

THE BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

by

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In the Gospels Jesus makes reference to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit or, as it is often called, the unpardonable sin. The interpretation of Jesus' words and their application has been a problem throughout the church's history. The purpose of this dissertation was to examine Jesus' statements from a detailed historical, exegetical, and theological perspective in order to hopefully shed some new insights on the problem and come to a conclusion which is fully supported by all the data.

The first step was to undertake a historical survey of how the sin has been interpreted in church history. Next, the passages in the Gospels themselves were studied. This involved a detailed exegesis of the accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. After the Gospels had been dealt with, attention was turned to Hebrews 6 and 1 John 5:16 since these passages are sometimes thought to be also referring to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Although a detailed exegesis of these passages was not attempted, it was demonstrated that neither of these passages had any bearing upon the interpretation of the sin in the Gospels. Finally, the historical and exegetical data from the previous chapters was brought to bear on a fresh analysis of the sin. The major areas of debate were considered under the headings of four questions: (1) What is the precise nature of the sin? (2) Why is the sin unpardonable? (3) Who can commit the sin? (4) Can the sin be committed today?

It was concluded that the sin consisted in blaspheming the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit. The sin is never forgiven because God chooses not to grant repentance for this sin and the sinner simply remains in his depraved condition. It was also shown that only unbelievers are capable of committing the sin. Because of the nature of the sin itself, it can only be committed during a period of supernatural sign-miracles such as during the ministry of Jesus, His Apostles, or possibly during the future ministry of the two witnesses in Revelation 11.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	viii
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Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION	1
Reasons for the Present Study	2
Statement of the Problem	3
Method of Study	3
Limitations of the Present Study	4
Statement of Thesis	6
II. HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION	7
Early Church	7
Nonspecific Views	7
A Generalized Sin	14
A Specific Sin	17
Summary	22
Middle Ages	22
Peter Lombard	23
Thomas Aquinas	24
Summary	26
Reformation	27
Martin Luther	27
John Calvin	30
James Arminius	32
Summary	33
Modern Church	33
Denial of the Sin	34
A Sin Committed at the End of One's Life	36
A Sin Committed during Jesus' Day	36
An Unpardonable Sin Which Can Be Committed Today	38
Summary	45
III. EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 12:22-32	46
The Miracle of Jesus (22-23)	47
Textual Variants	47
Verse 22	48
Verse 23	50
The Charge of the Pharisees (24)	52
Textual Variants	53
Verse 24	55

The Refutation by Jesus (25-30)	65
Textual Variants	65
Verse 25	67
Verse 26	68
Verse 27	70
Verse 28	74
Verse 29	79
Verse 30	81
The Charge of Blasphemy (31-32)	82
Textual Variants	82
Verse 31	83
Verse 32	87
Summary	94
IV. EXEGESIS OF MARK 3:22-30	97
The Charge of the Scribes (22)	97
Textual Variants	97
Verse 22	98
The Refutation by Jesus (23-27)	101
Textual Variants	101
Verse 23	103
Verses 24-25	105
Verse 26	106
Verse 27	108
The Charge of Blasphemy (28-29)	108
Textual Variants	108
Verse 28	110
Verse 29	114
Mark's Explanatory Comment (30)	116
Textual Variants	116
Verse 30	116
Summary	118
V. EXEGESIS OF LUKE 11:14-23 AND 12:10	121
Luke 11:14-23	122
External Evidence	123
Internal Evidence	126
Conclusion	129
Luke 12:10	129
Textual Variants	129
Verse 10	129
VI. POSSIBLE PARALLELS OUTSIDE THE GOSPELS	133
Hebrews 6:4-6	133
1 John 5:16	138

VII.	INTERPRETATION OF THE BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT	142
	What Is the Precise Nature of the Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?	142
	Denial of the Sin	143
	A Generalized Sin	145
	Rejection of Clear Truth	147
	Labeling Good as Evil	149
	Rejection of the Convicting Work of the Spirit	150
	Attacking the Divine Power and Nature of Christ	152
	Attributing the Spirit's Work to Satan	153
	Attributing the Miracles of Christ to Satan	155
	Blaspheming the Miracle-Working Power of the Spirit	156
	Why Is the Sin Unpardonable?	160
	Who Can Commit the Sin?	163
	Can the Sin Be Committed Today?	164
VIII.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	166
	
	BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CITED	176

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
<u>ANF</u>	<u>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</u> , ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson
BAGD	<u>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</u> , ed. W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker
BDB	<u>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</u> , ed. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs
BDF	<u>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament</u> , ed. F. Blass, A. Debrunner and R. W. Funk
<u>BHS</u>	<u>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</u> , ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph
<u>BSac</u>	<u>Bibliotheca Sacra</u>
<u>ExpTim</u>	<u>Expository Times</u>
FC	Fathers of the Church
<u>GTJ</u>	<u>Grace Theological Journal</u>
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
<u>IB</u>	<u>Interpreter's Bible</u>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<u>IDB</u>	<u>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</u> , ed. G. A. Buttrick
<u>ISBE</u>	<u>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</u>
<u>JBC</u>	<u>Jerome Biblical Commentary</u> , ed. R. E. Brown et al.
<u>JBL</u>	<u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u>
<u>KJV</u>	<u>King James Version</u>

LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	<u>Greek-English Lexicon</u> , ed. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, et al.
LXX	Septuagint
MHT	<u>A Grammar of New Testament Greek</u> , ed. J. H. Moulton, W. F. Howard, and N. Turner
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
NA ²⁶	<u>Novum Testamentum Graece</u> , 26th ed.
<u>NASB</u>	<u>New American Standard Bible</u>
<u>NCE</u>	<u>New Catholic Encyclopedia</u> , ed. M. R. P. McGuire et al.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<u>NIDCC</u>	<u>The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church</u> , ed. J. D. Douglas
<u>NIDNTT</u>	<u>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</u> , ed. C. Brown
<u>NIV</u>	<u>New International Version</u>
<u>NovT</u>	<u>Novum Testamentum</u>
<u>NPNF</u>	<u>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</u> , 1st series, ed. P. Schaff
<u>NPNFSS</u>	<u>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</u> , 2nd series, ed. P. Schaff and H. Ware
<u>NTS</u>	<u>New Testament Studies</u>
<u>PG</u>	<u>Patrologia Graeca</u> , ed. J. Migne
<u>PL</u>	<u>Patrologia Latina</u> , ed. J. Migne
RG	<u>A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research</u> , by A. T. Robertson
<u>TDNT</u>	<u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</u> , ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich

<u>TDOT</u>	<u>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,</u> ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgsen
<u>TWOT</u>	<u>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,</u> ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, and B. K. Waltke
<u>TZ</u>	<u>Theologische Zeitschrift</u>
UBS ³	<u>The Greek New Testament, 3rd corrected ed.</u>
UBSC	<u>A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testa-</u> <u>ment, by B. M. Metzger</u>
<u>UT</u>	<u>Ugaritic Textbook, by C. H. Gordon</u>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Jesus' statement about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit or, as it is commonly called, the unpardonable sin is found only in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; and Luke 12:10). According to Mark's account, Jesus says:

Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.¹

One writer suggests that these are some of the darkest words ever to come from the lips of Jesus.² Another calls them "awe-inspiring" and adds: "For searching solemnity they are unsurpassed in the records of the things Jesus said. We tremble as we read them."³ There can be no doubt that these words have been the source of considerable fear and anxiety on the part of both believers and unbelievers.

One might expect that words which can elicit such somber responses would be clearly understood. That is not,

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in English are from the New American Standard Bible (New York: World Publishing, 1971).

²Herschel H. Hobbs, An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 152.

³G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to Matthew (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1929), p. 131.

however, what one finds as he begins to study the history of the interpretation of this passage of Scripture. Throughout the history of the church, there has always been interest in understanding the unpardonable sin, but there has never developed a clear consensus as to its true meaning. The air of uncertainty about its meaning only increases the anxiety of those who fear they may have committed the sin. The example of Samuel Cox vividly illustrates this point:

I shall never forget the chill that struck into my childish heart so often as I heard of this mysterious sin which carried men, and for ought I knew might have carried even me, beyond all reach of pardon; or the wonder and perplexity with which I used to ask myself why, if this sin were possible,--if, as the words of our Lord seem to imply, it was probable even and by no means infrequent,--it was not clearly defined, so that we might at least know, and know beyond all doubt, whether it had been committed or had not.¹

Reasons for the Present Study

It is certainly no exaggeration to say that numerous individuals have been and still are today deeply troubled by Jesus' words concerning a sin for which there is no forgiveness. Many pastors have probably encountered such a person. But do they have any real reason to be concerned? Have they simply overreacted to Jesus' warning? These questions need to be answered. Certainly the words of our Lord call for close scrutiny.

