

The Unforgiveable Sin and the Mark of the Beast

At one point or another, some believers wonder if they've committed the "unforgiveable" or "unpardonable" sin.

For the most part, such worries are the trick of the evil one designed to engender fear, unbelief and a distancing from God. He's trying to drown their confidence and neutralize their productivity in the kingdom of God by filling their minds with hopelessness, self-hatred and doubts about God's goodness.

Let My People Go

Some believe that they've committed the sin of Pharaoh, who repeatedly and defiantly hardened his heart to the witness of the Holy Spirit. In that case, God finally declared:

"I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen" (Exod. 7:3-4a, ESV).

Pharaoh had hardened his heart at least ten times before God took action—refusing to believe that the "signs and wonders" performed through Moses were from God. Having read the intents of his heart, God knew that Pharaoh's decision would never change—that he had rendered himself incapable of repentance.

The Sin That Dare Not Call Its Name

We see a variation on the sin of Pharaoh in Matthew 12:22-31 when the Pharisees charged Jesus with healing a demon-possessed, blind and mute man by the power of Satan. They declared:

"This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons."

Jesus replied:

“Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come ...” (NASB).

“You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart ...” (NASB1995).

By attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to demonic powers, the Pharisees were also denying the validity of Jesus’ ministry—in essence, charging Him with working for Satan himself. As Jesus put it, they were speaking: out of that which fills the heart.

The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to bear witness to the divinity of Jesus as the Son of God, Savior and Lord and to demonstrate that fact through divine miracles, signs and wonders. In John 16:7-8, Jesus expands on this by saying that the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment.

To Be Against Jesus is to Be on Satan’s Side

To believe that we are irretrievably destined to hell by dint of one sin or another (or even a multiplicity of sins, egregious as they may be), is to say that the atonement of Jesus is not sufficient to cleanse us from all sin. Thus the “unforgiveable sin” lies outside of kinds, types, degrees or numbers of sin. It lies in the hardening of one’s heart to the only way that man can be saved—the forgiveness that the Son of God *alone* offers (Acts 4:12).

It is unforgiveable because the only thing that can save a person *is* such faith. If we make a final and full denial of

Jesus and His work, we have cut ourselves off from salvation itself.

An important caveat: Only God knows when a person has reached this point, so it is important for us to share Jesus with everyone, no matter what their present behavior.

In his commentary on Matthew, Robert Mounce adds:

“Jesus is saying to His antagonists that to attribute to Satan that which has been accomplished by the power and Spirit of God is to demonstrate a moral vision so distorted that there is no longer any hope of recovery.... Denial of this was not the result of ignorance but of a willful refusal to believe. Therefore it is unforgiveable. The only sin that God is unable to forgive is the unwillingness to accept forgiveness. Thus the unforgiveable sin is a state of moral insensitivity caused by continuous refusal to respond to the overtures of the Spirit of God.”

The ‘Sin Unto Death’

In 1 John 5:16 (NIV), the apostle John makes a curious statement about “a sin that leads to death”:

“If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that.”

Clearly, this sin is so egregious that God takes the life of the person who commits it. Whether John is referring to physical death or spiritual death is not clear, though the warning is directed toward “brothers and sisters.”

Alternately it may refer to an “unpardonable sin” repeatedly and unrepentantly committed by an unbeliever.

The Mark of the Beast

Another possible understanding of the “sin unto death” is that it prophetically refers to the sin of taking the mark of the beast during the Tribulation period. In Revelation 14:9-11 (NASB1995), the Holy Spirit informs us:

“If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God. ... And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever. Those who worship the beast and his image and receives the mark of his name have no rest day and night.”

(See also Revelation 13:15-17; 16:2; 17:8; 19:20-21.)

Comfort for the Fearful

If you have a desire to repent and be forgiven by Jesus for your sins, you have NOT committed the unpardonable sin, for if you had, that witness and desire would not be there.

If you are afraid that God has permanently hardened your heart because you’ve repeatedly steeled yourself against the witness of the Holy Spirit (that Jesus is Savior and Lord), there is still time to make that right!

Remember, Pharaoh’s sin was to repeatedly harden his heart as an act of defiant opposition to God and as an attack against His chosen people. The Pharisees’ “unforgiveable sin” was to declare that Jesus was doing miracles by the power of Satan rather than by the Holy Spirit, thus blinding the people to God’s singular plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. And though the text isn’t clear, the “sin unto death” is likely a variation on the sins described above or a taking of the mark of the beast in the last day.

It’s important to understand that we currently live in an “age of grace” where the redemptive power of Jesus Christ works to woo us to surrender our lives to His love and grace—before it’s too late! Though others choose darkness instead of

holiness, if you still have a desire to positively respond to God's invitation, His grace is still available to you. Respond to it now and receive the gift of eternal life. In John 17:3 (MEV), Jesus proclaimed for all who would listen:

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." {eo}

Dr. David Kyle Foster is the host of the Pure Passion podcast and author of *Transformed Into His Image and Love Hunger*. He is also the founder and director of *Mastering Life Ministries*. Read more of his take on sexual sin and brokenness in his newest book, *The Sexual Healing Reference Edition*.

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.