



# Examining...

## “blasphemes against the Holy Spirit”

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Lord Jesus, as we discuss your word in order to serve you in truth, guide us into truth wrapped in love and compassionate dialogue and humility with a pure motive to seek truth for the benefit of the church body. Amen



❖ The commentary that follows is my understanding of the scripture presented. You, the reader, have the responsibility to test any and all interpretations of scripture presented to you by any and everyone.

MATTHEW Ch 12	MARK Ch 3	LUKE Ch 12
24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." ...  30 "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.  *(said also in Matthew 10:32-33)	22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."	8 "I tell you, whoever <b>publicly</b> acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God.  9 But whoever disowns me <b>before others</b> will be disowned before the angels of God.  *(said also in Matthew 10:32-33)
31 And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.	28 Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."	10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.
	30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."	

Let's explore the context under which Jesus made the statement's highlighted in yellow. Whether this is one incident recorded three times or three separate incidents is irrelevant. What is important is that each writer brings in different details. This will help us in our study. At the center of this study looms the fearful declaration

by Jesus that there is one (1) unforgivable sin - blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The aim of this study is to determine exactly what "blaspheming the Holy Spirit" is.

## First, let's get the Greek word definitions of blasphemy....

In Mark/Luke - *blasphēmeō*

1. to speak reproachfully, rail at, revile, calumniate, blaspheme
2. to be evil spoken of, reviled, railed at

In Matthew - *blasphēmia*

1. slander, detraction, speech injurious, to another's good name
2. impious and reproachful speech injurious to divine majesty

## Second, let's examine the context surrounding this blaspheming example.

Interestingly, Matthew equates "blasphemy against the Spirit" (v31) directly to "speaking a word against the Holy Spirit" (v32).

Mark connects the Pharisees **saying** Jesus had an impure spirit as the reason Jesus made the statement.

All three accounts are in a public setting. In fact, Luke specifies that rejecting Jesus "**before others**" gets one disowned.

Jesus made these declarations before the resurrection, so it was applicable at that time. I believe that would be what Jesus meant when he said "in this age". I hardly think that there is any good reason that this would change post resurrection which I believe is what Jesus meant by "in the age to come".

Yes, the Pharisees were blind to Jesus's divinity **despite overwhelming evidence performed in their presence and the declaration of the prophets in their scripture**. They spoke harshly against Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They denied and rejected Jesus and the authority by which he came. This infers that this blaspheming of the Holy Spirit is under a condition where the party's doing so we're given sufficient knowledge and evidence of the truth in Jesus, yet fully reject that truth.

And then there is Saul (Paul). A Pharisee. A Pharisee descended from Pharisees. In Acts 26:5 he bragged that he conformed to the strictest sect - the Pharisees. He rejected Jesus. He no doubt spoke out publicly and harshly against Jesus and denied the Holy Spirit as the source of the multitude of miracles performed. He even rounded up Jesus's followers and imprisoned them and put them to death! Picture Stephen being stoned and as Stephen looked up to heaven seeing Jesus...Jesus was looking back at Saul (Paul) who ordered the stoning, standing just a few feet away. Saul (Paul) rejected entirely Jesus's teaching regarding the Holy Spirit's involvement with Jesus in salvation. Saul (Paul) surpasses by a country mile the Pharisees actions depicted in this incident! Is there any doubt that Saul (Paul) thought, did and said publicly - exactly what his Pharisee brethren did here?

And yet... Jesus came to him. Jesus offered him forgiveness. Salvation. He gave him an opportunity and choice. It's the same opportunity and choice offered you and I and everyone today. But only while it is called **Today**.

If we let scripture define scripture - speaking a word against the Holy Spirit **IS** blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (Mt 12:31-32). Scripture gives us an example of what that looks like; Mark 3: 30 **He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."** And per the definition(s) that speaking out language is to speak; reproachfully, rail at, revile, to be evil spoken of, slander, detraction, speech injurious, to another's good name, impious and reproachful speech injurious to divine majesty.

And yet we find the ultimate blasphemer Saul (Paul) forgiven.

**This leads me to believe** that it's not the words themselves **but the state** of the person uttering those words. Do the words emanate from a state of simple ignorance that has the potential for being corrected and repented of or do they emanate from a state of sin so entrenched and persistent that it is willful rebellion that produces the irreversible hardened heart of which scripture so sternly warns us?