The present writer is not so presumptuous to think

¹"The Sin Against the Holy Spirit," The Expositor 3 (May 1882):321.

that this work will be so convincing as to end all debate about the blasphemy against the Spirit. Other reasons were the main impetus for this study. Surveying the literature, one finds very few thorough treatments of this problem. The commentaries are usually very brief in their discussions. Most essays which are written to specifically deal with the passage often fall short because of an inadequate exegetical base. This present study attempts to treat the passage from a detailed historical, exegetical, and theological perspective. Hopefully, a few new insights can be shed on this problem.

Statement of the Problem

The problem with which one is confronted in understanding the unpardonable sin is in reality a whole series of problems. However, there are several major areas of concern which can be conveniently put in the form of questions: (1) What is the precise nature of the unpardonable sin? (2) Why is the sin unpardonable? (3) Who can commit the sin? (4) Can the sin be committed today? After the historical and exegetical bases have been laid, this paper will seek to provide the correct answers to these questions.

Method of Study

This study will begin with a historical survey of the interpretation of the unpardonable sin since good exegesis cannot be done in a historical vacuum. Then, in three successive chapters the Scriptural data will be considered.

This will consist of a detailed exegesis of the relevant passages in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The next chapter will look briefly at possible parallel passages outside the Gospels in order to ascertain what bearing, if any, they may have on the problem at hand.¹ With the exegetical data in hand, the next chapter will focus on the interpretation of the unpardonable sin itself. The final chapter will summarize what has been learned and draw conclusions.

Limitations of the Present Study

Since Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 John 5:16 are sometimes appealed to as being the same sin as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, this paper will of necessity have to give some attention to these passages. However, since the portion in Hebrews could of itself be the subject of a dissertation, a detailed exegesis of these passages will not be undertaken.

While it is the intention of this study to discuss as

¹Some exegetes have attempted to connect the blasphemy against the Spirit in the Gospels with passages such as Heb 6:4-6 and 1 John 5:16. See e.g. G. C. Berkouwer, Sin, trans. Philip C. Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 334-37; R. A. Cole, The Gospel According to St. Mark, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), p. 85; William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 529; Abraham Kuyper, The Work of the Holy Spirit, trans. Henri De Vries, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), pp. 608-09; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1946), p. 154; Edwin H. Palmer, The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), pp. 181-84.

fully as possible the various interpretations of the unpardonable sin, it is not, however, possible to discuss all of them. For example, an Adventist evangelist, D. E. Venden, taught that refusal to observe the seventh day was the unpardonable sin.¹ Such illogical interpretations are so obviously refuted by even a cursory understanding of the Biblical data that they will not be formally dealt with in this study.

While all three Synoptic Gospels make reference to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, there are some differences among the accounts. These differences will be discussed during the exegesis of the individual Gospel accounts. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine all the ramifications of the synoptic problem. It is the presupposition of this writer that the Synoptic Gospels were equally inspired by the Holy Spirit and are therefore without error. The field of synoptic studies is in a state of flux today. The cherished theories of the priority of Mark and direct literary dependence between the Gospels are being challenged by numerous scholars.² Since these questions do

¹J. K. VanBaalen, The Chaos of the Cults, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 253.

²For a general survey of the current status of synoptic studies, see B. Ward Powers, "The Shaking of the Synoptics," Reformed Theological Review 39 (May-August 1980): 33-39. For the classic rebuttal to Markan priority, see William R. Farmer, The Synoptic Problem (New York: Macmillan Co., 1964). More recent rejections of Markan priority include Malcolm Lowe, "The Demise of Arguments from Order for Markan Priority," NovT 24 (January 1982):27-36 and Sang Bok

not directly affect the truthfulness or accuracy of the Gospel accounts, the question of how the blasphemy passages relate to the synoptic problem will not be a major concern of this study. As Thomas has recently remarked, there may be some important benefits from studying parallel synoptic accounts as separate literary compositions rather than from a purely harmonistic approach.¹

Statement of Thesis

The thesis toward which this dissertation argues is that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the sin of blaspheming the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it could only be committed during a period of sign-miracles, such as the time of Jesus or the Apostles.

