

Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

Matthew 12:31-32

Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin -- because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

Mark 3:28-30

Some degree of confusion surrounds what is commonly called the "unforgivable" or "unpardonable" sin of Matthew 12:22-32 and Mark 3:22-30. According to Jesus, there is a sin which will not be forgiven. He declares that it is an "eternal sin" with consequences "in the age to come" (Matthew 12). These texts raise a host of questions: What is this eternal sin? Is it possible to commit today? Have I possibly committed it?

What is It?

What it is not:

1. The eternal sin is not mere unbelief (for mankind is naturally unbelieving and thus we would all be guilty).
2. It is not a sin explicitly named elsewhere in Scripture: it is not murder (see David, Moses, and Paul); it is not adultery (see David); nor is it suicide (there is no biblical warrant for such a conclusion and certainly the context has nothing to do with suicide).
3. It is not denying Christ (see Peter's explicit and repeated denial of Christ) nor blasphemy (see Paul who called himself a blasphemer – 1 Timothy 1:13).
4. It is not flippantly saying something against the Holy Spirit.
5. It is not grieving or quenching the Spirit which appear to be possible for a believer (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19).

To answer the question of what this sin entails, we need to examine the context. Looking at Matthew 12 and Mark 3, we find that Jesus is speaking to his disciples, the gathered crowd, and a

group of Pharisees. These Pharisees had seen Christ's ministry in the power of the Spirit in healing and deliverance and yet attributed that work to the devil. It is this rejection which prompts Christ's warning in the passages. He states that blasphemy in general and even blasphemy against Himself will be forgiven (the unstated but assumed means of forgiveness being through faith). While Christ does not explicitly state that the Pharisees had actually committed this eternal sin, at the very least they were very close to having done so.

From this context, it appears that "blasphemy of the Spirit," involves knowledgeable, willful and continued rebellion against the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees had explicitly seen the Spirit working through Christ and yet rejected His utterly obvious work. Their denial was a decided response to the overt testimony of the Spirit. It was not out of ignorance or indecision.

In light of this rejection, the Pharisees appear to have fallen over or were at least teetering perilously on the edge of a precipice from which there was no repentance. Any sin from which you turn away and trust in God will be forgiven (1 John 1:9), but this particular sin will not be forgiven precisely because it puts you beyond repentance. To blaspheme the Spirit is to reject the very One Who illuminates our hearts to faith and repentance.

This was not a one-time, momentary slip or inadvertent mistake in judgment, but a persistent, life-long rebellion in the face of inescapable truth. Blasphemy of the HS is not a careless act but a calloused attitude...Blasphemy of the HS, therefore, is not just unbelief but unashamed unbelief that arises not from ignorance of what is true but in defiance of what one knows beyond doubt to be true. It is not mere denial, but determined denial; not mere rejection, but wanton, willful, wicked, wide-eyed rejection.

Sam Storms

The NT reveals how close one may come to the kingdom - tasting, touching, perceiving, understanding. And it also shows that to come this far and reject the truth is unforgivable. So it is here. Jesus charges that those who perceive that his ministry is empowered by the Spirit and then, for whatever reason - whether spite, jealousy, or arrogance - ascribe it to Satan, have put themselves beyond the pale (of forgiveness). For them there is no forgiveness, and that is the verdict of the one who has authority to forgive sins.

D.A. Carson

Is it Possible to Commit Today?

Some pastors and theologians have concluded that this particular sin was restricted to the time of Christ's personal earthly ministry and is therefore not possible today. While it is certainly true that the circumstances and context surrounding this warning were related to Christ's earthly ministry, the Scriptures never limit the sin to such a time. The vast majority of Christ's warnings were uttered in response to certain circumstances and within certain contexts, but this does not limit their application today. Where the Scriptures do not suggest a restriction, we should not assume one. Therefore, I conclude that this sin is still possible today for one who has obviously seen the ministry of the Spirit and yet defiantly and continually rejects Him.

Have I Committed it?

Many Christians live in constant and paralyzing fear that they have committed the unpardonable sin. They are burdened and broken and grieved and terrified that some sinful habit they cannot break or some recurring transgression they cannot avoid will forever exclude them from the presence of God. Their confidence is shattered and their assurance of salvation is all but lost.

Sam Storms

The vast majority of questions that we have received regarding the eternal sin are from those who think that they might have committed it. They identify with Sam Storms' quote above and are afraid that they have possibly put themselves beyond repentance. In attempting to shepherd them, I want to ask two questions in particular:

- Are you a believer?
- Are you concerned?

If you are a believer, you are gifted with eternal life, not guilty of eternal sin. If the Holy Spirit dwells in you, then you have not blasphemed Him (Romans 8:9). As Donald Whitney has said, "those indwelt by the Holy Spirit cannot deny the Holy Spirit."

If you are contrite and concerned that you have committed it, then take heart. This sin is unrepentant and unremorseful. God never despises the truly broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17).

The point of Christ's warning is not to cause us to worry that we have committed this particular sin, to judge others for having done so, or to genuinely doubt that we are recipients of salvation. Rather, the Lord spoke it and the Spirit inspired its revelation in order to warn against the dangers of intentionally resisting the Spirit and to therefore encourage us to be attentive and responsive to His work in our lives.

If you believe that you are consistently rejecting the Spirit's work, then you are not commanded to consider whether or not you have committed the eternal sin, you are commanded to repent, trust Christ, and humble yourself. May we be ever diligent to respond to the Spirit, particularly to His work of conviction (John 16:8-11). This response should lead us toward confession, repentance and faith in the work of Christ which is sufficient to cover any and all sin.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

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Recommended Resources

- This [sermon](#) by Donald Whitney relates blasphemy of the Spirit with the warning of Hebrews 6.
- This [article](#) and [sermon](#) by John Piper states that blasphemy of the Spirit sin puts you "beyond repentance."
- This [article](#) by Sam Storms argues that it is the nature of the sin itself which makes it eternal and "unpardonable."