

Transcript 173

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. We're doing a series on frequently asked questions about sin. So joining me today again is Kevin. Kevin's the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries. And Jeff, he's the administrator for bibleref.com. Now today we're going to be focusing on one specific question that we receive a lot and we'll be discussing kind of the three main questions that go along with this particular issue is. Today's question is what is the unpardonable sin or also what is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? So to start, let me go ahead and read the passage so you'll know the passage we're talking about in case it's unfamiliar to you, and then Kevin will jump in and explain this passage. What Jesus is saying, what's what's happening, what's the context, and then we'll discuss it from there. So reading from Matthew chapter 12 from the ESV, the context is Jesus just performed a miracle, healing a man that had a withered hand. And then in verse 24 of Matthew 12 the Pharisees say it is only by Beelzebul, the Prince of Demons that this man casts out demons. And then Jesus rebukes them, continues on.

Shea Houdmann

And in verses 31 to 32, specifically mentions the unpardonable sin, the blasphemy with Holy Spirit. With, therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven. Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come. In this passage, Jesus saying there's a specific sin, a specific action that identifies someone that God will not forgive. Obviously, for many, many people, this is a terrifying prospect as they have what is the unpardonable sin, what is the blasphemy of spirit and how can I avoid committing that particular sin. So. So, Kevin, what's going on in this passage? Help us to help us to understand and grasp what's going on here.

Kevin Stone

Well, moving back up to verse 22 of Matthew Chapter 12, the specific miracle that started all of this was a demon possessed man that was brought to Jesus, who was in this in this man was both blind and mute. So that was connected to the demon possession somehow. So Jesus heals him and the man is now talking and seeing just fine. The demon is gone. And then the people start asking, hey, could this be the son of David? Could this be the Messiah? Because look, he's doing these miracles just like we would expect the Messiah to do, our deliverer. And so the Pharisees make their accusation that Jesus is driving out demons by the Prince of Demons, Beelzebub, or the devil himself. And so Jesus knows their thoughts and he confronts them. He says basically in verses 25 and following that their argument is both illogical and it is self condemning. #1. It's illogical, because if Satan is himself driving out his own minions, then he's a house divided. And a house divided cannot stand as Jesus points out in verse 26.

Kevin Stone

And then he also Jesus points out that their argument is self condemning because the Pharisees also had exorcists. And it seems as if you know their practice of casting out demons was effective. And so who's to say that the Pharisees were not in league with the devil to be casting out demons? You know, you say Jesus is, well, it's right back at you. If that's the accusation, it could go both ways. And so Jesus says, no, I'm not harnessing the power of Satan to do this work. In fact, and the fact that I can drive out

demons proves that I am working with a power that is greater than Satan. Verse 29, Jesus says again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. So Jesus is driving out demons because he has more power than Satan. Jesus is operating under a greater power, and so he enters the house. Jesus enters the house and he ties up the strong man, which is the demon. And then Jesus has control. So the exorcism was proof of God's power, the Holy Spirit's power in Jesus.

Kevin Stone

And one of the Pharisees at least got it. Nicodemus back in John Chapter 3, Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night and he says we know that you are a teacher come from God, because nobody could do these miracles that you do unless God is with him. So Nicodemus understood that the signs that Jesus did were proof of who Jesus was, that he was sent from God, that he was operating under the power of the Holy Spirit. So Nicodemus understood these Pharisees in Matthew chapter 12. They're confronting Jesus. They don't get it. And they are actually very clearly taking sides against Jesus and setting themselves up in opposition to him.

Jeff Laird

The thing that's interesting to me about that is that there's people like Nicodemus who recognize that what Jesus is doing is divine. You have Pharisees or other Pharisees, I should say, who are rejecting that idea. And the theme seems to be the attitude that a person takes towards what Christ is doing. And I think that's important when we look at exactly what's happening, because as we explore this idea of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, we have to remember how consistent God is with the way he deals with people in, in the fundamental sense. And there's a form of legalism that's sort of involved when we want to say, if I make certain syllables with my mouth or certain movements with my hands, then I have now condemned myself and God cannot or will not forgive me for that. And that's that's more like Voodoo and witchcraft, then Christianity. So I think it's not as simplistic as just saying oh, this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was saying a particular thing in a particular way.

