

The Unpardonable Sin

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Integration Question: *Could someone commit the unpardonable sin today? How would you work with someone who thought they had committed it?*

Theological Statement

From Old Testament prophesy, it was anticipated that in the New Covenant, God's people would be radically transformed through the Holy Spirit. Jeremiah, Joel, and Ezekiel believed that the New Covenant people would know how to walk and live in the way of the Lord because God's law would be written on their newly circumcised hearts through the outpouring and active relationship with His Spirit (Jer. 31:33-34; Joel 2:28-29; Ezek. 36:26-37). Jesus called this process a second birth. While He was talking to a pharisee one evening, Jesus told the man, "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). This was to happen, just like the Old Testament foretold, via the Holy Spirit. Jesus continued to explain to the man that "unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5-6). Holy Spirit is, therefore, thought of as the one to bring the effect of Jesus' New Covenant life upon His people. The Apostle Paul writes that through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we are saved by the cleansing and renewed life of Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). The Apostle John also records that Holy Spirit teaches us to abide and find life in Jesus as He reveals our sin that we can repent and be forgiven of, the righteous standing we have before God by being covered in the blood of Jesus, and the ultimate judgment of the world for not living in relationship with God. (1 John 2:27; John 16:8).

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Matthew records that while Jesus was performing miracles through the power of Holy Spirit, some religious leaders attributed Jesus's miracles to Satan. In response, Jesus tells them that "blaspheming the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven"

(Matt. 12:31). Because the work of the Holy Spirit is to renew humanity, rejecting Him means that person will not be cleansed, reborn, or renewed in Jesus. The Bible is clear that this will only lead to death and ultimate separation from God (John 3:18, 36). In other words, blaspheming Holy Spirit is a permanent rejection of the grace of Jesus that offers forgiveness of sins, making repentance impossible. By rejecting Holy Spirit's work manifesting in Jesus' miracles, which served as the invitation to live into and experience God's kingdom, those religious leaders in Matthew 12 made the conscious decision to reject the only means to salvation. Similarly, anyone today who rejects Holy Spirit's offer of a renewed life accomplished by Jesus, willingly chooses to remain in darkness, and consequently, will not be found cleansed and forgiven of their sins as they stand before the Judge.

Ministry Application

The theological concept of the "unpardonable sin" has two important applications. First, it is important to reassure Christians who feel that because they got angry with their child, had an affair on their spouse, or maybe even murdered someone in their earlier life, that those actions were not committing the "unpardonable sin," and they can still experience the forgiveness and redemption of Jesus in their lives. In fact, the Matthew 12 passage has brought fear to many Christians' faith. If a follower of Jesus came to me in fear that they might not be forgiven because of a sin they committed, it is important to remind them that Scripture promises that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). I would take the opportunity to teach this person the theology of the "unpardonable sin." I would want to reveal to them that unless they are rejecting Jesus, He will cleanse all people from their sins. This would also be a great opportunity to encourage them

that the fact they are taking such precaution in the faith is because they really do fervently love Jesus with all their life.

A second implication of the theology of the “unpardonable sin” is that followers of Jesus should take to heart the reality that a vast majority of humans (those who reject Jesus) will be cast out and not experience His presence. This verse serves as a reminder that Jesus has commissioned us to bear His witness and to be His ambassadors to a fallen and lost world, held captive by the evil one. This world cannot afford us to be so self-focused, caught up in the worries of this world, that we miss the chance to share the truth about the redemption and renewed life found only in Jesus. Practically, we must be intentional about sharing the good news of Jesus to our lost family members, neighbors, coworkers, friends, and strangers. For those who are not following Jesus, the theology of the ‘unpardonable sin’ should really force them count the cost of rejecting Jesus and His Spirit. I personally believe the fear tactic of hell is never the best way to draw people to Jesus. On the contrary, I believe introducing and having people experience the love of their Creator is the best way to develop a relationship with Jesus. I would focus on God’s love and faithfulness that despite humanities wayward living, He made a way for us to experience His eternal presence and renewed life, never having to experience unforgiveness and separation from Him.