

Blasphemy

by Rebecca S. May

- What is blasphemy?
- What does the Bible say about the name of God?
- Is blasphemy “unforgivable”?

The Definition of Blasphemy

Blasphemy is “damaging speech.” Webster’s defines blasphemy as “profane or contemptuous speech, writing or action concerning God.” The Greek word βλασφημία (*blasphemia*) means “to slander; to speak lightly or profanely of sacred things.” To “slander” is “to make a false spoken statement damaging to a person’s reputation.” To “profane” is to speak in an “irreverent, disrespectful, or obscene” manner. The Hebrew word translated “blasphemy” (*naqab*) means “to curse.” The Hebrew word for “curse” (*qalal*) means “to be slight, swift, or trifling, that is, unimportant, or trivial.”

Blasphemy, then, is:

1. To think or speak lightly (unimportant, insignificant, or unholy) of God or trivialize the name of God. *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain* (Exodus 20:7). For example, “Oh my ...” followed by the name of God is blasphemy.
2. To think or speak in an obscene manner towards God or disrespectful of the name of God. *Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory* (Revelation 16:9).
3. To think or make damaging statements about God or use false words in the name of God, *You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD* (Leviticus 19:12).

Blasphemy is a word or a thought against the character of God, involving the name of God

The Significance of the Name of God

God desires His name to be sanctified (Isaiah 29:23) and honored (Malachi 2:2). The very mention of His name should instill fear (1:14). God said, *For the sake of My name I delay My wrath* (Isaiah 48:9). Consequently, God hates it when His name is despised (Malachi 1:6). Three times in Ezekiel God said, *But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations ...* (20:9, 14, 22).

When Israel began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab, God commanded that all who had joined themselves to an idolatrous woman should be put to death. When an Israelite brought a pagan woman to his relatives, in the presence of Moses and all the people, it was the priest Phinehas who *took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through* (Numbers 25:7-8). God established a covenant of life and peace with Phinehas because, as God said, *he revered Me and stood in awe of My name* (Malachi 2:5).

Because God is worthy to receive glory, and honor, and power (Revelation 4:11), His name is worthy of respect, honor, and fear. Blasphemy is a serious sin, therefore, the punishment for blasphemy is severe. *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘The one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death’”* (Leviticus 24:13, 15-16).

The Nature of the Sin of Blasphemy

Blasphemy is a sin of rebellion. Nehemiah associated it with the rejection of the Word of God and those who deliver the Word of God. *But they became disobedient and rebelled against You, and cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets who had admonished them, and they committed great blasphemies* (Nehemiah 9:26).

Blasphemy may be committed in ignorance. Of himself, the Apostle Paul said, *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly ...* (1 Timothy 1:12-13).

Blasphemy is a sin which defiles. Jesus taught His disciples, saying, *That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander [βλασφημία], pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man* (Mark 7:20-23). This word *defile* is the Greek word κοινωω, meaning “to make common.” Believers in Christ are special—they are chosen by God, set apart by God, and are the children of God. When a believer blasphemes God, he is defiling himself. He is rejecting his sanctified status as God’s child, declaring that he is merely a common man.

The opposite of blasphemy is glory. Believers are to glorify God. To glorify is to “render or esteem glorious,” that is, to bring fame or admiration to the name of God. Peter said, *Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation* (1 Peter 2:12).

Blasphemy is a characteristic of the Antichrist. The Apostle John described the arrival of the Antichrist as follows: *Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, ... and on his heads were blasphemous names ... and they worshipped the beast ... saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name ...* (Revelation 13:1, 4, 6).

Blasphemy is particularly satanic because it is not only a sin *against* God, it is a sin directed *towards* God. John MacArthur says, “Blasphemy represents conscious denouncing and rejection of God. It is defiant irreverence, the uniquely terrible sin of intentionally and openly speaking evil against holy God or defaming or mocking Him” (*Matthew*, p. 311).

The unforgivable sin of blasphemy. In each of the synoptic gospels, it is recorded that Jesus said, *... 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* (Matthew 12:31-32; see also Mark 3:28-29 and Luke 12:10).

First, in this context, blasphemy is a specific sin listed separate from sin in general. This seems to reveal the seriousness of this particular sin which proceeds out of men and is directed towards God.

Second, we see that not all blasphemy is unforgivable—most blasphemies will be forgiven.

Third, we observe that there is a blasphemy which IS unforgivable, specifically, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The context of the pronounced judgment by Christ is directed towards the Pharisees—one branch of the Jewish leadership of His day. These Pharisees, who Jesus Himself referred to as poisonous snakes, were committing the utmost sin—attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father, in the name of the Son (John 14:26). The purpose of the Holy Spirit was to authenticate the Messianic claims of Christ by demonstrating the presence of divine power through the various miracles recorded in the Gospels (Mark 3:28-30). To claim the Holy Spirit is empowered by Satan is to say that Satan has authority over God. This is unforgivable.

“During Jesus’ earthly ministry, the unbelieving Pharisees and all others who blasphemed the Spirit cut themselves off from God’s mercy, not because it was not offered but because it was abundantly offered yet rebelliously and permanently rejected and ridiculed as satanic” (MacArthur, p. 313).

Blasphemy against the Spirit demonstrated committed unbelief. Even after having seen all the evidence necessary to make faith in Christ a reasonable decision, they possessed an absolute and determined refusal to believe which resulted in loss of opportunity ever to be forgiven *either in this age or the age to come*. In other words, God would not offer an extra chance for repentance in eternity.

Because this particular sin was committed while Christ was physically on earth and performing miracles, many believe “it is impossible for this particular sin to be committed today” (Lewis Sperry Chafer). However, it seems possible that if one were to believe, that is, think or state that Jesus was or is empowered by Satan and not by the Holy Spirit, they would be committing the same blasphemy which Jesus said was unforgivable. Ultimately, I would agree with Dr. John Walvoord, who said, “As far as it applies today, it is not the thought that one seeking pardon will not find it, but rather that one who rejects the Holy Spirit will not seek pardon” (*Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 89).

Conclusion

We should be very careful how we use God’s name. God said, *But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name ... that prophet shall die* (Deuteronomy 18:20). The word *presumptuous* means “failing to observe the limits of what is permitted or appropriate.” To make “light,” “disrespectful,” or “false” statements about the name of God is blasphemy, the utmost profanity. It is inappropriate and stated as sinful in the Law, the prophets, the Gospels, and the epistles—clearly, it is not permitted by God.

Conversely, God said, *My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways ...* (2 Chronicles 7:14). Those who respect God’s name gather in the name of God (Matthew 18:20), accept hatred by the world for the sake of the name of God (Matthew 10:22), and do not tolerate evil men or false teachers (Revelation 2:2-3) for the sake of a highly exalted name of God—the name which is above all names, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, ... and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

Questions and Answers

Q: *What is blasphemy?*

A: Blasphemy is damaging speech against the character of God, involving the name of God. Blasphemy involves trivializing God, disrespecting God, and swearing falsely by God. For example, “Oh my ...” followed by the name of God is blasphemy.

Q: *What does the Bible say about the name of God?*

A: The Bible says that God’s name is *the name which is above all names* (Philippians 2:9). It is a name worthy of respect, honor, and fear (Malachi 1:14; 2:2). God said, *But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations* (Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22).

Q: *Is blasphemy “unforgivable”?*

A: ... *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* (Matthew 12:31-32; see also Mark 3:28-29 and Luke 12:10).