Jeff Laird

I do think that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was exactly what we're saying. It was these people saw Jesus perform a miracle. They understood on some level what they were seeing, and they made a deliberate choice to blasphemy, to insult, to disrespect the Holy Spirit, by taking that work and that power and saying well that's that's Satan, that's not actually God. And the terminology that's even used in Scripture, you know it often, it more often refers to the person who does it than the act itself. So when you have this heart that's so totally hardened against God that you're willing to insult the Holy Spirit by saying yeah, what you're doing is actually satanic. That's that's indicative of a heart attitude that is just not not forgivable. Those persons are not in that mode. I don't think it's as simplistic as Jesus looking at the Pharisees and saying, ohh you said the magic words, you know you said the secret word.

Jeff Laird

I am way too young for the the Marx Brothers movies, but I love them anyway. And the, you know, Groucho Marx had a show where he say the secret word, and you win a certain amount of money. Well, it's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not like that. God's not just sitting there with a gotcha going ohh, you said the forbidden phrase now you're done forever. The attitude really is, I I would hesitate to say

everything because we don't want to be oversimplified, but in essence it's really the attitude that matters much more than the exact words or the circumstances that somebody's in.

Kevin Stone

Exactly. In fact, Jesus makes that very point in in the context in Matthew Chapter 12, just continuing here in verse 33, immediately after Jesus makes that statement about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, he says, make a tree good and its fruit will be good. Or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad. For a tree is recognized by fruit. Verse 34 you brood of Vipers, he says to them. How can you, who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks with the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him. And an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. And so Jesus immediately focuses on their heart condition. Their heart was evil and because of that, their words coming out of their mouth were also evil. The blasphemy was coming from a place inside, inside their heart. And so the the the words coming out of their mouth were simply the fruit of what was in their heart. So the root connected to the fruit. It wasn't the magic words that they were saying, but it was indeed a heart condition.

Shea Houdmann

And both you bring up excellent points that are really helpful understanding what's going on in this passage. So it's not just a one time act. It's a culmination of hardness of heart. If you study the gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, especially, Jesus is constantly arguing, debating, defending himself against the attacks of the Pharisees. And if someone could continue to witness Jesus performing these miracles, teaching these things, doing, saying amazing things that only God could do could witness all of that and still come to the conclusion that Jesus is not the Messiah. Jesus is not the son of God. Jesus is, in fact demon possessed, and that's how he's performing these things to be that hard hearted to be that resistant to God's clear revelation of his son, to be that rebellious against it's a culmination that it's not just someone seeing a miracle and like, huh? Well, I wonder if that's a miracle from God or from Satan. Because if it's just, say, there are counterfeit miracles, so it's not a matter of questioning. It's a matter of having witnessed Jesus again and again and again and again. And still hard heartedly rejecting him to the point that you know what? I can't deny that he's performing miracles, so my only choice is here to say basically he's Satan possessed. And to get to that point reveals his point. At that point God is no longer, basically I'm I'm done with you. I'm no longer going to work in your life. I'm no longer going to call you. You are essentially stuck in your hard hearted rebellion against me. And you will suffer the eternal consequences of that continued hard hearted rebellion revealed by the fact that you contribute a clear miracle of God performed by my son, the Messiah, God Incarnate, to Satan. So it's a it's a culmination of hard heartedness not just a one time questioning or even attack against Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Kevin Stone

Yes. Going along with that culmination, Shea is the fact that the Pharisees had been hard hearted for a long time. They had rejected John the Baptist ministry, and so they're rejecting the father who sent him. They're rejecting Jesus the son. And as they are rejecting the miracles that Jesus does, they're also rejecting the Holy Spirit. So they they've rejected Father, son and Holy Spirit. They have consistently rejected everything that God has shown them plain as day. And Jesus says something very interesting as he says verse 31, every kind of sin and slander will be forgiven except for the blasphemy against the

spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in this age or the age to come, I would take that as the the age of the law, the age of grace, the two dispensations that Jesus was referring to there. But isn't it interesting that you speak against the son of man Jesus in his Incarnation? You know that's that's forgivable because when Jesus was walking here in this world, he looked like an ordinary man. If you saw Jesus, you would not notice anything special about him. And if you reject that that's, that's understandable. That's forgiven. That's forgiven maybe. But when you start rejecting everything else that God has done. You know, sending John the Baptist, the miracles that Jesus has doing, the incontrovertible proof that Jesus is the son of God and the Messiah. Jesus says now you have just denied your your final witness, the Holy Spirit working through me. And that is you have sealed your fate. That is unforgivable.

Shea Houdmann

That Kevin, that transitions really well into the next question. The first question was what was the blasphemy that was the unpardonable sin? And second question, can it be performed today and you read the end of verse 32, it says whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Either in this age or in the age to come. And as you said, the age to come would be the age that follows the the church age, the age of grace that we are currently in. So according to this verse seemingly in some sense the blasphemy against Holy Spirit, and unpardonable can be committed today. So Jeff, how would, how would you see this same sin being committed today when we can't actually literally witness Jesus performing a miracle in the power of the Holy Spirit and then attribute that to Satan?