Scripture records some things that I believe back this premise up. So let's take a look.

Our primary example where forgiveness is eternally denied is Satan. Satan was one of God's greatest angels. He moved from a state of loving God to a state of hating God. Satan has entered such a state whereby his evilness is so bad that he has been bound to hell. No chance of forgiveness because of the total rejection, hatred and **continued evil against God** through God's creation. There is no doubt that Satan's state has caused him to blaspheme the Holy Spirit innumerable times.

Listen to Jesus describing the state of the Pharisees;

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are. {Matthew 23:15 NIV}

The state of the Pharisees was such that what came out of their mouth (what they taught) and by their actions they were gathering disciples of Satan rather than children of God. Matthew Chapter 23 is a scathing rebuke of the Pharisees and teachers of the law in Jesus's time.

In Acts 26 Paul recalls for King Agrippa the words Jesus spoke to him in his conversion on the road to Damascus.

15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. 17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. **I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.**'

Scripture teaches us that Satan and his minions fight to pull mankind into darkness while the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and the heavenly host of angels fight to point us to the light of eternal safety in salvation.

Jesus is saying to the world through his rebuke of the Pharisees and teachers of the law that no amount of ceremony and no amount of effort to **appear** pious and righteous will fool God as to the **true state of your heart.**

**Jesus affirms this conclusion;**

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' {Matthew 7:21:23}

It's a heart issue. The heart sets the state of the individual. Paul knows this well and discussed it in Romans 8;

5 Those who **live** according to the flesh have their **minds set** on what the flesh desires; but those who **live** in accordance with the Spirit have **their minds set** on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind **governed** by the flesh is death, but the mind **governed** by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind **governed** by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

What best describes the overall state of your heart? How are you living? Lead (governed) by the Spirit or lead (governed) by the flesh? Occasional forays (unintentional or deliberate) into sin **do not** constitute a majority state of your heart.

### **Consider the following...**

It has given me great joy to find some of your children **walking** in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. {2 John 1:4 NIV}

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are **walking** in the truth. {3 John 1:4 NIV}

Here, **walking** is referring to the state of their hearts. Walking is a view of a continuing event not a singular event. The same goes for Paul's use of **live** and **governed by** and **state of their minds**. The state of their hearts (minds) was evident by their continued lived out actions. In John's example, the state of their heart (minds) was led by the Spirit.

### **John confirms this 1 John 1;**

6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet **walk** in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.  
7 But if we **walk** in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Without question, John is talking to believers as he refers to "we have fellowship with him [Jesus]". And most astonishing is that John absolutely understands human nature and the teachings of the Old Testament that man, despite his relationship with Christ, will sin. John goes on then to differentiate a life walking in fellowship and occasionally succumbing to sin.

### **1 John 1:8-10**

8 If **we** claim to be without sin, **we** deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.  
9 If **we** confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive **us** our sins and purify **us** from all unrighteousness.  
10 If **we** claim we have not sinned, **we** make him out to be a liar and his word is not in **us**.

### **Again, John confirms this;**

1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. **But if anybody does sin, we** have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

2 He is the atoning sacrifice for **our** sins, and not only for **ours** but also for the sins of the whole world.

Without question, believers on this side of the return of Christ can in fact **walk in fellowship with Jesus** and will occasionally succumb to sin. It's important to be honest here also. While it is true that we will occasionally accidentally sin, much (if not most) of our sin will be deliberate sin. We will have made a choice to do it.

Through repentance we are promised forgiveness through the cleansing blood of Christ.

It is equally possible for us to turn and walk in darkness and disfellowship ourselves from Christ through a heart that sets its mind on the flesh, that lives and walks according to the flesh. John goes on to warn us in subsequent chapters that any sin is against God. He warns us not to take this mercy and grace of continued forgiveness of our occasional sin(s) for granted! That is the path to a hardened heart.

### **Paul struggled with sin (Romans 7);**

19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.  
20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.  
21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

What Paul is saying is although we occasionally sin our only hope is in Jesus and the work of the Spirit to keep our heart from being hardened. Paul walked in fellowship with Christ. Paul's heart was set on Jesus. Therefore Paul's state of being was lead by the Spirit despite his occasional sins!

