

Introduction

I saw on a discussion board this week this cry for help:
I have blasphemed the Holy Spirit - I am unforgivable. Is there ANY hope for me in Christ still? I will still follow Him until my death, but I just want some hope. I have begun writing out the promises of God in notebooks but would they still apply to me considering I am no longer savable- no longer a child of God? I still believe in Jesus and I always will, but I know God is against me.

This cry exhibits a number of problems. Among them, though, the person believes they have blasphemed the Holy Spirit. And as a result they are in a state of alarm and misery and hopelessness and fear. This state unfortunately can result from not accurately understanding the Scripture in regard to the unforgivable sin.

One of the more common questions brought to pastors comes from Christians who are terrorized by the thought that they have committed the unpardonable sin. The question also arises as to what exactly is the unpardonable sin. We will be addressing this matter this morning as we open up the Bible to Matthew 12:31-32.

[Read Text; Pray]

The text we have read begins with the word therefore. It points to the fact that Jesus made the statements of verses 31-32 in direct response to the situation that had just occurred. The Pharisees asserted Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Jesus, however, demonstrated that the accusation was inconsistent and completely lacking in logic. In fact the Pharisees had revealed their inward determination to reject Jesus despite what they had witnessed. Their accusation made it clear that it is not Jesus but they themselves who are on the side of the devil. In that light then, Jesus makes one declaration of great consolation and another declaration of terrorizing alarm. We need to understand both correctly.

I. The Assuring Word of Comfort.

A. Sometimes people become so captured by the alarm associated with the second of Jesus' two declarations that they miss the consolation associated with the first. Let's not miss it this morning. Jesus declares, "I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people." Did you hear that? "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people." In verse 32 he reiterates the declaration of hope by referring to one of the worst possible sins. "Whoever speaks a word against [even] the Son of Man will be forgiven."

B. In his first letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul a similar kind of declaration: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He did not come into the world to help good people; he came to save bad people. We are all bad people. We all have transgressed God's law, committed iniquity, and done what is evil in God's sight. There are no good people to be helped into heaven, only bad people who must be saved if they are to enter heaven.

We have all sinned in every sort of way. We have worshiped gods that are no gods at all. We have misrepresented the true God. We have misused his name. We have cursed our maker. We have dishonored our parents. We have committed murder with our words and adultery with our thoughts. We have stolen and have been deceitful. We have been discontent with what God has given us. We have scoffed at God's word. We have disbelieved. We have not worshiped him and we have distrusted him.

All sin is bad. Some sins we commit unwittingly because sin has such a hold on our lives. Other sin is blatant and brazen. We do what we know better than to do. Sometimes our souls are rightly riddled with guilt because of how we knew the right thing to do but did the wrong. We resisted the urging of God's spirit and went ahead anyway right into the whirlpool of temptation and down the drain of sin. We spoke when we should have held our tongue. We held our tongue when we should have spoken. We looked when we should not have and we looked away when we should have looked with compassion. We made provision for the flesh. We gave satisfaction to the flesh only to wake up deep in sorrow and

regret. We emerged from the cave to cry out, "what have I done?!" Can God forgive me? God, will you forgive me?

C. For Peter this kind of occasion happened not infrequently, but certainly there was no time of greater sorrow and potential despair over sin than when he denied Christ. He had boldly proclaimed that the other disciples may fall away, but not him. He would never deny Jesus. "Oh, but this very night you will deny me three times," said Jesus. "Oh no," said Peter, "Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you!" But he did. And he did so with curses and swearing. And he was within sight of Christ when he did. He went out and wept bitterly. After his resurrection, however, Jesus restored Peter. God forgives sin. Even unthinkable sin.

D. What is your unthinkable sin or sins? Have you ever been so heartbroken over the fact of your sin against God that you felt deeply how you do not deserve the love of God? Have you ever been so under conviction and so weighed down with guilt that you wonder whether God would ever forgive you? You have sinned again in the same way as last time. Well, this word of Jesus here should give you some hope. "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people ... even speaking a word against Jesus."

Surely this statement from the lips of Jesus confirms what David wrote in Psalm 103: "who forgives ALL your iniquity . . . he does not deal with us according to our sins, or repay us according to our iniquities. He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." If he did not forgive in this way, no one would be forgiven. No one would make it to heaven.

But he does forgive that way. All we like sheep have turned to his own way and the Lord has laid our iniquity on the lamb of God that takes away sin. Jesus is that lamb. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners by becoming our substitutionary sacrifice. For our sakes God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

E. But this forgiveness and this salvation is not automatic. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. God commands all people

everywhere to repent. Jesus said, "IF you do not repent, you will perish." Whoever believes in him has eternal life, but whoever does not obey the son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on him. IF we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Whoever WILL CALL upon the name of the Lord WILL BE saved.

You must repent. You must call. You must trust in Christ to be forgiven, and if you do, you WILL be forgiven of EVERY sin and EVEN blasphemy. What a comforting word from Jesus! Every Christian should soak it in. And everyone out there wondering whether you have sinned too greatly for God to receive you needs to hear this wonderful assurance from Christ. Every sin and every blasphemy will be forgiven if you will simply confess your sins, repent of them and believe in Jesus Christ.

E. Now this consoling word of assurance is not a reason to go on sinning without a care in the world. That kind of person is not one who has repented. It is like saying, "Let us sin that grace may increase." No, no. How shall we who died to sin still live that way. But let us embrace God's grace. Let us run to him as one who will welcome repentant sinners.

So Jesus makes an assuring declaration, but it is followed by . . .