David Kim, "A Critical Investigation of the Priority of Mark" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1977).

¹Robert L. Thomas, "The Rich Young Man in Matthew," Grace Theological Journal 3 (Fall 1982):235-60 [hereafter cited as GTJ].

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

This chapter is a survey of the history of interpretation of the unpardonable sin in the Gospels. Obviously, it is not possible to deal with everyone who has ever written on the subject, nor would that necessarily be desired. More important is the need to chronicle, where possible, the origin of different interpretations as well as their subsequent development and modification.

Early Church

This section will be nearly exhaustive of all church Fathers who make any reference to the Gospel passages. It is feasible to do this because of the limited amount of literature which has come from this period. Such comprehensive coverage is desirable in this early period since many of the later, fully developed interpretations of the unpardonable sin were first conceived in the early church.

Nonspecific Views

A number of church Fathers make only passing reference to the unpardonable sin.¹ They may offer no explanation as to

¹A number of patristic writers cite Matt 12:31-32, not in order to discuss the unpardonable sin, but to prove the dignity, majesty, and, by inference, the deity of the Holy Spirit. See e.g. Novatian Treatise Concerning the

the nature of the sin; or, if they do, it is often so brief as to raise as many questions as it answers. Therefore, it seems best to place them in this category.

Didache

Possibly the earliest reference to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is found in the Didache or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles.¹ This is basically a Greek handbook of instruction in morals and church order.² Although its existence had been known from citations by patristic writers, the work itself came to light for the first time in the Constantinople manuscript discovered by Bryennios and published by him in 1883.³ Since this manuscript is dated 1056, the actual date of composition of the Didache can only be determined by patristic citations and study of the work itself. Dates ranging from the first to the fourth centuries have been suggested by various scholars.⁴ However,

Trinity 29, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, reprint ed., 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 7:380 [hereafter cited as ANF] and Origen De Principiis 1.3.2, in ANF, 4:252.

¹A longer title, The Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles, is also attested.

²The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, rev. ed., s.v. "Didache, The," by R. E. Nixon, p. 297 [hereafter cited as NIDCC].

³The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1979 ed., s.v. "Apostolic Fathers," by J. R. Michaels, 1:207 [hereafter cited as ISBE].

⁴For a sampling, see Albert H. Newman, A Manual of Church History, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Valley Forge: Judson

a consensus of scholars places its composition in the second century, probably in the first half of the century.¹

In a section concerning the testing of traveling teachers and prophets in order to tell the true from the false, the Didache apparently makes reference to the unpardonable sin in the following words: "And every prophet that speaketh in the Spirit ye shall neither try nor judge; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven."² C. K. Barrett understands this passage to refer to the rejection of the activity of the Spirit through Christian prophets by members of the Christian community, and appeals to it in order to support his own view of the blasphemy against the Spirit.³ Barrett's particular view will be discussed later. Apparently the Didachist connects the blasphemy against the Spirit with trying or judging prophets because prophecy is a function of the Spirit. However, the Didachist's interpretation of Matthew 12:32 may be another example of reading his own meaning into the Gospel texts, a

Press, 1933), 1:234. Schaff (History of the Christian Church, reprint ed., 8 vols. [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950], 2:184) and Hamell (Handbook of Patrology [New York: Alba House, 1968], p. 24) are representative of a few scholars who believe the Didache may have been composed as early as the latter decades of the first century.

¹ISBE, 1979 ed., s.v. "Apostolic Fathers," by J. R. Michaels, 1:207.

²Didache 11.7, in ANF, 7:380.

³C. K. Barrett, The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 107.

practice for which he is known to be guilty.¹

Irenaeus

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, makes a passing reference to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in his chief work, Against Heresies, which was probably written about 185.²

In one place he says:

We must conclude, moreover, that these men (the Montanists) cannot admit the Apostle Paul either. For, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, he speaks expressly of prophetic gifts, and recognises men and women prophesying in the Church. Sinning, therefore, in all these particulars, against the Spirit of God, they fall into the irremissible sin.³

Although Irenaeus does not discuss the sin in detail, he does seem to connect it with a denial of the gift of prophecy. This may be similar to the teaching of the Didache; however, Irenaeus may have considered any heretical teaching concerning the Holy Spirit to be the unpardonable sin as is the case with some later writers.

