

XXI. The Holy Spirit in Biblical Perspective

Led by the Spirit

“What is the Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?”

Matthew 12:22–37

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In order to look at this subject of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit we will be looking at a key text which I will read in its entirety to begin with and then we'll walk our way through it. This is God's Word and it's the truth. Matthew 12:22–37 says [22] *Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. [23] And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” [24] But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” [25] Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. [26] And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? [27] And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. [28] But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. [29] Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. [30] Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. [31] Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. [32] And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.*

[33] “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. [34] You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. [35] The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. [36] I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, [37] for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I want to tell about a true account that has also been repeated throughout my life and ministry. A young man came to meet with me in my office and when he came to meet with me he was obviously distraught. He hadn't slept. He was anxious and fidgety. He was just seemingly coming apart before my very eyes. He said to me, “Pastor, I need to talk to you because I'm damned for eternity.” I said, “Why would you say that?” He said “Because I have committed the unpardonable sin and I know I cannot be forgiven. I sense there must not be any help so is there any help? I have blasphemed the Holy Spirit.” Then he proceeded to explain to me how he believed that he had done that and wondered if there was any hope for him. We talked for a while and obviously I'm giving you a distillation of a long conversation.

At the end of our conversation I said to him, “I am merely a man who wants to serve and encourage you. I will never tell you something I don't believe is true so with that said you may be guilty of a lot of sins but the sin of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not the one you are guilty of.” After our conversation I felt absolutely assured I could tell him that. You might

be thinking ‘how could you be able to tell him that even with your acknowledged limitations of being a man and not knowing people’s hearts.’

I want to make this clear to you. It is not because I don’t believe there is an unpardonable sin for I do. Three times in your Bible it states this. The way it is stated it is very likely that Jesus taught this on multiple occasions. This was something He made clear on numerous occasions usually in the presence of the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and teachers of the law. I believe Jesus that there is something called the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and that sin is unpardonable, unforgiveable. From what I understand the Bible teaches about that sin, if there was anything this man was guilty of, which like all of us there are sins we are guilty of, that sin was not one of them. Why? It is because of what it actually is.

I want to get to what that sin actually is but I also want to take some time to tell you what it is not. I have people on many occasions come and tell me what they think it is and many times it is not what they think it is. That is not because I want to diminish what it is. It is because I want to understand what it is.

This subject falls right into our ministry theme throughout this year that comes from Romans 8:14 that says *[14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* This means we have been going to the Bible to understand the presence, power, ministry, purpose, and the message of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. To do that we have taken the time to do two expositional series of sermons and one was about nine sermons from the magisterial text of Romans 8 on the ministry of the Holy Spirit given to us by the Spirit through the Apostle Paul. Then we did another series from the last sermon that Jesus preached known as the Upper Room Discourse. The Bible records six of Jesus’ sermons – five in Matthew and one in John. In the Upper Room Discourse Jesus brings our attention with increasing clarity of the One whom He will send when He ascends which is the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit and His work, the other Helper who is sent as Counselor, Teacher, the One who regenerates, the One who sustains us and the One who is at work in our lives.

Here is what I propose for the rest of this year in look at this theme on the Holy Spirit. I am not going to do a lengthy exposition of any other texts of Scriptures but I am going to work exposition from singular texts around topics. These will be around the topics that people continually send to me, such as what is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, what is the fruit of the Spirit, what are the gifts of the Spirit, what is the sealing guarantee of the Spirit, what is the baptism with the Spirit, what does it mean to grieve or quench the Spirit, etc. I hope to address all of these and each time we’ll look at a key text that will address it. Most of these will be invitingly positive in our life but a couple of them will be sobering and mourning. This topic on the blasphemy of the Spirit will be sobering.

