Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

Matt 12:31 And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. NIV

These are the words of Jesus Himself. His words are quite clear; the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. This passage, however, is often greatly misunderstood. There are a few popular teachings about this passage, but they fall apart when put under the scrutiny of Scripture. These errors have caused much confusion and even fear within the church. We think that it is important to understand these teachings and we are confident that when we look at the passages in context we can then see clearly what Jesus was speaking about.

There have been those Pentecostals/Charismatics that believe to disagree with their teaching on the spiritual gifts and baptism of the Holy Spirit is to commit the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Some only caution, while others sometime outright condemn for having committed this "unpardonable" sin. This implies that those they condemn are destined for hell with no chance of ever repenting or receiving forgiveness (if they had actually committed it). Sadly, this tactic has caused fear in the hearts of many.

Another popular teaching comes from the more traditional denominations. They claim that blasphemy against the Spirit is "not just a one-time offense; rather, it is an ongoing attitude of rebellion—a stubborn way of life that continually resists, rejects and insults God's Spirit." Many have come to this erroneous conclusion for a couple of reasons. First, they feel that it is the only way they can reconcile this passage with the fact that Christ died for all sins. While unbelief can be forgiven, those who continually reject God's salvation and never repent have rejected God's offer through the Spirit. They try to equate this sin of unbelief with blasphemy of the Spirit. The second reason for this belief is an attempt to keep this passage in union with their teaching of eternal security. Because they believe that once they are saved there is no way they can lose that salvation, many have "made-up" their own interpretation of this verse to fit that doctrine.

Now let us look now to the Scriptures to find out what the Blasphemy against the Spirit is. We will start by looking at this event as described in the book of Mark:

Mark 3:22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." 23 So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. 28 I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. 29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." 30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." NIV
Who was Jesus Speaking To?

First let us look at whom Jesus was speaking to. We see in verse 22 that it was the "teachers of the law" (the Scribes) who accused Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebub. These Scribes were the "teachers of the law." This is significant. They were the ones who studied, taught and knew the Scriptures! They were the ones who sat in Moses' seat and explained the law in the synagogues (Matt 23:1). Because they were the teachers of the Scriptures, they, above anyone else, should have known exactly who Christ was. In fact, when Herod wanted to kill Christ and needed to know where Christ had been born, he called for the chief priests and the Scribes to get this information. Let us look for a moment at what happened then.

Matt 2:3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."" NIV

We see that these very teachers of the law knew the exact prophecy that spoke of the birth of the Christ. They knew where He was to be born. They knew ALL of the prophecies about Him. However, although they knew what the Scriptures said, they did not follow those teachings. Matthew chapter 23 goes into great length about how the Scribes and Pharisees did not practice what they preached, how they continually misinterpreted God's law.

In the passage in Mark, we see these teachers of the law, the very men who knew the prophecies and should have been able to identify the Christ. However, when they looked upon that very Christ casting out a demon through the power of the Holy Spirit, because of their hardened hearts and blinded eyes (Matt 23:15), they refused to admit who He was. Instead, they said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

So how does Jesus answer these teachers of the law? In verse 23 it says "Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables". This too is significant. Why didn't Jesus just speak to them plainly? This was a fulfilment of prophecy (Ps 78:2), something that they could have seen and understood, if they had chosen too. However, the Scripture tells us that their hearts had become calloused and they had closed their eyes. So, Jesus did not explain things to them plainly, as he did with his disciples (Mark 4:10-11), but rather he responded in a parable.

What Was Jesus' Response?

Mark 3:23 So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's
Jesus basically explained how foolish it would be for Satan to be casting out his own demons. He spoke of how a divided house cannot stand and how the strong man must be subdued in order for the house to be robbed. Then He says; “… all sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.” So what does this mean then? The next verse helps us understand that question.

Mark 3:30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." NIV

They said that He [Jesus] had an evil Spirit. That is why Jesus spoke in a parable and then said that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. These teachers of the law watched Jesus (the Messiah who was taught about in their Scriptures) cast out a demon through the power of the Holy Spirit and turned around and said that the power through which He did so was Satan's power. Let's look at these events in the book of Matthew and Luke. There we can see more clearly what took place.

Setting the Scene

Matthew chapter 12 begins with the two incidents in which the Pharisees were trying to find ways to accuse Jesus, to trap him in some sort of sin or false teaching. Both of these events take place on the Sabbath. According to the law, a person was supposed to rest on the Sabbath and not do any work. The disciples pick up grain and eat it on the Sabbath and Jesus heals a man. The Pharisees tried to use both of these to accuse Jesus, but Jesus showed them how He had not broken the law. The Pharisees then went out to plot a way to kill Jesus! Jesus continues to go around healing people, which we are told is a fulfilment of prophecy spoken by Isaiah. It then quotes the passage from Isaiah 42:1-4. This leads us to the following passage in Matthew.

Matt 12:22-45 22 Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. 23 All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." 25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. 30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. 31 And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the 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. 33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." 38 Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." 39 He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. 42 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. 43 "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. 44 Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. 45 Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation." NIV

What Started It All?

