

**April Questions and Answers:
Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit—What Is It?**

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

Sometimes we receive questions for which the answers are so involved we need to devote our entire lesson to it. That is the case for this lesson. The question we will address during this lesson is “What does the Bible mean by ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’ and why is this sin unpardonable?”

Are you guilty of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? Many people are unsure, because they do not know what it is. This troubling concept is mentioned in three scriptures: **Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10**. Hopefully, our study will help us gain a greater understanding of these texts. I do not believe, nor should you, that this lesson is the definitive treatise on the topic. Rather, view it as a step in the direction of understanding Jesus’ words. We will approach our study by dispelling two assumptions about the texts which mention the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Then, based on the immediate and Biblical contexts of the passages, we will note what I believe *is not* the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we will examine what I believe *is* the blasphemy of the Spirit in these contexts.

Discussion:

- I. Dispelling faulty assumptions.
 - A. Over the years, I have discussed this text with several people, read many commentaries and consulted numerous sermon outlines. I have discovered two often made assumptions that are simply not supported by the texts. Before we can understand what blasphemy of the Spirit is, we must make sure the scales of assumption are cleared from our eyes.
 - B. Assumption #1: Jesus accused the Pharisees of committing blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.
 1. Not one of the texts claims Jesus was accusing the Pharisees. Read them backwards, forwards and upside down, but you will not find Jesus saying the Pharisees had committed this sin. Yet, many Christians assume that is what Jesus did.
 2. Most assume this because in both **Matthew 12** and **Mark 3**, Jesus was responding to the Pharisees’ accusation that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan.
 3. However, note three reasons why this assumption does not follow from the text.
 - a. Firstly, prior to mentioning blasphemy of the Spirit in both **Matthew 12** and **Mark 3**, Jesus mentions other blasphemies. It makes more sense to link the first mention of blasphemy to the accusation. Thus, one would conclude that Jesus was accusing the Pharisees of the other blasphemies and warning them not to go further and commit blasphemy against the Spirit.
 - b. Secondly, Mark’s statement in **Mark 3:30** does not apply simply to mentioning blasphemy of the Spirit, but to Jesus’ entire reply from **vs. 23** through **vs. 29**.
 - c. Thirdly, if these Pharisees had indeed committed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which would not be forgiven, what would be the point of mentioning it to them?
 4. Instead of accusing the Pharisees, it makes much more sense to believe that Jesus was warning the Pharisees. They had committed blasphemy against Christ, accusing Him of being in league with the devil. Jesus warns them not to commit blasphemy against the Spirit.
 - C. Assumption #2: Jesus said “shall be forgiven” and “shall not be forgiven,” but He meant “can be forgiven” and “cannot be forgiven.”
 1. I understand the desire to change the meaning of the words Jesus used. But, we are not allowed to simply change the Scripture’s words just because they do not fit our package.
 2. We know the importance of words in scripture from passages such as **Matthew 22:32**. Here Jesus argued for the resurrection by noting that God said, “I am” instead of “I was.” Also, Paul, in **Galatians 3:16**, argued that Christ was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham because the scripture said the promise was to Abraham’s “seed” not “seeds.”
 3. Unless proven otherwise by scriptures, we must assign the most natural meaning to the terms “shall be forgiven” and “shall not be forgiven” in these texts.
- II. What blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not.
 - A. It is not a sin for which one might seek forgiveness but never be able to receive it.

1. Some Christians believe exactly this. I have some notes a sister gave me during a discussion regarding these passages. She wrote, "Those who spoke against the Holy Ghost during Christ's ministry (during the Mosaical age) and continued to do so. (*sic*) These persons soon found themselves in the Christian Age-dispensation. If they sought forgiveness they could not receive it."
 2. However, this contradicts all of scripture's teaching. **I John 1:9** said if we confess our sin, God is faithful to forgive our sins, making no exception for blasphemy against the Spirit. In **II Peter 3:9**, Peter claims God wants everyone to come to repentance, making no exceptions. **Ezekiel 18:23** claims God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but wants them to turn from their ways, making no exceptions. No sin exists for which a person can repent and be refused forgiveness. Therefore, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, in this context, cannot be a sin which will not be forgiven despite the person's repentance and pleading.
- B. It is not a momentary action which forever consigns a person's soul to hell no matter what.
1. Many people are frightened that they might commit blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. We should find comfort in knowing that this sin is not a one time, momentary action which forever condemns us to hell no matter what we do after that.
 2. **Luke 12:10** helps understand this point. In this passage, Jesus was not responding to the Pharisees, but was speaking of ways of life. In **Luke 12:8-9**, Jesus spoke of those who confessed Him before men and those who denied Him before men. Neither of these verses referred to momentary actions, but to ways of life. After all, if referring to momentary actions, we might ask which statement applied to Paul. For part of his life he denied Christ. For another part he confessed Christ. Would Jesus deny him or confess him to the Father? We know he would confess Him because of his repentance and changed way of life. From this contextual connection, we can learn that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not a one time, momentary action either, but a way of life.

