



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 4.9 – The Doctrine of Human Beings and Sin

### The Sin against the Holy Spirit

Jesus mentioned the sin against the Holy Spirit in His ministry. There are parallel passages in the synoptic Gospels concerning the incident that led Jesus to speak of this sin. In Matthew 12 we learn that in reaction to Jesus' miracle of healing a blind and mute man who was possessed by a demon, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons through the power of **"Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons"** (Matthew 12:24). Since Beelzebub is another name for Satan, Jesus responded by pointing out the foolishness of saying that Satan was fighting against himself. **"If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself"** (Matthew 12:26). Jesus was casting out demons **"by the Spirit of God"** (Matthew 12:28). It was in connection with this accusation that Jesus warned the Pharisees: **"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"** (Matthew 12:31-32).

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says: **"Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation" – because they said, 'He has an unclean spirit'"** (Mark 3:28-29).

Luke's Gospel does not give the same background to Jesus' warning but indicates that Jesus said similar words to His disciples after warning them: **"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy"** (Luke 12:1). Jesus continued: **"Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven"** (Luke 12:10).

Thus the sin against the Holy Spirit, the so-called unforgivable sin, consists of a deliberate and stubborn rejection of Jesus and His Word against better knowledge, accompanied by a blasphemous speaking against the work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. Jesus did not actually say that the Pharisees had committed this sin; He was warning them against committing this sin. Jesus, of course, died for all sins, including this sin. And the God of our salvation, the Triune God, surely wants all men to be saved by faith in Jesus. But when one rejects the means by which faith is created, that person makes faith impossible. The warning is given to prevent people from committing this sin.

Other passages in Scripture seem to allude to this sin without calling it the sin against the Holy Spirit. The prophet Isaiah said of the children of Israel: **"But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them"** (Isaiah 63:10). In his address to the Jewish leaders before he was martyred, Stephen said: **"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you"** (Acts 7:51).

There are several severe warnings in the letter to the Hebrews that possibly refer to the sin against the Holy Spirit. In Hebrews 6:4-6 we hear these words: **"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."** In this case, the warning is given to persons who were in danger of falling away from

their faith in Christ, not to persons like the Pharisees who had always rejected Christ.

A similar warning is given in Hebrews 10:26-31: **“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? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** Insulting the Spirit of grace is a very dangerous thing to do on the part of any believer; it may be fatal.

The apostle John seems to be speaking of the sin against the Holy Spirit when he tells us that there are some sinners we should pray for, and others for whom we need not pray. He says: **“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that”** (1 John 5:16).

Jesus sees all and knows all, but even he did not definitely say that any Pharisees had committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. And because the book of Acts (for example, Acts 15:5) tells us that some Pharisees, including Paul himself, were brought to faith in Jesus, we cannot definitely say to anyone: “You have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit.” Rather, we are to use it as a serious warning against rejecting the testimony of the Holy Spirit about Jesus. It has happened in church history that some Christians have been very much concerned that they have committed this unpardonable sin. But any person whose conscience is bothered in this way most assuredly has not committed this sin. For anyone who is sinning against the Holy Spirit is not concerned about the sins they commit. The Gospel of universal grace must be proclaimed to any sinner who is afraid they have committed this sin against the Holy Spirit.

The point we should always remember is that when the Spirit begins His work of showing us our sins and showing our Savior to us, we should not stubbornly delay our repentance. The prophet Samuel said to King Saul: **“Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king”** (1 Samuel 15:23). Consider also Jesus’ sad words to the people of Jerusalem: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’”** (Matthew 23:37-39).

## Questions

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1. What is special about the sin against the Holy Spirit?
2. Under what circumstances did Jesus mention the sin against the Holy Spirit?
3. What is the sin against the Holy Spirit?
4. Why can we be sure that Jesus died also for sins against the Holy Spirit?
5. What sin did Stephen accuse his listeners of committing?
6. How do you feel after reading the warnings from the letter to the Hebrews?
7. What would you say to someone who thinks he has committed the sin against the Holy Spirit?