This topic/issue is so crucial. The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is so sobering that it really needs to be understood so I really want to dig deep into this for us to understand what this really is by looking at several passages of Scripture. You will find the reference to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit in Matthew 12, Mark 3 and in Luke 12. So there is more than one occasion where Jesus taught on this. I want to use the text from Matthew 12 with its sober warnings and clarity. So let’s start by looking at the occasion.

Jesus is engaged in His public ministry as the Messiah. The Messiah means the Anointed One, the Christ, the One who fulfills the three anointed offices of Prophet, Priest and King. Here He is on His way to Calvary and as the High Priest He will bring the sacrifice. He has come from heaven as the King to save us from our sins in humbling Himself. Now He is showing us the ministry as the Prophet as He has been engaged in a pointed itinerate ministry for

a number of weeks around the Sea of Galilee and periodically He is doing these miracles, selectively, sovereignly, and purposefully to affirm, buttress, enhance and put exclamation points by who He is (the Messiah) and what He is doing. The Messiah would teach and bring signs, wonders and miracles as credentials and it would declare that this is the One who is our Priest, the Lamb of God and the King who has come to save us from our sins.

Now we have a very specific moment. Here there is a man in front of Him who has two issues. His physical issue was very likely a genital one from birth. He is mute. He cannot speak. He is blind. He cannot see. We are also told he has been oppressed by demons. Actual translation is that he is being demonized. They are trying to get the point across by saying he is demon oppressed. On this occasion, Jesus now delivers him. The Pharisees will confirm that the demons have been cast away from him and that the man could now speak and see. So that is what happens with this man. Now the people that have been listening to Jesus teach who have seen these miracles now finally speak out.

Here is the response of the people. This must be the Son of David! They don't say this with an exclamation but their response is actually a rhetorical question saying, 'Is this the Son of David? Is this the promised Messiah? Is this the Prophet, the Priest and the King?' Why would they say this? One, is because of what He is teaching and two, because of the miracles that He is doing. Many times when the Bible talks of miracles it will say 'sign, wonder and miracle.' Here is the reason it says that. All you need to do is reverse it. Miracles are not done in a sporadic fashion. They are sovereignly, selectively and purposefully done. A miracle is a supernatural act of God where He suspends His creation laws, does something miraculous that is inexplicable and then when it's done He then pulls away and everything comes back in and the laws of nature continue just as He has accomplished them.

We tend to try and explain away miracles like they have tried to do with the parting of the Red Sea. They didn't help me at all by their explanation of how it could have happened. Their explanation also has some holes in it because they didn't walk through on mud but they walked through on dry land. Then there is a bigger issue where the greatest army in the world at that time drowns in two inches of water? How is that going to happen? I just think the Bible is what it says it is and miracles are simply God showing up. The only reason you can't believe is because you don't believe there is a God who can show up and act. You might think if you believe that then that is inexplicable. Well, that's God. God is beyond us.

Miracles are explained in the reverse of how the Bible generally puts them. Miracles create wonder and the wonder leads you to the sign. What is the miracle there to signify? So they have seen the miracles and the wonder has been established and their conclusion is that this must be the Son of David. This must be the Messiah. There are a whole group of people who don't want them to believe that. They are the scribes and Pharisees.

The scribes and Pharisees come down from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee and they have another response to what Jesus just did for this mute and blind man who was demon oppressed. Their response is that He is not the Messiah or God having come in the flesh or the Prophet, Priest and King or the Son of David being greater than David. They say He is from the kingdom of darkness. He does this in the name of Beelzebub, in the name of Satan. This is satanic work. So what they are saying is that Jesus is a sorcerer, a worker of the occult. He is working the kingdom of darkness. So that is their response. Just know that this answer they gave is a prepared answer that they will use a number of times in response to when Jesus does these miracles. We call this type of answer 'their spin' on this, their talking point.

What is Jesus' response to their response? Let's look back at the text for His response. Matthew 12:25 says [25] *Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand."* Basically Jesus is asking them if someone has a kingdom do they fight themselves? If they do they will destroy their kingdom. If a city fights itself then it kills itself and we're seeing that in cities all over our nation today. It doesn't build anything, it destroys everything. Now Jesus responds to their spin.

