

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit

By: Jason Cole

One of the most fascinating topics in the New Testament is the topic of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. On numerous occasions I have been asked about what exactly the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit means. I have had well-meaning Christian people concerned whether or not they have committed this unpardonable sin. This unpardonable sin is obvious one we want to make sure we do not commit. There is a fascination and fear of this sin naturally. There is also a lot confusion and misunderstanding surrounding this topic. There are countless differing views as to what Jesus meant when he spoke about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit being an unpardonable sin. The truth of the matter is that the Scripture says so little about it. It is somewhat surprising that something that has garnered so much attention and seems to be so urgent is spoken of nowhere else in the Scripture. I believe that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is different from grieving the Holy Spirit, the sin unto death and quenching the Holy Spirit.

Blasphemy comes from the Greek word "*blasphemo*" which comes from two Greek words combined. *Blapto* which means "to harm" and *phemi* "to speak". Hence blasphemy is to speak harmfully about someone or to speak irreverently. That may define blasphemy in general, but what does it mean to commit blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and why is this sin unpardonable. The sin referenced by Jesus is one that will not be forgiven in this age or in the age to come. It does not say that is cannot be forgiven, but that is it will not be forgiven.

There are several views about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. One view is that the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a general state or attitude that a person might have. Perhaps they would state that it the sin is committed by the persistence in unbelief until death or resistance of the "Holy Spirit" until death. The second view is that it is a specific act that a person could commit. Jack Cottrell's definition of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, "it is a specific act of speaking against the Holy Spirit's testimony to

Jesus in His miracles and in His Word, and that this always occurs in connection with the specific attitude of rejection of and opposition to Jesus himself.”

Many of the ideas that have been espoused make good points in their own favor. Some have defined the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as “crediting the work of God to the work of Satan”. This certainly is the case that caused Jesus to say what he did about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. He has just cast out a demon and was accused of performing that miracle by Beelzebul. However, I am not certain this captures the meaning of what Jesus was saying.

Carl Ketcherside says that the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a sin that cannot be committed without speaking. He described it as a sin of the tongue. This also seems to fit within the context of Matthew’s account. Immediately following his words about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, Jesus spoke about the danger of idle words. Jesus said, “every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). However, it is not just idle words though that Jesus is condemning, but a whole attitude towards the kingdom of God and the work of God.

Jack Cottrell teaches that one commits the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit today by “deliberately, knowingly and blasphemously rejecting the Spirit-inspired Word’s clear testimony towards Jesus.” That sounds good, but it also leaves many questions. The main question that arises in mind is, why does the Scripture never speak of this elsewhere. The Apostles never addressed this that we know of in their preaching or in the epistles. Nowhere do we find the apostles preaching that anyone can be saved unless they have done the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

In order to understand this, we need to establish the exact context of Jesus’ statement. Jesus had just cast out of a demon from a blind and mute man. Matthew tells us that the crowds were amazed and they were saying, “this man cannot be the Son of David, can he?” (12:22-23). What exactly were the crowds suggesting by that statement? To refer to Jesus as the Son of David would speak of his right

to reign as king. It was very clear that they were posing the possibility, even the probability that not only was Jesus the Messiah, but he would establish a Messianic kingdom. This was the response of the crowds in general. The response of the Pharisees was quite different.

Matthew says that the Pharisees “heard this”. They heard the response of the crowd. They were threatened not only by Jesus, but by the crowd’s response to Jesus. The Pharisees were already conspiring against Jesus and coming up with a plan of how they might destroy him (12:14). Now, the crowds were fawning over Jesus, which would throw a wrench in their plans. The Pharisees official position was that “this man casts out demons only be Beelzebul the ruler of demons” (12:24). Notice that the Pharisees could no longer deny that Jesus was performing miracles. They did not deny that he was casting out demons. They were denying that Jesus was doing these things by the power of God. The crowds were thinking that Jesus was going to establish the Messianic kingdom. The Pharisees were suggesting that any kingdom that he starts would not be a kingdom from God, but a kingdom from Satan. The idea of the kingdom looms large in this text.

It is the position of the Pharisees that elicits a response from Jesus that will culminate in His statement about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶ If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷ If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? For this reason they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong *man*? And then he will plunder his house. ³⁰ He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. (Matthew 12:25-30, NASB).

It is vital to understanding this to know that Jesus was speaking to the Jewish religious leaders. The leaders were not denying that a miracle took place, they were questioning the source. Furthermore, they were intentionally rejecting despite the evidence. This was a willful and pre-meditated rejection. When Jesus responds to the Pharisees, he uses logic and reason. He makes it clear that for him to cast out a demon if he was from Satan would not make sense. I believe that in light of the context, Roger

Chambers' definition of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit makes most sense. Roger Chambers says it is "to admit the supernatural character of Jesus and His Kingdom, but to attribute the Christian system to Satan and to demons."

Jesus was addressing the nation of Israel through the Pharisees on this occasion. He was telling them that they might reject Jesus despite the evidence, but to continue in rejection would bring about a serious consequence. He was telling the Pharisees that they would be forgiven if they rejected Jesus, but there would come a time that the offer of forgiveness would not continue. It is most likely that the warning was national and not individual. The warning is to the nation of Israel more than it was to individual Jews or Christians. Jesus said, "whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him." This is what the Pharisees were doing right now. They were calling the work of God, the work of Satan. That would be forgiven. However, as a nation, they would be given one last chance to accept the Messiah.

This last chance would come on the Day of Pentecost when the church was established. There were Jews present from every nation. When Peter preached, he preached a message of judgment and repentance. His sermon in Acts 2 was essential the funeral sermon for national Israel. That was the opportunity to the Jews to accept the Kingdom of God. Jesus would suggest that to "blaspheme against the Spirit would not be forgiven." The way that they would blaspheme the Spirit is to call the church and the Christian system the work of Satan and not the work of God.

The Jews rejected Jesus and they rejected the kingdom of God. In fact, their official position eventually became one where they viewed the church as from Satan. This is what was stated about Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud:

On the eve of the Passover Yeshua [the Nazarene] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place a herald went forth and cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come and plead on his behalf." And since nothing was brought forward in his favor, he was hanged on the eve of Passover."

The Jews took the position that Jesus was not from God, but rather that he was from Satan. In fact, this was the position of people like Saul of Tarsus. Saul vehemently persecuted the church because he believed that he was doing what God wanted him to do. His conscience was clear because he viewed the church in its infancy as a kingdom from Satan. I believe that this shows that the way in which blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is unpardonable is a national sense more than an individual thing. It was unpardonable for the nation of Israel as the people of God. Their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and the church as the kingdom of God was the ultimate and consummate sin that resulted in national judgment.

Certainly there are individuals who are guilty of claiming the work of God is the work of Satan, but it would be difficult to suggest that those people are beyond the ability to be saved. There is no indication that anyone was ever told that they could not be saved because they rejected Jesus previously. The sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit was unpardonable to the Jewish nation. There were individual Jews who had viewed the kingdom of God as the Kingdom of Satan, but they repented and were forgiven of that sin. I do not believe that there is any need for a Christian to worry whether or not they have committed the unpardonable sin. They do not need to worry because individually, the blood of Jesus is able to cover even the most blatant rejection in their past. They also do not need to worry because the presence of any amount of guilt shows that God is still at work within that individual to bring about conviction through His Word. They do not need to worry because it is not possible for a person to be a Christian and at the same time call the church the kingdom of Satan.