unpardonable sin? It's just not possible for a true Christian. Remember what Paul said:" "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 8:1).

A true Christian cannot commit a sin for which there is no forgiveness. We are protected by the power of God (1 Peter 1:5). Although we can certainly grieve the Holy Spirit, he still seals us for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). The Apostle Paul was confident "that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6, NKJV).

Bear in mind, however, if someone who claims to be a Christian is responding to the Holy Spirit and Christ in a way very similar to that of the Pharisees, despite the strong witness of the Holy Spirit and abundant exposure to the truth of God's Word, it is highly doubtful that the person was ever saved. Only God knows for sure. The evidence clearly points to an unregenerate heart.

"...for a tree is known by its fruit. ...For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:33-34, NKJV).