

Word Study **BLASPHEMY**

(Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell)

The word "blasphemy" is a terrible word. It is a transliteration of the Greek original and means, in the verb form, "to speak reproachfully, to slander, calumniate, rail at, or revile." Blasphemy is, therefore, a sin of the tongue. Without speaking, it is impossible to commit the sin of blasphemy.

The terms *blaspheme*, *blasphemy*, *blasphemer* and *blasphemous* are found in the New Testament scriptures. Interestingly, the noun and the verb are most common in the book of Revelation. The Old Testament scriptures also refer to this sin. For example, we read in Leviticus: "**And he who blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he who is born in the land, when he blasphemes the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.**" (24:16).

Unbelievably, Jesus was accused of blasphemy during His ministry. (Matthew 9:3; 26:65; Mark 2:7; 14:64; Luke 5:21; John 10:33). So was Stephen (Acts 6:11,13). The apostle Paul described himself as a blasphemer at one time (1 Timothy 1:13). The sin was clearly and unequivocally condemned by him. (Colossians 3: 8).

BLASPHEMY AGAINST GOD

The "beast" of Revelation was guilty of blasphemy. We read: "**And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his head the name of blasphemy...And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them who dwell in heaven.**" (13: 1,5,6) Later, we read of men blaspheming God in response to Divine punishment (16: 9,11,21). Then there is the picture of the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet who did "**sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.**" (17:3) To whom do the beast and the woman refer? The Bible is its best interpreter. For example, we later read in Revelation 17: "**And here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits.**" (v9). "**And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.**" (v12)

PROBLEM TEXTS

R.P. Martin sees two problem texts on this subject: 2 Peter 2:10-11 and Matthew 12:32 (with Mark 3:29). We read: "**...but chiefly those who walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil (*blasphemeo*) of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing (*blasphemos*) accusation against them before the Lord "** (2 Peter 2:10,11). Albert Barnes refers us to Jude 9 & 10 to help us in our understanding of this passage. David H. Wheaton has pointed out that "dignities" may refer to angels. He writes: "...it could be that they used the behaviour of the fallen angels in Genesis 6:1-4 as a justification for their own

immorality, and spoke evil of the unfallen angels by holding that such behaviour was typical of all angels... Angels, by contrast, have the right to complain to God of the behaviour of these arrogant mortals, but refuse to do so: this may be a reference to the kind of incident described in Jude 9." William Barclay has written: " This is a strange and difficult passage; but the meaning is clear. Even angels, when they sinned, were punished. How much more shall men be punished? Angels could not rebel against God and escape the consequences. How shall men escape? And men need not seek to put the blame on others, not even on angels; nothing but their own rebelliousness is responsible for their sin."

BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE SPIRIT

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has caused much comment. We read these words of Jesus: "**And whosoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.**" (Matthew 12:32). The passage, of course, must be read in its context. Jesus had healed a blind demoniac. When the Pharisees heard what He had done, they accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. Jesus pointed out the impossibility of this action. It meant that Satan was divided against himself. The Lord went on to say: "**And if I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.**" (v27) The situation was very clear: Jesus was genuine and the Spirit of God was at work. To say that Jesus had an unclean spirit was to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit and put oneself in a position for which forgiveness is not provided.

PREVENTS MEN FROM SEEING GOD

Why is this sin so heinous? Because it was, as one writer has put it: "a malicious conspiracy to deprive men of eternal life because of personal jealousy and hostility." Jesus performed miracles, which included casting out of demons, to show to people that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The signs were designed to make believers in Him. The apostle John wrote towards the conclusion of his gospel record: "**And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His name.**" (John 20:30,31). Carl Ketcherside has written: "To behold the signs done to produce faith, and against all observation, knowledge, and conscience, assign that power to Satan for the specific purpose of destroying faith is to condemn mankind once for all to eternal death."

But why is there no forgiveness for this malign act? The simplest answer is because God has placed it outside the pale of Divine forgiveness. Yes, there is the grace of God and grace covers sin, but this particular sin is beyond the limit, is outside the circle of God's grace. It is that simple. Those who were guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit possessed hearts of stone. I believe their hearts were so hardened that they were totally beyond repentance. Their damnation of the work of the Spirit had damned themselves. Truly, each had sinned away his or her day of grace.

Can people commit the unpardonable sin today? Yes, it is possible. Note what Jesus said: "**...but whosoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.**" (Matthew 12:32b). "This world" refers to the dispensation in which Jesus lived. The "world to come" speaks of the Messianic age or the Christian age – the dispensation in which we now live. The sin is as unpardonable now as it was in Jesus' day.