III. What blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is.

- A. Firstly, we must understand who the Holy Spirit is and His role in our salvation.
1. According to **John 16:7-13**, the Holy Spirit is the agent by which the world is convicted of sin, righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit is also that agent by which the apostles were guided into all truth. Thus, they were able to teach God's will. According to **Hebrews 2:4**, the Holy Spirit was the agent by which God confirmed the teaching of the apostles as being those of Christ.
 2. The Holy Spirit is instrumental in our salvation. In fact, by revealing the will of God and recording it for all time, giving us all we need to be saved (**II Timothy 3:16-17**), the Holy Spirit has given us God's final appeal to serve Him.
- B. Secondly, we must understand blasphemy as used in these contexts.
1. According to Webster's, "blasphemy" means "profane or mocking speech, writing or action concerning God or anything regarded as sacred" (emphasis mine, *ELC*). Note, blasphemy is not just defamatory speech, but also action which profanes God, in this case the Holy Spirit.
 2. In the context of **Luke 12:10**, as noted earlier, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not a single action, but a lifestyle. Thus, Jesus is speaking of a lifestyle which profanes the Holy Spirit through word and/or deed. In the context of **Matthew 12:31**, blasphemy of the Spirit is not limited to actively attacking the Spirit, but also includes not actively confessing and living according to the Spirit's revelation (**Matthew 12:30**).
- C. Thus, combining our understanding of these two issues, we understand blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a lifestyle which rejects the Spirit's offer of salvation. This lifestyle is not unforgiven because God cannot or will not forgive someone who repents of this sin. This lifestyle is unforgiven by default, because it is the continued rejection of the very thing which offers forgiveness. We can understand now why Jesus said any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven, but blasphemy of the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven. Jesus is explaining the difference between those who will spend eternity in heaven and those who will spend eternity in hell. The difference is not that those in hell committed murder, theft, adultery, etc. and those in heaven did not. There will be people in heaven who have done all these things (**I Corinthians 6:9-11**). Rather, the difference is the people in hell rejected the Spirit's message of reconciliation. The

people in heaven accepted and obeyed the message of the Spirit, confessing Christ through their daily lives.

- D. Note two other passages that support this understanding of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.
1. Note the parallel with **Hosea 4:6**. The Israelites were rejected from being priests because they rejected the very thing that would make them priests for God. They rejected knowledge. The knowledge they rejected was the law of God, revealed by the Holy Spirit.
 2. **Hebrews 10:26-31** is the clearest explanation of blasphemy of the Spirit. It speaks not of those who commit a one time, momentary, single act which condemns them to hell no matter what they do. Rather, it speaks of continued willful sinning. It speaks of a lifestyle. It also refers to this lifestyle as not only trampling underfoot the Son of God, but insulting the Holy Spirit. Does that not sound strangely familiar to blaspheming the Holy Spirit? This insult is not just through words, but through deeds. This insulting of the Spirit results in vengeance and judgment from God. The most interesting aspect of this passage is the Hebrew writer's point that if one continues sinning after receiving the truth, there is no more sacrifice. The point is, this is the last opportunity. Jesus is not going to be sacrificed again. No other gospel is going to be offered. If any reject this message of the Spirit, they have rejected it all. By default, they will not be forgiven because they have rejected the only avenue of forgiveness. All that is left for them is a certain terrifying expectation of judgment. This explains why Jesus distinguishes blaspheming the Spirit from other blasphemies. The Pharisees could reject Jesus, but there would still be another coming to whom they might listen. That would be the Spirit as the word of God was revealed through the apostles and prophets. However, if they rejected the Spirit, nothing more was coming, they had rejected the final offer of salvation and would be, by default, unforgiven.

Conclusion:

To sum up, we note the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a lifestyle of rejecting the saving message of the Spirit, by continuing in sin. It is unforgiven because it is the rejection of the only offer of forgiveness we have. Jesus says all other sins are forgiven to signify why people are saved or lost. People are saved because they accept and obey the Spirit's message. They are lost because they reject the message, which is blaspheming and insulting the Spirit.

Which state are you in right now? Have you accepted the message of the Spirit or are you rejecting it? As long as you have breath in your body, the Spirit offers you salvation through Christ. Please, do not let yourself come to the judgment day guilty of rejecting the offered forgiveness—guilty of the blasphemy of the Spirit. Submit to God right now, honor the Spirit by obeying His word in baptism (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38**), and confess Christ in your daily life (**Luke 12:8-9**).