***In my opinion then***, what this points to is that ***where scripture talks about our damnation through continued sin or willful sinning*** - it is referring to walking in (living or governed by) sin. A state of persistently and continually sinning. Our heart then is hardened and rapidly moving to an irreversible state of hardening. Again, Scripture warns us of this time after time! James 1:13-16 is a golden example of this principle!

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

15 ***Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.***

16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.

Notice that James acknowledges that there is an unspecified time between when our desires begin and when they produce sin. And again an unspecified time from when we sin to when that sin is full grown. And then another unspecified time on which it brings death. Since death here refers to our final disposition, and minute by minute our time on earth may end, it would be to our best interest not to let sin drag us to destruction.

This is an important understanding as we proceed.

### **I think Paul confirms this premise in Hebrews Ch. 6;**

4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit,

5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age

6 and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.

8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

It must be noted here that Paul is talking to an audience of Jewish believers. Paul has spent considerable time in chapter 5 and the beginning of 6 to outline their apathy and lukewarmness in the faith. Therefore this warning is to them.

The key to this scripture I believe is in "**fallen away**". What makes repentance **impossible** to such a person?

To **fall away** or have **fallen away** depicts a finished act different from **falling away** which indicates an ongoing process.

The descriptors of what the fallen person was exposed to and participated in are;

- Enlightened
- Tasted the heavenly gift
- Shared in the Holy Spirit
- Tasted the word of God and the powers of the coming age

Note here that the person has had enough experience and knowledge to know the truth of God yet reject him anyway. This is the same as what Jesus was addressing with the Pharisees in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

### **Consider the following;**

Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' {Matthew 26:31 NIV}

"You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' {Mark 14:27 NIV}

Certainly the apostles and disciples of Christ were enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the word of God and the powers of the age to come...yet repentance was open to them.

So, either **fall away** or **fallen away** has different meanings or it is the state of the person's heart that is ultimately in view. We forget that the true state of someone's heart may be hidden from us but it is certainly not hidden from God.

Paul has a history of using hyperbole by playing something to its natural conclusion and contextually appears to have already happened. I believe his example does play the tape to the end for his audience who were in the **process of falling away** by their disinterest and apathy towards spiritual growth. (\*See John 16:1, Romans 11:11, 2 Cor 10:12, Rev 2:5)

So in this example Paul confirms that a person's state of mind (heart) **can (over time) move to a point** where despite having been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy spirit and tasted the word of God and the powers of the age to come... **it is impossible to bring them back to repentance.**

This means that the person's **state has become so depraved and centered on the flesh** that neither the efforts of those around them nor God, the Son or Holy Spirit can bring them to repentance. They have completely rejected the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit on the Cross and tossed it to the gutter as being meaningless. With absolutely no desire for repentance, forgiveness is unavailable and impossible.

### **To re-cap:**

It appears that in Hebrews 6 Paul is elaborating on just what Matthew, Mark and Luke recorded as blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Paul, the ultimate Pharisee and by definition blasphemer of the Holy Spirit, was

forgiven. The Apostles and disciples were forgiven for falling away. In those instances it appears that the state of the heart was judged, not the actions. They were in fact given an opportunity to repent of those actions.

### **Take away:**

Sin is nothing to play with. It is like the strong undercurrent of what appears to be a calm River. It can unexpectedly draw you underwater and not let you up again. James 1:15 is our warning.

A **hardened heart** is a real thing and scripture tells us that it brings about death.

Dead Man walking is a real possibility according to Paul. It's not a point of God not wanting you...it's a condition where you don't want and never will again want any part of God. That is a scary proposition!

Let's heed scriptures warning in light of what we have just covered.

So, as the Holy Spirit says: "**Today**, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...{Hebrews 3:7-8}

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "**Today**," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. {Hebrews 3:13 NIV}

As has just been said: "**Today**, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." {Hebrews 3:15 NIV}

God again set a certain day, calling it "**Today**." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "**Today**, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." {Hebrews 4:7 NIV}

Paul was convinced that so long as it is "**Today**" we have a possibility to repent and surrender to Christ and allow the working of the Holy Spirit on our heart to keep us from ever coming close to rejecting our Creator and Savior!

In His service,  
Keith Andersen