Now, once Jesus cast out the demon, what was the response of the crowd? The Scripture says, "All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" Not only was the crowd astonished, but also they began to ask, was Jesus the Son of David? That is to say, could he be the Messiah, the Christ. They were beginning to recognize who Jesus was! Jesus once asked the Pharisees whose son the Christ was, and they replied "the Son of David (Matt 22:42)." So here we have the teachers of the law (the Scribes) watching Jesus cast out a demon by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then they hear the crowd start to ask if Jesus could be the Son of David! How do the Scribes react to this?

Matt 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." NIV

The Pharisees had already tried trapping him into admitting he had broken the law. They desperately wanted to find a fault in this man, but they were unsuccessful. But Jesus did not do those things, Jesus, was sinless, perfect and there could not be any fault found within him (1 Peter 2:22)! The Pharisees who were unsuccessful at their attempts to discredit Jesus, are now trying to plot his death, they wanted to kill him! When others began to see who Christ was, they quickly and unjustly accused Jesus of being possessed by Satan!

So what was actually the significance of accusing Jesus of being possessed by the Prince of Demons? Jesus clearly explains this to us as recorded in both the book of
Matthew and Luke as he responds to the Pharisees. Jesus was not simply replying to words he heard spoken, Jesus "knew" their thoughts, knew their hearts and their motives. The Pharisees were trying awfully hard to discredit Jesus; after all, if they could not discredit him then they would have to admit He was indeed the Son of David, their Messiah.

Matthew 12:26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. NIV

Luke 11:18 If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. 19 Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 20 But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. NIV

Jesus states it rather emphatically; if Jesus was driving out demons by the power of God then this meant that the Kingdom of God had indeed come to Israel. The "teachers of the law" knew that too. They knew what to expect of the Son of David, but they wanted no part of Christ. Instead, they watched this man, whom they were desperately trying to discredit, cast out a demon and they accused him of doing so through the power of Satan. Why? They had NO reason for thinking this, he had broken no law, been caught in no sin. He was perfect, yet they were plotting to kill him! Jesus knew their thoughts and revealed to them the reality of what they were doing. They were rejecting the kingdom by trying to attribute to Satan the works that Jesus Christ did while He was in the flesh walking upon the earth. That is what the Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is.

Why did Jesus say this?

Mark 3:30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." NIV

Jesus said this because they accused Him of having an evil spirit. This reason and this alone is why Jesus spoke these words. We cannot try to impose this teaching on anyone who speaks in the name of Christ, those circumstances do not meet the criteria for committing this unpardonable sin. We should think about that for a moment. Can the blasphemy of the Spirit be committed anytime anyone who speaks the truth and is accused of speaking for or by Satan? The answer to that question is no.

What Blasphemy Is Not

The Bible clearly states that they committed blasphemy against the Spirit because they accused Jesus of having an evil spirit. There are no other teachings in the Bible that transpose this to mean anyone speaking for Christ. There are plenty of Scriptures that tell us there are false spirits and that we should test them. We are often encouraged and admonished to not follow false teachings and to be aware of them. Never in any Scripture are we cautioned, warned or admonished to be careful
that we do not make false charges against an apostle for fear we would suffer eternity in hell if we were wrong. It is just not there. The Bible says this was said because they accused Jesus (and no one else) of having an evil spirit.

The Bible also states in these passages that the significance of Jesus performing His power through the Spirit was that it was proof that the kingdom of God had come to Israel. No matter what we do or how much we speak for Christ, we are only messengers of His power and glory. We could never say that because we do work through the Spirit that means the kingdom of God has come to you! Only Jesus can usher in His Kingdom, only He has that authority and power! Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning the Kingdom, as He was the Messiah! We are not, and therefore, even if we were to do some great and mighty work through the power of the Spirit it will never be a fulfilment of the prophecy of Israel's Messiah and the Kingdom he has promised would come to them!

Jesus was sinless and perfect. He did no wrong. When Jesus, who was God, became man, He did His work through the Power of the Spirit. There was no room for doubt that He was of God. No one could ever make any credible accusations against this man Jesus! We, however, as sinful people will sin, no matter how much we are filled by the Spirit. No matter how great of a work for the Lord we are doing, this does not negate the fact that we sin. Therefore we can be accused, and rightly so. Unlike Jesus, humans can sin and are subject to objective criticism. With Jesus there is no doubt that He was indeed performing His work through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Only while Jesus is here on earth, and only while Jesus is doing the work of God through the Spirit of God can this blasphemy of the Spirit be committed. We see the evidence of this in the words of Jesus:

**Matt 12:32 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. NIV**

He spoke of the fact that it was in this age, that is, the age in which He was on the earth, and a future age to come. This is in reference to the coming Kingdom that Jesus postponed, and is yet to be set up. When the Kingdom on earth is here, then the danger of committing blasphemy against the Spirit can again exist, for it is then that Jesus will be ruling and reigning for a thousand years.

The Scriptures are clear. We pray that you will not be afraid to search the Scriptures to find the truth. Do not take our word for it. Let the Spirit guide you through the Power of His living Word. The answers are in the Bible. We must simply look to it and trust what it says.