

Bite Size Bible Study

Unpardonable Sin #202

By Pastor Lee

The subject of the Unpardonable sin is one that comes up often, but it is never mentioned in those words in the Bible. It seems to always be called unforgivable sin or blasphemy that is not forgivable.

Many commentaries either ignore the issue or have the “cast into hell” approach. In my research I reject these approaches for a more *agape* approach.

To get to my approach we need to look at several sources of information. We begin with the Torah and progress to the New Testament.

In the Torah there are seemingly opposite positions. Remembering that Hebrew thought is able to balance ideas like this, we have to accept what each is telling us and not place one more important than the other, and especially not reject one or the other.

Numbers 15 lays out the offering for unintentional sins. There is no mention of intentional or premeditated sin. From this we find that the Torah understood that people were imperfect and would eventually commit a sin unintentionally. This provided a way to return to the presence of God – who was pure. Being forgiven of the unintentional sin the person could again be in relationship with God.

However, if the sin was intentional the person was not forgiven and the relationship with God was “cut off” from the relationship with not only God but from the rest of Israel. The intentional sin signified that the person was despising the Instructions (Law) of God and thus placing shame on those instructions, as well as God Himself.

In contrast to Numbers 15 is Leviticus 16 which states that on Yom Kippur ALL SINS were forgiven. That would mean unintentional and premeditated sins. All sins were placed on the Scapegoat and sent into the wilderness, out of the camp and away from Israel. The scapegoat was killed by sending it over a cliff, in the desert, to its death, ridding Israel of all sin.

Remember that we need to balance these two points of view and take what is meaningful from each.

Now we come to the New Testament. Does it talk of an unforgivable sin? Again, not in those specific words, but the idea is still there. Here, the word is often blasphemy, specifically against the Holy Spirit.

All three synoptic gospels Matthew 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-29, Luke 12:10 refer to this concept. The context is identical in Matthew and Mark, following an exorcism by Jesus, which included the accusations

by some that Jesus cast out demons by the authority of Beelzebub.

Luke however, includes it with some of Jesus' Warnings and Encouragements to His disciples.

Matthew 12:31-32 NIV

³¹ And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Luke 12:10 NIV

¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Mark 3:28-29 NIV

²⁸ Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

In these verses the Biblical Usage of the word blasphemy means:

1. slander, detraction, speech injurious to another's good name.
2. impious and reproachful speech injurious to divine majesty.

Hebrews goes one step further by stating that one who has the understanding but commits blaspheme anyway can never be forgiven.

Hebrews 6:4-6 NIV

⁴ It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age ⁶ and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Jesus Promised the Holy Spirit: who would live within each follower who kept His teachings (commands).

John 14 NIV

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate (some translations use comforter) to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it

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neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

Biblical Usage of Holy Spirit:

- A. summoned, called to one's side, esp. called to one's aid.
- B. one who pleads another's cause before a judge, a pleader, counsel for defense, legal assistant, an advocate, an intercessor.
- C. of Christ in his exaltation at God's right hand, pleading with God the Father for the pardon of our sins.
- D. of the Holy Spirit destined to take the place of Christ with the apostles (after his ascension to the Father), to lead them to a deeper knowledge of the gospel truth and give them divine strength needed to enable them to undergo trials and persecutions on behalf of the divine kingdom.

So much for the lengthy introduction. Now for what I believe currently (subject to revision as new information becomes known to me).

Numbers 15 shows a contrite spirit on the part of one who has probably committed a sin through omission or misunderstanding of the instructions. As he presents a sacrifice or offering to reengage communion with God, his heart is in a place of subservience to God. He has initiated the desire to reconnect. People are weak and flawed and the societies we live in are often not much help. Therefore, the need for this sacrifice is obvious.

Lev 16 is a yearly cleansing of the entire community. For the community to be free of anything that would separate them from God, God initiates a cleansing sacrifice for the entire community. It is participated by the entire community and provides for the

forgiveness of all sins, unintentional and intentional. God's grace has restored the community to Himself.

Those who are a part of this community have their sins forgiven even if the sin has been intentional. However, if the individual has not repented of his sin(s), then he fails to receive the benefit of being restored to communion with God, who can help him refrain from other sins. From his point of view, he has not been forgiven, but from God's point of view he has. His repentance for the sin and his acceptance of God's forgiveness is the key to being restored to communion with God. Communication is restored but the sinner fails to recognize it or take advantage of it.

Yom Kippur is the day that God has chosen to bestow this grace upon the community. The 10 days before this day are called the Days of Awe, in which a person is to judge himself and repent of any sin he has committed in the past year.

Jesus' death and resurrection represents the ultimate Yom Kippur. Jesus is choosing to forgive all sins for the human community. He initiated this; and it is an entirely free gift. However, those who fail to accept this gift, fail to reap the benefits of the gift. They have the right and ability to come before God but have chosen not to avail themselves of the opportunity. This could be from not understanding God or events in their lives that prevent belief in God's goodness.

As far as an unpardonable (or unforgivable sin) either in this life or the life to come, it all boils down to whether the person has seen the error of his actions and determined to the best of his ability to not repeat them. It is not God that determines it to be unpardonable – but the human.

From the Bite Size Bible Study #200, entitled "God's Lawsuit" I find that God wants us to mature – He doesn't want to destroy anyone. Further, He sees us as we are and what we can be, not for what we have done in the past. Forgiveness is always there on God's part, where it falls short is where we as humans fail to see and receive it.