Jeff Laird

Yeah, that context matters. I think it when we look at it in that sense, that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as an action is something that can't be duplicated today. We're not seeing Jesus Christ in person performing miracles. We're not attributing that to the work of Satan. So in a I I hesitate to say simplistic or oversimplified sense. It's correct to say that you can't commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit today. That's something that you can no longer do because you're not in that circumstance. You're not in that situation. However, that is not to say that we can't express the same attitude or have the same heart, or make the same mistake. Proverbs 29:1 says that a person who gets corrected often and is is constantly being stubborn, is going to be cut off suddenly and with no remedy.

Jeff Laird

It's very, very true that a person can get to the point where they in immunize themselves to the Holy Spirit. So even though a person cannot literally attribute the work of Jesus to Satan, and there isn't necessarily, there is no one particular action. There's no certain thing. Again, this is not witchcraft. This is not voodoo. This is not spells. You don't say the right incantation or the wrong incantation. Read the wrong book. You know, say the wrong words. Go to the wrong place. You put your right hand in, you put your right hand out. That's not how that works. You're not just suddenly flipping a toggle switch that says, oh, well, now you're you're gone forever. But you can resist the Holy Spirit. You can ignore God and you can get to the point in time where the Holy Spirit's just not going to, he's not going to interact with you anymore. He's going to shrug his shoulders and say, well then not my will, but yours. If that's the way you want it, go ahead and do what you're going to do.

Jeff Laird

So in the sense that people are really worried about, because I know that's what concerns people really is this idea of can I commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit today? And this is not this is not opening the wrong door, pushing the wrong button, clicking the wrong link. This is not spiritual spam or phishing. You cannot do this by accident. So this is not something that a person's just going to stumble into. It has to be deliberate. So you can't do it as literally as the Pharisees did it. But you can put yourself in a position spiritually where you can blasphemy Holy Spirit to such an extent that you become immune, you become completely resilient and resistant to the Holy Spirit.

Jeff Laird

But there again, I think it's that attitude. Anybody who comes to a sense of repentance, anybody who who has conviction from the Holy Spirit can and will be forgiven of any sin that they have ever done and committed. Scripture does not present the idea of a sinner who sincerely comes to God in repentance and says I'm I'm, I'm sorry, I'm I'm, I'm repenting. Forgive me. And God goes no, you're out of luck. That's that's just not part of the way that works. So the persons who truly have committed some version of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit are not the persons who are later going to be coming to God and saying, oops, I made a mistake. I'm really sorry. They're the persons who are absolutely never going to have any interest in God at all.

Shea Houdmann

So perhaps a modern analogy would be just look at the pharisees and the relationship with Jesus, and that they had witnessed him teaching, performing miracles again and again and again they continue to reject him. So today it could be someone who had been witnessed to the gospel, has been shared with this person multiple times. They've seen God work in other people's lives. They've even perhaps witnessed a miraculous event of some sort. And it can, even though God is calling them, God is working and God is pricking their heart, God is trying to get their attention, but that person rejects God's calling, his or her life again and again and again and again. And eventually God's again, to the point it's like, OK, you've chosen to reject me. I'm going to allow you to remain in that rejection. I'm no longer going to work in your heart and on your life or call you anymore to salvation. So in a sense it wasn't like, the blasphemy of the holy spirit, it wasn't a one time unpardonable sin, but as a culmination of rejection of God's working to the point that you know, God says I'm going to allow you to remain in the hardness of your heart and and experience, the consequences of your continued rejection of me.

Jeff Laird

I think it's worth pointing out just just that we're we're not unclear, there was something unique about what the the people talking to Jesus at that time we're doing. So it's it's not that we want to say that what they did was nothing particularly special but I I think maybe the thing that makes what they did most unique is just that it is so jaw droppingly amazingly blasphemous against the Holy Spirit. These are men who know the Old Testament very well. They see the condition of the people. They're there watching Jesus. I mean, they don't need any of this context stuff that we try to develop, like what does this word mean? What does this situation really entail? What was culture like? They are seeing everything in the absolute most ideal light to be evangelized in that sense. And they're not just rejecting that, but they're hatefully, blatantly insulting God by claiming that what's going on is actually satanic. So

there is a sense in which what was happening there is absolutely unique and strange in human history. In a sense, it can't be duplicated in that way. So when we say that it is still possible for people to have that same heart, and that same idea, it's that is very true. But that's that's also not that we're saying that what Jesus was talking about at that moment was not extraordinary, it it really was. That was about as bad as it gets.