Matthew 12:26–27 says [26] *And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? [27] And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.* Jesus is telling them that if their spin is true then it's illogical. It's not only illogical but it's irrational. Why would Satan cast himself out? Why would demons cast out demons? They are fighting against themselves and they will destroy themselves. Clearly, their analysis to divert people of seeing His teaching and miracles that the Kingdom of God has come, is illogical and irrational which is Jesus' response to them but He doesn't just stop with a response.

Jesus goes on to give an explanation and a declaration. Matthew 12:28–29 says [28] *But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* (They are seeing the testimony of the Spirit of God bringing the Kingdom of God to their midst.) [29] *Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.* So Jesus is saying if one is thinking clearly at all then what the Pharisees have said ought to be dismissed for the Kingdom of God has come because the King has come. The King is bringing warfare through the Spirit of God against Satan and his kingdom through His teaching and what He is doing. He is bringing the testimony of the healing power to the physical so that they will hear the message of the spiritual healing power where they can be right with God and forgiven of their sins. That is what is going on in front of them.

He explains to them why He has come to do it. My Father has sent Me, the King, to humble Myself to come into this world because He has given Him a people to save from every tribe and nation but these people from every tribe and nation are under the dominion of Satan and the reign of sin. So I cannot save them until I first bind the strong man. What they are seeing is Him binding the strong man. When He goes to the cross he'll fall like lightning and then We will plunder his house. They are seeing a preliminary statement of what He is about to do at the cross. He will bind the strong man and break the power of sin in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the stronger Man. God has come in the flesh. No fallen angel can stand against him. Satan is stronger than me and you but that strong man can't stand against the Incarnate Son. The Incarnate Son brings the full power of the Holy Spirit to bear upon the kingdom of darkness. These signs, wonders and miracles are pointing people to Him to listen to Him because He has the message that will deliver them from sin's guilt and power and to the majesty and power of God's grace.

After giving that Jesus gives a number of declarations. He gives three of them. The first one is in Matthew 12:30 which says [30] *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.* There is no neutrality here. You are either with Him and if you're with Him then you are gathering and that is the evidence of those with Him. If you are not with Him and gathering then you are against Him and scattering. I don't know where you are today. We had those who just joined the church today giving an incredible declaration of

their faith but I don't know their heart. They could be a wolf in sheep's clothing. You could be in that same spot.

I'm grateful for the members at Briarwood and for every intent purpose I believe you know Jesus but you can become a member of a church and not know Jesus. You can be baptized and not know Jesus. The church and baptism won't get you to Jesus. We can be Pharisees and Scribes and say seemingly the right things but we're not with Him. The evidence is that we don't gather. There is no neutrality so if you're not with Him and gathering then you're against Him and scattering. You might think you're not against Jesus and you're not scattering but Jesus does not allow that. You are either in the dock, under His accusations and judgment or in the witness stand telling people that Jesus saves. He saves sinners. He saved me.

Jesus now makes another declaration. Matthew 12:31 says [31] *Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.* Do you understand what He is saying here? There is no sin beyond the redeeming, cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, none, except one. It's a singular sin. All sins can be forgiven when you believe and put your trust in Jesus but there is one by its very definition that you cannot be forgiven of because it puts you beyond forgiveness. That is why it's the unforgiveable sin, singular.

Then He goes on to say this in Matthew 12:32, [32] *And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.* The third declaration that Jesus is makes is that sin will not be forgiven in this age or the age to come. We know that in the age to come that if you're not in Jesus then you're not forgiven. He has just said that there is not only a sin that is unforgiveable and unpardonable but there is a sin that you are unpardoned and can't be redeemed, not only in the age to come but now, beyond the redeeming work of grace. What is that sin? It is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. By the way, the word 'speak' used in verse 32 means to continually speak as a patterned way, not just one time.

