

COMMON QUESTION NO. 16

IS THERE A SIN THAT CANNOT BE FORGIVEN?

The clear answer is 'Yes', because Jesus says so. He says, "The one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven" (Luke 12:10, see also Matthew 12:31-32 and Mark 3:29).

1. What is 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit'?

Blasphemy generally is to speak wickedly against someone. One of the ones crucified with Jesus "railed" (= blasphemed) at Him (Luke 23:39). It is a word used for slanderous speech against Paul (Romans 3:8). All such blasphemies can be forgiven if repented of, but not when it is against the Holy Spirit of God. Mark is the one who gives an explanation: "but is guilty of an eternal sin---for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit'" (3:31). There is something different about this sin from others, it is "eternal". It has eternal consequences, its guilt remains for ever. The scribes about whom Christ was speaking had witnessed Jesus casting out demons. For example, "a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw" (Matthew 12:22). Although it was obviously the work of God in restoring this man, the evidence of the kingdom of God among them (verse 28), they wickedly and repeatedly said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons". To witness the power of the Holy Spirit and deliberately say it is the power of Satan is going too far. It would be as if a person today, seeing a wicked man totally changed in becoming a Christian, then proclaimed that it is the work of the devil.

So this unforgiveable sin is not any kind of blasphemy, not even blasphemy against the Son of Man (Jesus). So many have blasphemed Jesus and yet have been saved – from His family who said 'He is out of His mind' (Mark 3:21), the Pentecostal crowd who had shouted for Him to be crucified, to Saul of Tarsus (1 Timothy 1:13). During His earthly ministry He had veiled His glory. Who could believe that the Son would be born in a stable, or be crucified as a criminal? Nor is it sexual sin – think of the sinner woman of Luke 7:36ff. who was forgiven much, and the former life of many of the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). It is not even suicide when attempted and fulfilled by one of disturbed mind.

2. Why will this sin not be forgiven?

There is one condition in order to experience forgiveness, and that is repentance. No one will ever be forgiven sins without repentance. Read Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 8:22. Those who commit this sin of deliberate and repeated slander towards Christ against the evidence they have seen with their own eyes show they have such a hard heart that will never soften in repentance. They have already rejected the means to repentance: they knew the truth and were persuaded of it; they saw and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit at work through Christ. It is sad truth that even in this life that someone may be in this condition where forgiveness is impossible. On the other hand, there is the absolute assurance that if you repent, you will be forgiven. Or to put it another way, God will not soften this heart in His grace.

3. Is it possible that you have committed this sin?

Thank God it is most unlikely. Unless you are seeking to defiantly oppose everything written here, the fact you are reading this seeking information, wanting to know the truth, is enough evidence you have not so sinned. The fact that you are concerned about whether or not you are in this state shows that you are not!

4. **Some other passages** with similar teaching explained. These passages do not use the words 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' but they reveal conditions where there will be no forgiveness.

➤ **Hebrews 6:4-6.** "It is impossible ... to restore them again to repentance." Here are professing Christians who have had great privileges and spiritual experiences yet they have fallen away. In the context of Hebrews with its emphasis on perseverance, these are Christians from a Jewish background who embraced Jesus as Messiah but they now reject Him. It is like they are crucifying Jesus again. Despite their identification with Christians they never were true Christians. The writer likens them to ground that bears thorns and thistles (verse 8). He goes on to assert confidence that the others to whom he is writing are not such but have "things that belong to salvation" (verse 9). The fearful thing is that those who once professed Christ but now reject Him can never come to repentance and so be forgiven.

➤ **Hebrews 10:26-30.** "There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment." These are people who "go on sinning deliberately after receiving a knowledge of the truth". We need to be very careful and realize the writer is referring to the specific sin of stopping meeting with the church (verse 25) because they no longer profess the faith (verse 29). If a person comes to the conclusion that Jesus was not the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, then what other sacrifice for sin is there for him? What a wicked thing to reject Christ, the Spirit's work, and the gracious covenant, when once believed in.

Note. To blaspheme Christ like this now will not be forgiven. He is exalted in glory and there is no excuse for those who have known the truth to mistake Him.

➤ **1 John 5:16-17.** "There is a sin that leads to death." This death is spiritual as all people die physically because of sin (Romans 5:12). In the context it is the specific sin of the secessionists, those who left the church (see 2:19). They deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4:2-3) and also deny the significance of His death (5:6). Such deniers of Christ will not experience the eternal resurrection life. This distinction between sin that does and sin that does not lead to death is not that of the Catholic teaching between 'mortal' and 'venial' sin, for there is no distinction in the Bible between such sins. John is certainly not encouraging prayer for such people, although he does not outwardly forbid it. There is little hope for those who have turned away from Christ when once they professed Him.

The fact that there is an unforgivable sin ought to be a challenge to each one reading this. No one purposes to go in this direction. The Pharisees did because they only other alternative was to believe in Jesus and He did not fit their idea of Messiah. The Hebrews were in danger because of the great suffering they were undergoing because of their faith in Jesus. John was writing about people who came to embrace false teaching about Jesus and they left the church. Any one of these is possible and that is why Hebrews gives such strong warnings. The way to avoid this sin is to look to Jesus, to keep going and let nothing turn you aside (read Hebrews 12:1ff.).