Kevin Stone

Yes. Absolutely. The Pharisees I like to think of it this way. They had been given more light than anybody else ever had in the history of the world. Like you say, Jeff, they knew they knew their Bibles backwards and forwards. They had studied the scripture, they had Daniel's prophecy about the timing of the coming of the Messiah, and so they should been ready for that. They had the truth in body, the the man who is the truth standing right in front of them. And they had seen the miracles over and over. They were, they were clear signs from God that this was God's chosen one, and they chose to reject all of that. And Jesus says, well, you've been given so much and a lot is going to be required of you, and nobody's received more light than you have. You are choosing the darkness and that was that was your chance. The you have blasphemed the Holy Spirit. And today it's if a person ultimately rejects Christ, then they too, are turning their back on their only savior. You know they're not going to get another savior of the from their sins. Jesus, is it. Salvation is exclusive in Jesus Christ. Bible is clear about that. So if we ultimately reject Christ today, then we're kind of placing ourselves in the same boat as the Pharisees did.

Jeff Laird

And what they're doing is really the the worst possible example of something. Maybe that's a good way to think of it, is that sort of like Judas. Judas is probably easily the clearest example of somebody who cannot make the excuse that I didn't have enough evidence. I didn't have enough information. He literally walked, talked, ate, saw, served with Jesus in person more than all but a very few other people in human history ever did. And yet he could not bring himself to really commit his faith and his belief in that sense. Nobody beyond that, beyond those apostles is getting that level of interaction with Jesus. But you don't have to have that level of stubbornness and hard heartedness to be lost. So at the same time that we're saying that, yes, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in a literal sense isn't something we can do anymore. We don't want to have the attitude of saying, but it's not something you have to worry about or think about at all, because just because it's not a magic spell just because it's not something that you can't do by accident doesn't mean that you can't put yourself in a position where you're going to resist God. And you're going to be immune to it. So it's it's more than it's the ultimate example of that. That's the pinnacle, that's the paradigm for rejection of God. And when you're there, there is there is no forgiveness.

Shea Houdmann

We'll said both of you. Question three, which we've already kind of been discussing, but how can we avoid committing the unpardonable sin or blasphemy of the Holy Spirit today? You know, you guys have seen the questions, some of them are heartbreaking with someone who's is truly devastated in their faith that somehow they've convinced themselves, I've committed the unpardonable sin. God will never forgive me. I, but I really want him to. And anyway. And I feel terrible and I'm repenting and I know he's not going to forgive me. It's like complete misunderstanding. So I'd like each of us to maybe address that

both in giving people the confidence that almost if you're if you're repentant, that's demonstration that you've not committed the unpardonable sin. If you're seeking God, if you're wanting his forgiveness, that's evidence that you've not committed the unpardonable sin. If you're if you feel grief remorse over what you did, that's evidence that you've not committed the unpardonable sin. Because none of those things were present in the Pharisees, none of those were actions and.

Shea Houdmann

But one thing I've noticed, and it actually came through, I saw a few days ago where someone specifically wondered that they had witnessed a miracle from what I would someone who I consider a false teacher and they were questioning whether that miracle that they seemed to have witnessed was truly from God, or whether it could possibly be a demonic deception. Like oh no. I just committed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. It's like, well, hold on one second just looked to Matthew 24 other passages, talk about counterfeit miracles, questioning a miracle is not the unpardonable sin. It's not the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us to test the spirits the God tells us that there will be counterfeits. There will be deceivers, there will be lies who will perform miracles. Even Satan, his demons masquerade as angels of light. So our enemy can perform counterfeit miracles. So questioning whether miracle from God is not from, is not necessarily the unpardonable sin. Something we should be extremely careful about. Recognizing that God does perform miracles and not automatically assuming that every miracle out there is demonic deception. So it's one thing to be careful. It's another thing to be overly aggressive in terms of trying to reject every claim of a miracle out there, so no, that is not the unpardonable sin. It's not something, I mean that the Bible actually specifically tells us to watch out for the false teachers, for false prophets. So no, that's not the unpardonable sin. What are some other examples maybe you've seen in questions we've received or just what opportunities for ministries you've had with people who have believed they've committed the unpardonable sin. And how are you able to help try to help them see that they have actually not committed that sin.