Then Jesus finishes with a very poignant explanation. So why is this crucial? Matthew 12:33–37 says [33] *“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. [34] You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? **For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.** [35] The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. [36] I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, [37] for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

There is coming a judgment day where our words will be displayed and our words will evidence our hearts. Our words don't earn our way into heaven. Words are not acts of merit that get you saved, but words reveal whether there is a saved heart because we speak from what fills our heart. The fruit reveals the root. The words reveal the heart. The answer is not for the preacher to give you an outline with a religious vocabulary that is safe. No, the answer is a new heart.

So before I tell you what the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, I want to tell you what it is not. Some think it is the sin unto death because of what John says in I John 5. I John 5:16–17 says [16] *If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. [17] All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.* Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a sin that you can't be forgiven of so that

means you can't be a brother which is who John is addressing in this passage. The sin leading to death is something that saved people commit.

So what is a sin unto death? It is a sin or a continued pattern of a sin where God for the sake of His testimony and for your sake, checks you out. Ananias and Sapphira are an example of this. I think King Saul is another example. In I Corinthians 11 Paul talks about people who were abusing the Lord's Supper and Paul says in I Corinthians 11:30, *[30] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.* This is actually an act of God's mercy whereby believers caught in specific sins for the sake of God's testimony and their own sake, God goes ahead and takes them home. This is not blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Some think it is one who has violated the third commandment that is taking the Lord's name in vain. That is blaspheming the name of Christ. We are getting close to it but I don't think is it either. Maybe it's murder or adultery. Let's see if this holds water by looking at I Timothy 1. Here Paul gives us his testimony. This is also a prayer of Paul's. I Timothy 1:12-14 says *[12] I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, [13] though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, [14] and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

Notice he was acting out of ignorance and unbelief which is still sin but it was not a bold statement against something he knows and attributed to the kingdom of darkness. But he did blaspheme God. He murdered people. Paul was a religious terrorist. He was the Osama Bin Laden of his day but he got saved. So clearly, while blasphemy, murder and adultery are terrible sins that is not the unpardonable sin. Paul is saved. What about King David? David was saved. I was guilty of some of those and I'm grateful that God's grace is sufficient. Notice the phrase that he acted ignorantly in unbelief so it was not an assault from something he knew but it was something he didn't understand. Therefore the blasphemy was not the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Stay with me here so maybe it's treason. It can't be treason because Peter was a traitor for he denied Him three times. The difference is between Peter and Judas. It is not simply the act of traitorship, there is something else that is here. So what is it? My takeaway is what the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is and this won't fit on a bumper sticker plus it is too important for me just to give you a motto. Here it is.

The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a verbal sin revealing the condition of the heart by a persistent and intentional assault upon the Christ-centered mission, message and ministry of the Holy Spirit as a work of Satan and the kingdom of darkness. It is a verbal sin, whoever speaks but the verbal sin is revealing the condition of the heart. Jesus tells the Pharisees that they have attributed from their heart that the work of the Kingdom is the kingdom of darkness and that His work is the work of demonic work. You have done that insistently, consistently and you keep on doing for it is illogical and irrational and when He said that did they say 'Thank you for showing us that, we repent'? No, they did not.

I have sat with people in my office time and time again where a man walks out on his wife and a wife walking out on her husband, people embracing addictive forms of behavior and not seeing the horror of the sins, rationalizing them and I try my best to help these people but I cannot explain to them exactly why they do what they do because sin never makes sense. I will show the illogical and irrational nature of sin but I know it's not a mind or information problem. It's a heart problem. It's a spiritual problem. We suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

I had the opportunity to debate this man regularly in Charlotte, North Carolina on a local radio station. We got to become good friends and I would long for him to come to the Kingdom but he would characterize himself as an agnostic atheist. He would try to cover every possible base he could. On the air one day he said to me ‘the thing is that you’re just so arrogant.’ I said, ‘what do you mean I’m arrogant?’ He said ‘personally you’re kind of humble but it’s arrogant to tell people that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and abuse them of their religion.’ I said ‘I am not arrogant, I’m just reporting it. I didn’t create it. You have to take this up with Jesus. I did. I said it was arrogant and then He broke me. Then I thanked Him for amazing grace.’

