

## High Thoughts

### Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

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Given 15-Aug-15; Sermon #1281s

In Isaiah 55:8-9, God says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” The Bible provides a consistent record of this fact, and from the beginning of the book to the end, we see mankind at odds with his Creator. No matter the topic, mankind has developed a contrary viewpoint, and also developed the confidence that he is right.

Perhaps no other group of people epitomizes this contrariness as the Pharisees of Christ’s day, upon whom Jesus pronounces “woe” 8 times in one chapter. And yet, Jesus had an earlier interaction with the Pharisees which caused the Son of God to utter some of the most serious words in the entire Book. Please turn with me to Matthew 12, where we find a warning about crossing a line which cannot be uncrossed.

**Matthew 12:31-32** "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

This afternoon, we are going to examine what the NKJV calls “the unpardonable sin,” something that is so grave that it will not be forgiven, either in the present age or in the next one, even though God is eager to forgive. We may not be in immediate danger of committing this, yet there are still principles within the lesson which can always be applied, as we will see.

Blasphemy is not talked about much these days, because our culture cares less and less about the things of God. The word blasphemy comes from two

roots, which together, mean “injurious speaking.” Now, speaking (or writing) that causes injury *is* pretty common these days, but blasphemy is in a separate category because it has God or something sacred as its target. And so blasphemy is a dishonoring of God *or* sacred things. And it is typically done deliberately.

Christ’s words here are a strong enough warning by themselves, but Mark 3: 29 makes the consequences of this even more plain. It says, “He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit *never* has forgiveness, but is subject to *eternal condemnation*.”

The wider context of these verses helps us to understand this stark warning, and it begins back in verse 22 with Christ healing a demon-possessed blind-mute. Because of the Pharisees’ hardness of heart, they would not accept that this had been done through the power of the Holy Spirit, and so they tried to diminish this work of God by saying it was performed by the power of Satan.

The headings tend to obscure this, but Christ’s teaching continues all the way to verse 45, but for our purposes today we will just summarize through to verse 37. In verse 33, He says to evaluate based on the fruit that is produced. The Pharisees should have been able to see the supremely positive fruit that He was producing, and at the same time He was pointing out that the fruit they were producing was rotten. In verses 34-35, their speaking evil against the power of God showed the evil that was in their own hearts. And while the Pharisees wanted to belittle the miracle that had just taken place, in verse 36 Jesus says that even idle or careless words must be accounted for in the Day of Judgment. And verse 37 warns that our words will either justify us or condemn us, and that puts the Pharisees on pretty thin ice.

Notice, though, that He does not come right out and say that these Pharisees had committed the unpardonable sin. They *did* commit blasphemy, and what they did was serious enough to evoke a thunderous warning. But it appears that Jesus Christ was making some allowance for the Pharisees because, in taking on the form of a Bondservant, there was confusion about Who He was. It had not been revealed to them (as it had to the disciples), and so Christ said they could be forgiven the blasphemous things they said about

Him. He did not mean that blasphemy or other sins are no big deal, but rather He was saying that it is possible for those things to be forgiven, in contrast to something which cannot.

Remember, this warning was triggered by the Pharisees' attributing the outworking of God to the lord of flies. It included a rejection of God's nature, power, and activity. From the conversation between Christ and Nicodemus, we know that some of the Pharisees would acknowledge that Jesus was a Teacher, sent by God. In addition, back in verse 14 it says that the Pharisees were plotting against Him, so they had malicious intent. Yet there was still a measure of ignorance. Paul says in I Corinthians 2 that if the rulers of the age—which would include the Pharisees—had full comprehension, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. So their attitude was approaching the place where they would be unable to repent, and yet their lack of complete comprehension of Who they were opposing meant that repentance could still be possible, once their eyes are opened. Because of their ignorance it was not a *conscious* rejection of the Spirit of the Most High God.

If this were all we had, we might begin to think that all it takes is a slip of the tongue, and we are toast. But we have more instruction in the book of Hebrews:

**Hebrews 6:4-6** For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

This shows that the unpardonable sin is not easily committed. A person must have had spiritual enlightenment. He must have tasted the heavenly gift, which could refer to God's forgiveness, or the overall grace that comes from a relationship with God. He must have actually received God's Spirit. He must have experienced the goodness of God's word. He must have experienced God's gifting. And he must have had a genuine repentance. These attributes are all part of the same basic spiritual condition of being in Christ. This same thing is described in John 15:6, where Jesus says, "If

anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” And if you look at verse 8 here, you will notice that burning is also mentioned.

If such a person—who is abiding in Christ—falls away, the Phillips’ translation says, “...it proves impossible to make them repent as they did at first. For they are re-crucifying the Son of God ... and by their conduct exposing him to shame and contempt.”

The big question here is what it means to “fall away.” This is not the normal Greek word for apostasy. The Greek word here is only used in this place, and so we cannot compare it with other usages. The Greek lexicons indicate the word means “to become lost; to fall; to turn aside; to be at fault; to forsake; or to go astray.” One says it means “to abandon a former relationship or association.”

