

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

G. Michael Cocoris

One of the major tenets of Christianity is the forgiveness of sins. The bumper sticker says it well, “Christians are not perfect; they are forgiven.”

In light of what Christianity teaches about the forgiveness of sins, it is surprising to hear that the Bible speaks of a sin that cannot be forgiven. It is commonly called “the unpardonable sin.” What is the unpardonable sin? What could possibly be so bad that it cannot be forgiven?

This is more than an academic question. Some people are concerned that they have committed it. They are not just concerned; it has given them no end of grief. No less than John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, once thought that he had committed the unpardonable sin.

If there is a sin that God will not forgive, “what is it?” Perhaps, more importantly, the question is, “Have I committed it?”

The Unpardonable Sin

“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*” (Mt. 12:31-32). Jesus clearly says that there is a sin that will not be forgiven. To understand what that sin is several other things must be understood first.

The Power of the Holy Spirit This verse begins with the word “therefore.” In other words, this statement is the conclusion of something that preceded it. In the verses before this statement, Matthew records that Jesus healed a deaf and dumb demon-possessed man. “Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw” (Mt. 12:22). It is important to note that Jesus worked this miracle by the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:28).

The Proof of the Messiah The reason that is so important has to do with the purpose of Jesus’ miracles. Jesus worked miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit to prove that He is the Messiah. In this case, it worked. Matthew records, “And all the multitudes were amazed and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’” (Mt. 12:23). The title “Son of David” was one of the Old Testament titles of the Messiah. In other words, the multitude got it. They saw the miracle done in the power of the Holy Spirit and concluded Jesus was the Messiah.

The Pronouncement of the Pharisees The crowd’s favorable response created an enormous problem for the Pharisees. They did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, they had already decided to kill Him (Mt. 12:14). So they have a problem. On the one hand, they cannot deny that Jesus worked a miracle; they and a multitude of other people saw it! On the other hand, if He worked that miracle, He is the Messiah. They had already rejected that possibility. Hence, they were on the horns of a dilemma.

Their solution was to admit that Jesus did, in fact, work a miracle but that He did not do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. “Now when the Pharisees heard *it*, they said, “This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons” (Mt. 12:24).

Jesus answers their objection (Mt. 12:25-27). He declares, “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you (Mt 12:28-30) and He tells them that they have committed the unpardonable sin (Mt. 12:31).

So what is the unpardonable sin? The short answer is, “It is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” The explanation is that the unpardonable sin is attributing to Satan the miracles Jesus did in the power of the Holy Spirit to prove that He is the Messiah. They rejected Jesus as the Messiah. They did more than reject Jesus as the Messiah; they rejected the work of the Holy Spirit. They did more than reject the work of the Holy Spirit; they attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan.

The Explanation of the Sin To understand why there is a sin that is not forgivable, you need to understand how forgiveness works. It involves the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts people of sin (Jn. 16:7-11) and bears witness to Christ (Jn. 15:26). The Holy Spirit illuminates our minds so that we understand that Jesus died for our sins. He draws us to Christ (Jn. 6:44). In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to being forgiven. Therefore, *to reject His work of conviction to bring people to Christ by saying what He did was the work of Satan makes it impossible for a person to be saved.*

No one can commit the unpardonable sin today because Jesus is not here working miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost says, “It is evident that this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can only be committed while Christ was personally present on the earth.” Even in Jesus’ day, *only unbelievers could commit this sin.* If there is an unpardonable sin today, it is the final rejection of Jesus Christ, but people cannot do that until they draw their last breath.

If you are worried that you have, you haven’t because people who commit this sin don’t worry about committing it! The very fact that they want to be forgiven is an indication that they have not rejected the Holy Spirit.

The Pardonable Sins

To fully understand this subject, it is necessary to understand what sins are pardonable. Notice that Jesus said, “every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven” (Mt. 12:31). Except for the sin of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, there is no sin so enormous that it cannot be forgiven (Alexander).

The Payment for Sin Jesus died to pay for sin (1 Cor. 15:3). That payment covered all our sins. The apostle Paul said, “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13).

The Pardon of Sins Because Christ died for sin, all sins are forgivable. To demonstrate that, let’s look at sins that were forgiven in the Bible.

1. God forgives adultery. I once talked to a lady who was convinced that adultery was the unpardonable sin. In her opinion, since she had committed that sin, she could not possibly go to heaven. That is simply not true. “It is actually reported *that there is*

sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:1-5). Note that the man in this passage 1) committed adultery (with his stepmother!), 2) refused to repent, died (he had not died yet, but the point Paul is making assumes that the man dies without repenting), and 4) he will be saved. The man who committed adultery will be in heaven.

2. God forgives divorce. There are people who feel that because they were divorced, they have committed a mortal sin that hinders them from heaven. In the first place, some divorces are allowable. In Matthew 19, Jesus taught that fornication was grounds for divorce. In first Corinthians 7, Paul said the desertion of an unsaved mate was grounds for divorce. There are divorces, of course, that are not allowed and, therefore, sinful, but sinful divorces are forgivable. They do not keep you out of heaven. God divorce Israel! “Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also” (Jer. 3:8). God will be in heaven.

3. God forgives murder. There are those who are convinced that no murderer could ever go to heaven. David, the man after God’s own heart, committed adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:4) and had her husband killed. David will be in heaven.

Abortion is the murder of babies. Abortion is infanticide. We know from Ezekiel 16:21 that many of the Israelites did this as a form of idol worship. They offered their children to idols as human sacrifices. While not all Israelites were saved, some of those who did this will probably still be in heaven.

4. God forgives suicide. A minister once wrote to Mark Rafferty, a newspaper columnist, to say, “If one commits self-murder, there is no time to get forgiveness and you will go to hell” (6/6/1979; the minister was Jess Jackson). Samson committed suicide (Judges 16:29-30), and so did King Saul (1 Sam. 31:4-5); 1 Chr. 10:4-5). Sampson will be in heaven and so will Saul.

5. God forgives blasphemy. I have heard of a man who said that he committed the unpardonable sin. His explanation was that he had cursed at God. The most basic definition of blasphemy is to speak evil or injuriously about God. So blasphemy is a sin of the tongue. Jesus said, “Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him” (Mt. 12:32). Peter denied the Lord cursing in the process. Peter will be in heaven.

The point of all of this is to show that the grace of God runs deeper and wider than most of us will ever know. The ocean of God’s grace never runs dry. The limits of God’s grace never are reached.

Summary: God forgives every sin and blasphemy, except the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which people today cannot commit because Jesus is not here working miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit.