

## **CAN I BE FORGIVEN? BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT**

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**J**esus taught that every kind of sin may be forgiven except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10). That is, if anyone blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, that person demonstrates that he or she is not among the elect — that person will never be saved ("a tree is recognized by its fruit"; Matt. 12:33). But what exactly is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? How can we know if we have committed this unforgivable sin?

The general idea of "blasphemy" is "speaking impiously," "slandering," or "using abusive language." Jesus warned the Pharisees that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was unpardonable both in this age and in the next (Mt 12:32; Mk 3:29-30) in response to their insistence that he exorcised demons by being in league with Satan (Beelzebub). By denying that the Holy Spirit was the power behind the exorcism, attributing that power to Satan, the Pharisees spoke against the Holy Spirit. On this basis, theologians have commonly understood blasphemy of the Holy Spirit to be "attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan or other demonic forces."

Even this definition, however, needs refining. In responding to the Pharisees, Jesus also made the point that the work he did was obviously from the Holy Spirit (according to the logic of his argument in Matt. 12:25-29 and Mark 3:23-27). There was no reasonable explanation for the exorcism other than the power of the Holy Spirit, and this should have been evident to all. The Pharisees rejection of the Holy Spirit was thus informed and willful; they had not simply made a mistake. Speaking from the evil of their hearts (Matt. 12:34-35), they had intentionally blasphemed what they knew to be the power of the Holy Spirit.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is informed and intentional, motivated by evil. Because it is unforgivable, it cannot be committed by a Christian, or even by someone who is not yet a Christian but who later will come to faith. A college professor, who, while knowing the truth about God, dedicates his career to turning away young adults from the Christian worldview, would be a modern example.

Even so, sincere Christians sometimes fear that they, in an unguarded moment, have blasphemed the Holy Spirit. Usually, these people have simply misunderstood the nature of such blasphemy, or have misjudged their own actions. In any event, since the reprobate (those who will never come to faith) cannot feel true remorse for their sin (cf. Acts 11:18), Christians who fear that they may have committed this unpardonable sin generally show by their very anxiety and remorse that they have not done so.