So we can grasp what it means in general, but we do not have specifics, such as degree and duration. Every one of us has “turned aside” or “gone astray” at points, and yet it has been possible for us to repent. The Bible gives us the example of King David and others who, at times, seemed to give more evidence of spiritual death than spiritual life. Perhaps you even know someone who took a l-o-n-g detour that certainly gave the appearance of falling away, and yet God brought him or her to repentance. So there is some ambiguity here, and that is a hopeful thing because it indicates that God is retaining the judgment to Himself of where the line is. We don’t need the specifics to get the principle.

The author gives us another clue a few chapters over in Hebrews 10:

**Hebrews 10:26-29** For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

The key phrase in this is “sin willfully.” What is being described is an overall mindset rather than a single action. Many times when we sin, there is a *willingness* to sin, because we give in and do what we know is wrong. But willful sin is when there is deliberate and sustained opposition to God and His law, and the heart has hardened enough that there is a defiant refusal to repent. In this regard, the unpardonable sin is not a specific sin, but rather it could be any sin that is committed with a heart that is against God and which refuses to soften.

The Bible shows a number of sins against the Holy Spirit that still fall short of blaspheming. Ephesians 4:20 speaks of grieving the Holy Spirit. Acts 7:51 mentions resisting the Holy Spirit. And I Thessalonians 5:19 warns against quenching the Spirit. All of these show some opposition to the outworking, the power, and the fundamental nature of God. But blaspheming the Holy Spirit ratchets this up to where the things of God are deliberately despised and denigrated after receiving knowledge of the truth. It has the effect of trampling the very Creator underfoot, and belittling the holy covenant of which He is the Mediator. Repentance is impossible because self-confidence has hardened into a mind that is unchangeable. The rejection of God is so complete that the very idea of repentance becomes ludicrous. By rejecting the Spirit of grace and the forgiveness it allows, the blasphemer has nothing with which to pay for his sins, except his own life.

It has been observed in the past that this condition can come about in a couple of ways. One is through deliberate choice. In this regard, one of the biggest dangers to our walk with God is resentment and bitterness, because that can poison the mind to such a degree that one simply stops caring about God and His way. The object or circumstance of resentment begins to take up more of our view—more of our thoughts—than God Himself, and His will becomes overthrown in the internal rage.

A second way is through spiritual neglect, which is the path these Hebrews were treading. Through neglect, over time God’s truth slips away, and the things of Satan’s world begin to fill the void. The result is such spiritual weakness that what truly matters is no longer a part of the reasoning process. God’s law becomes unimportant, and Christ’s sacrifice becomes irrelevant, like distant memories with no immediate value.

Now, even if we are nowhere near that condition, there is still something else to consider about these principles. Remember that what evoked Christ's ominous warning was the Pharisees' attribution of God's work, by His Spirit, to an unclean source. And yet in principle, we may be guilty of something similar if we are so set in our own opinions that we are unwilling to acknowledge the activity of God in His other children.

The scattering of the church seems to have encouraged going from the one extreme of believing that *everyone* associated with the church is converted, to the *other* extreme of *suspecting* that everyone who is not *just like us* must be *unconverted*. Truly, there is a very fine line here, because we *are* required to evaluate fruit, and discern what is of God and what is not. With all of the scriptural warnings about false teaching, teachers, and even brethren, we understand the necessity to compare words and deeds with the word of God, and reject what is not of Him. We dare not underestimate the risk of deception.

But on the other hand, there is another grave danger in concluding someone is unconverted because of some failing we observe. Now, it may be that we are correct in our judgment, and our words will justify us rather than condemn us. Yet consider for a moment what is at stake if we speak idle words and misjudge *this* matter: It means we are attributing the work of God in *that* person's life—the faith; the overcoming; any good fruit—to something *other* than God. We may not be able to see all He has done, and we are deciding it is *nothing*. We are casting aspersions on the priceless sacrifice substituted for *that* person. We are declaring the holy covenant which God made with *that* person to be *null* and *void*. And we are *insulting* the *Spirit of grace* in *that* person's life. Is it really worth taking the *risk* of *that* sort of *evil speaking* against something that is *sacred*?—against a beloved child of the Most High God?

Think about Paul's experience early on. He did awful things to holy people, and he did it with a clear conscience because he was sure he was right. He thought he was serving God by opposing the heretics, until that same God knocked him flat and told him that he was persecuting his own Maker. Decades after the fact, he was still lamenting his violence and contrariness toward people in whom the Holy Spirit dwelled. It was so terrible in his own

sight that he did not even consider himself worthy to be called an apostle. What he did was similar to what the Pharisees did in Matthew 12—he misjudged the activity of the Holy Spirit. But he also acted in ignorance, and so he repented when God allowed him to see.

As Isaiah 55 says, God’s thoughts are so much higher than ours. It is when we start thinking too highly of our own thoughts that we begin grieving, resisting, or even quenching the spirit of God. God gives us these strong warnings because it is possible for us to ascend above the heights of the clouds in our own thoughts, and to arrive at the point where the mind, power, and nature of God become unrecognizable and objects of scorn. The verses we have seen should serve as a prompting to evaluate our actions and words to ensure that we are not in any way opposing the Spirit of God.