Kevin Stone

I like to point to Psalm 51 for starters, where David was confessing one of his sins and he said that a broken heart and a contrite spirit are the sacrifices that God accepts and he will not despise those who are repenting. And so that's what we look for. Are you repenting? Do you have that contrite spirit, the humble spirit before God, you have that broken heart over your sin. God promises to forgive. He delights in forgiven in forgiving those people. So whatever sin it was that you think might have been unforgivable in your past, go to Psalm 51 and there are so many more scriptures. James four and verse 8 come near to God. And he will come near to you. Romans 5, verse 20, where sin increased. So it's getting bigger. Grace increased all the more. You cannot out sin God's grace. You are not more powerful than God's grace. Your sin is not the the one that is going to stump God and that the the blood of Christ can not cover. If you come to Christ, you come to the father through Christ. He promises to forgive. He promises to restore. He promises to adopt you as his own child. The Lord will never fail. Surely God is my salvation. Isaiah 12 verse two. I would I. So I just encourage people to take God at his word. He promises forgiveness if you have that contrite spirit before him, the repentant heart, he will not despise.

Jeff Laird

I've heard people who are concerned because they have a moment of anger, frustration, weakness and they say or pray something that's insulting or disgusting against God. From as simple as I don't believe in

you anymore or I hate you to, you know, I renounce you. I turn my back on you. You know that sort of a thing. And they're they're concerned that does that mean that I've now blasphemed against the Holy Spirit? Does that mean that I've I've cut myself off now forever from God? And I would take the same basic tact that Kevin does is to say everything we read in the New Testament talks about God's willingness and ability to forgive sin. Jesus lived as a human being, Hebrews 4:15 and 16 says that he knows what it means to be human. He understands our weaknesses. He didn't succumb to sin. But he understands our weaknesses and that gives us the ability to approach him with confidence instead of with fear. And the reason is because he gets that. He understands.

Jeff Laird

And then we have the idea that nowhere in the New Testament do we have constant warnings about don't ever say this. Don't ever use these words. Don't ever let yourself get to this point. That's something that you would think that a guy like Paul would be interested in bringing up. Paul the guy who talks about how at some point in time you have to throw a person out of a congregation because their sin is so heinous that they need to be convicted of that sin. Hebrews talking about people who fall away and all those arguments that we get into about that sort of thing. There's nothing in the New Testament that suggests that a person can get to that point. If your heart is interested in repentance then that is in and of itself, a sign that you are not beyond God's forgiveness. There is no such thing in the Bible as a sincerely repentant person that God rejects. Period. End of story. End of discussion. Every single person that is lost is lost because they are somehow ignoring, resisting, defying, disobeying something that God is showing them or doing for them. There is no such thing as the hopeless case of a person who wants to be saved. Is there such a thing as a hopeless case? Controversial as it may be, I say yes, there are, but those are the persons who are hardened. Those are the persons who are saying in their souls and their spirits in their deepest places, that does not matter what God ever does or ever says. So it's I think wise to tell somebody if you're that worried about whether or not you've committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, that's almost in and of itself, definition enough for me to say no, because if you did, you probably wouldn't care.

Shea Houdmann

Well said, both of you. And Jeff, Kevin, thank you for joining me for this conversation today and I think we've all probably met people in our lives who we questioned whether they've in the sense crossed that line or rejected God for so long that they're spiritually blind, and unless God performs a miracle, they're going to remain in that condition and forever. Just how many times this person heard the gospel, or seen God transform people in their sphere of influence. And it's continued to hard heartedly reject. So that that's the blasphemy of the spirit, unpardonable today this continued hard hearted rebellion against God in the face of clear evidence of his working his calling, His transforming power. Can that be committed today according to Scripture? Yes it can. But Jeff, I love how you explained it. That if you're worried about it, if you are repentant, that's a powerful sign that you have not reached that point, that you've committed the unpardonable sin. And and Kevin, your repeated references in in the New Testament to God's forgiveness and in the Old Testament to people who sought God's forgiveness, and God always provided their forgiveness. And I love Jeff, your main point. That there's not a single example in the entire Bible, at least I'm aware of of someone repenting, seeking God's forgiveness and God pushing that person away. So just keep those things in mind as we study his passage. Remember

the strong warning that there is a sin that is unpardonable. But also remembering if we were seeking the Lord, asking for forgiveness, repenting of our sins, contrite heart, we've not committed that sin.

Shea Houdmann

So hope our conversation today about the unpardonable sin, the blasphemy of the spirit has been helpful to you. And understanding the passage, understanding what it meant then, whether it could be committed today and how to avoid committing it today. This is the Got Questions podcast. Got questions? The bible has answers and we'll help you find them.