

The Sin against the Holy Spirit makes Repentance Impossible

Is any sin so bad that it is not included in God's forgiveness? The answer is no! God earnestly desires the salvation of all (1 Tim. 2:4; Ezek. 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9). Jesus paid for the sins of all (John 1:29; 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus certainly died to pay for the sins of Judas. Judas simply lost the benefit of the forgiveness Jesus won for him by his rejection of Jesus in unbelief.

How then, do we explain the following words of Jesus from today's Gospel where He says, "²⁸ Truly, I tell you, all the sins that the sons of men commit will be forgiven and all the blasphemies that they utter. ²⁹ However, anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven but is guilty of an eternal sin," (Mark 3:28-29)?

In the first place, the Bible teaches that forgiveness of sins is an objective reality. When Jesus died on the cross, God declared the whole world "not guilty" for Jesus' sake (2 Cor. 5:21). The sin against the Holy Spirit is not a sin against the person of the Holy Spirit but against His office, which is to bring us to faith. It is a persistent, wilful, malicious, and blasphemous rejection of the Gospel by hardened sinners who have been fully convinced of its divine truth.

This sin is not to be confused with final impenitence (Mark 16:16), because all people by nature resist the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:7). It is not blasphemy that comes from spiritual ignorance. Paul called himself a blasphemer, and he was saved (1 Tim. 1:13). It is not the denial of Jesus caused by fear, as was the case with Peter in the house of Caiaphas (Luke 22:61-62). It takes place in those who have been given clear proof of the claims of Jesus and have rejected them.

The writer to the Hebrews stated, "*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace,*" (6:4-6). He also wrote: "*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God,*" (10:26-27). John indicated that it is possible to recognise when someone has committed such spiritually deadly sin (1 John 5:16).

The reason the sin against the Holy Spirit is called the unpardonable sin is that, by its nature, it makes repentance and faith impossible. It is a wilful, persistent rejection of the office of the Holy Spirit to give us Christ's forgiveness through faith. Some have maintained the sin against the Holy Spirit takes place only in believers who have fallen away from the truth and have hardened their hearts. Others have indicated they believe unbelievers can also commit this sin when they see the compelling evidence for Christ's claims but still reject Him.

How do we deal with this sin? If we see someone who is persistently hardening his heart against the Holy Spirit's work through the gospel, we need to warn this person of the danger of hardening his heart. We may not have the discernment John had when he spoke of being able to recognise that this sin had been committed (1 John 5:16). We will certainly warn people, however, of the dangers involved in a persistent, wilful hardening of the heart against God's truth.

On the other hand, what do we do if someone comes to us and fears he has committed this sin? The logical thing to do is to tell the person that he has not committed the sin, because he is concerned about it. If he had committed the sin, he wouldn't be worried about it. This is a logical approach, but it will not do the person any good. All we are doing is directing the person back to his own life, over which he has already despaired. Point the person, instead, to Jesus, who has paid for the sins of the whole world. Only the good news that God has forgiven all our sins will enable the Holy Spirit to kindle in our hearts the conviction that this forgiveness is ours through faith in Jesus.