Then I appealed to logic with him. I said ‘Either I’m right and you’re wrong or you’re right and I’m wrong. Maybe we’re both wrong but we can’t both be right.’ He said ‘There you go, you’re not going to put me in that logical box.’ I said, ‘Then what box are you going to get in?’ That didn’t amaze me because it’s not logic that saves. Christianity is logical and supra-logical. It’s rational and it’s supra-rational. What saves people is when God gives you a new heart and then from the heart we speak what overflows. I will finish this way.

This sin has eternal ramifications but it doesn’t wait till death to shut the door of grace. It shuts it now, in some cases. So who are those that it shuts on? I don’t know and I won’t know until I get to heaven. I do know that there are people in this world where God shuts the door of grace. Hebrews 6:4–6 says *[4] For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, [5] and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, [6] and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*

According to this, their last state is worse than their first. What is my first state spiritual when I’m born into this world? I am dead in my sins. What can be worse than being dead in my sins? It is being dead in sins with no hope of grace. I don’t know who those people are today but some are listed in the Bible. Esau is one. He couldn’t find repentance even though he sought for it through tears because he had trampled under his feet the covenant of grace. God shut the door of grace. The sons of Eli for in I Samuel 3 God says He is about to do something that will tingle their ears because of their blasphemy against Me and the sons of Eli will never be forgiven. Pharaoh kept hardening his heart and then in the middle of the plagues it says God was hardening his heart so the door was shut on Pharaoh.

You cannot be guilt of this sin unless you have been informed and exposed but this sin when it has come to roost and one, from the heart not only says ‘no’ to Jesus but declares that all of the grace of God is actually evil and from the kingdom of darkness. They call good evil and evil good. They deny the work of the Holy Spirit. Doing those things puts you in a place where there is no forgiveness. I say that because there is only One whom Jesus sent on a mission with a message and a ministry that can bring you and me from death unto life in Christ so if I blaspheme Him who alone can bring me to the One who alone can save me, then I can never be saved.

You are reading this today and you’re not on the bench in judgment. We are either in the dock or we are on the witness stand. I want you to be on the witness stand. I’ll be happy to talk with you at any time. You have been exposed and informed. God is working. This day call upon Him for a new heart, and from your mouth confess Him as Lord. Give praise to the Spirit who brings you to Himself that you might know the joy of salvation now and forevermore. The church says ‘come.’ The Spirit says ‘come.’ You say ‘Yes, Jesus I come.’ Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments and let the Lord speak to your heart. Pastor, I'm so glad that today I have confessed Jesus and He's making me a gatherer. Bless His Holy Name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pastor, I am hearing this and I do not want to be guilty of an ongoing speaking against the Holy Spirit. I know that Jesus has bound the strong man and He is about to set me free from the chains of sin. O Jesus, give me a new heart that I might have a new record and all my sins forgiven. I speak not against Him who You have sent to bring me to You for I now speak, 'Jesus, I come.' If you would like to talk with me about the commitment you made to Jesus I would be happy to spend any and all the time you need to do this. I don't know when men and women have the door of grace shut in this life and I don't know who but I do know that today is the day of salvation. Amen.

Power Point

THE OCCASION

THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE

THE RESPONSE OF THE PHARISEES

THE RESPONSE OF JESUS

THE DECLARATIONS OF JESUS

THE EXHORATION OF JESUS

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a verbal sin revealing the condition of the heart by a persistent and intentional assault upon the Christ-centered mission, message and ministry of the Holy Spirit as a work of Satan and the Kingdom of darkness.