II. A Terrorizing Word of Alarm.

A. Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit WILL NOT be forgiven. Those who speak a word against Jesus will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will NOT be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

There is one exception to forgiveness for every sin and blasphemy, one. And it will NEVER be forgiven—not in this age or the one to come. The indication here is not that there are some sins that are not forgiven now but are forgiven in the future, but simply that the finality of no forgiveness is just that—forgiveness not now and not ever. Judgment eternally falls upon those who commit this one sin. It is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit or speaking against the Holy Spirit.

B. What is this sin? It is critical that we rightly understand exactly what Jesus means here. Confusion leads to unnecessary despair.

Here is where the first word of verse 31 is important—therefore. The Pharisees had been ascribing the powerful works of Jesus to the devil and in a most offensive way. They used the crudest, most abhorrent term for the devil that they had in their vocabulary. They had displayed that their vitriol was not based upon sound reason or good judgment but upon the hostility toward Jesus that engulfed their hearts. Thus Jesus gives them this sobering warning. It was not that they simply spoke some offensive words off the cuff but that their words revealed their hearts. And their hearts were so hardened against Jesus that they ascribed his Holy Spirit-empowered works to the devil.

The targets of the warning were not the disciples but Christ's hard-hearted opponents. And as we look back, we see a developing hostility against Jesus in the face of mounting evidence that he is the Messiah. It is striking to note that when a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, he said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Nicodemus reflects a general understanding of the Pharisees by the use of the pronoun we. But as time wore on, some Pharisees began to reject what God was clearly showing them and what they knew to be true. Their sin did not occur on the spur of the moment but took place as light and opportunity increased.

In Matthew 9 when Jesus told a paralytic that his sins were forgiven, the Pharisees present said to themselves that Jesus was blaspheming. Later in that chapter (v. 34) Jesus healed a demon-oppressed man and the Pharisees asserted that he cast out demons by the prince of demons." In chapter 12 we have seen how the Pharisees challenged Jesus and his disciples regarding the Sabbath. Once Jesus answered their charges, they went out and conspired how to destroy him. Now that he has healed another demon-oppressed man, the Pharisees take their aggression to the next level. They intensify their language and their rage against Christ is evident: "It is ONLY by Beelzebul that this man casts out demons." Their initial resistance has now escalated to outright rejection of Christ. And it is

at this point that Jesus gives the warning concerning the unpardonable sin. If they have not yet committed it, they are gravely close.

So what have they done? They have received great light, enough to demonstrate clearly that Jesus has come from God because no one could do the things he does unless God were with him. These things he is doing by the power of the Holy Spirit. They have witnessed or heard of healing upon healing of every kind of disease. They have heard of how he speaks with authority. As experts in the Scriptures, they are witness to how the Old Testament points to him. God has given to them every conceivable external evidence that Jesus is Messiah and Son of God. But their hearts are so completely hardened against him that they slander the Spirit of God by saying Jesus does these works by the devil.

The unforgivable sin is not one a person accidentally trips over or commits in the blink of an eye. To quote Henry Alford, "It is a sin of willful, determined opposition to the present power of the Holy Spirit, and this as shown by its fruit, blasphemy." John Piper puts it like this: when a person has committed the sin of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, they have come "to the point where they are sinning in such a way that they are unwilling and unable to repent and believe."

Isaiah 5 provides a picture of the essence of the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 5:1-7.

Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it;
and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.

4 What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?
When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;

I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

The sin of blaspheming the Spirit is committed when one receives such light and evidence that God can do no more in an external sense than he has done, but still a person defiantly rejects, a person ascribes the work of the Spirit to the devil. His heart is so hard he stares God in the face and spits. That is the essence of the sin of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

When a person comes to that state they cannot, and thy desire not, and they will not repent. And repentance is the path one must trod to find forgiveness.

C. So this sin is not unbelief itself. For every moment before you believed you were an unbeliever. This sin is not openly rejecting Christ. Peter did that and was restored. Paul rejected Christ so strongly that he persecuted the church. He says to Timothy, "formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief." His intense rejection did not reach the level of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit because of ignorance. And he found mercy.

D. Neither is the unforgivable sin the quenching or grieving of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul tells the church of the Thessalonians not to "quench the Spirit." He commands in the Ephesians' letter, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Significantly different from the situation in Matthew, these are instructions for those who believe and are sealed, not those who resist and refuse to believe. These are serious sins indeed, but not the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

E. To put it in bottom line form, if you desire to come to God and you believe in Jesus and repent of your sins, you cannot have committed the unforgivable sin. Think of the invitations to come to salvation. The

Philippian jailer cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." They didn't say, "Wait a minute, have you committed blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?" The assurances regarding those who would come and follow Christ are rock solid. Consider John 6:37: "WHOEVER comes to me I will NEVER cast out." And verse 40: "For this is the will of my Father, that EVERYONE who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." John 3:16: WHOEVER believes in God's only Son will not perish but have everlasting life. John 5:24. Truly, truly I say to you, WHOEVER hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life. Then there is Romans 10:9: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

When you put the warnings in regard to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit side-by-side with these gospel assurances, what you must conclude is that persons who blaspheme the Holy Spirit are not persons who will come to Christ in faith. That explains how the sin is unforgivable. This is a sin with such determination that those who commit it will not turn back. God will not turn them back. They may regret consequences, but they will not embrace Christ. They will not bow to the testimony of the Holy Spirit. They will persist in defiant hostility.

Conclusion

Do not take the kindness of God for granted. It is great, so great that every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven for those who humble themselves and seek God in repentance and confession. But it is not so great as to forgive those who are determined to reject the witness of his Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. Given great blessing and every opportunity, do not turn your back on God. The warning here is of a time when God will turn his back on you.