Tertullian

Tertullian's writings span the period roughly from 196

¹I. Howard Marshall, "Hard Sayings--VII," Theology 67 (February 1964):66. Marshall cites, as an example of the Didachist's faulty exegesis, 9.5 where Matt 7:6, "Do not give what is holy to dogs," is interpreted as a command not to allow the unbaptized to partake of the Lord's Supper.

²Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, rev. Robert T. Handy, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 63.

³Against Heresies 3.11.9, in ANF, 1:429.

to 212.¹ He makes reference to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in both a polemical work, Against Marcion,² and a practical work, On Modesty.³ However, he does not discuss the sin at all. In On Modesty he simply notes that the Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1:20 had committed the sin. Actually in that verse Paul says: "Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme." Paul does not say that their blasphemy was against the Holy Spirit. Modern interpreters have not generally connected this case of blasphemy with that in the Gospels since Paul's purpose seems to be remedial, "that they might be taught not to blaspheme."⁴ Tertullian, on the other hand, argues that Paul's description of these men in the previous verse as being "shipwreck in regard to their faith" shows that they are guilty of irremissible sin. Tertullian seeks to get around Paul's apparent remedial purpose for Hymenaeus and Alexander by suggesting that the "they" of "that they might be taught not to blaspheme" does not refer to these two men

¹NIDCC, s.v. "Tertullian," by D. F. Wright, p. 960.

²4.28, in ANF, 3:396.

³Chapter 13, in ANF, 4:87.

⁴See e.g. Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, The Pastoral Epistles, trans. Philip Buttolo and Adela Yarbro, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 34; William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 87; Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Pastoral Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 98.

but to the rest of the church.

Cyprian and Novatian

Both Cyprian, bishop of Carthage from 248 to 258, and his opponent Novatian, a leading presbyter in the church at Rome during this period, connect the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit with a denial of the Christian faith, though the details are unclear. Their views are closely linked with the problem of the lapsi, a Latin term for the thousands who had "lapsed," that is, had abandoned the Christian faith during the severe Decian persecution (250-251).¹ These apostates were divided into three groups: sacrificati, those who had offered a sacrifice to the gods; thurificati, those who had offered only incense to the gods; and libellatici, those who had obtained a certificate saying they had done so, though in actuality they had not.²

Neither Cyprian nor Novatian discuss the sin in detail though both agree that one who is guilty of it should not be readmitted to the church.³ However, they disagree

¹NIDCC, s.v. "Lapsi," by D. F. Wright, p. 579.

²Hamell, Handbook of Patrology, p. 74.

³Cyprian's view can be found in his Treatises 12.3.28, in ANF, 5:542. Since few of Novatian's writings are extant, information about his views must come from other patristic writers, chiefly Cyprian and Jerome. Jerome discusses Novatian's view of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in his Letter 42.1,2, in A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Ware, 2nd series, reprint ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 6:56-57 [hereafter cited as NPNFSS].

as to how this should be applied to the lapsi. Novatian believed that all the lapsi had committed the unpardonable sin and, therefore, should not be readmitted to the church. Cyprian, on the other hand, held that any who showed themselves truly penitent had not committed the unpardonable sin and should be allowed to re-enter the church.

Origen

Origen's view of the unpardonable sin is set forth in his commentary on the Gospel of John:

And in the Gospel He declares that there is forgiveness for the sin committed against Himself, but that for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit there is no forgiveness, either in this age or in the age to come. What is the reason of this? Is it because the Holy Spirit is of more value than Christ that the sin against Him cannot be forgiven? May it not rather be that all rational beings have part in Christ, and that forgiveness is extended to them when they repent of their sins, while only those have part in the Holy Spirit who have been found worthy of it, and that there cannot well be any forgiveness for those who fall away to evil in spite of such great and powerful cooperation, and who defeat the counsels of the Spirit who is in them.¹

Origen does not comment on the nature of the sin itself, but he does make a distinction as to who can commit the sin. Blasphemy against the Son is that which is committed by unbelievers and is forgivable, but blasphemy against the Spirit can only be committed after salvation (baptism) and cannot be forgiven. This concept that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a post-baptismal sin was apparently a very popular interpretation among patristic writers after

¹Commentary on John 2.6, in ANF, 10:329.

Origen.¹ Actually, it is an overstatement to call Origen's view an interpretation of the sin since it does not identify the nature of the sin but only limits it to those who have been baptized. Therefore, this limitation could be held in conjunction with a number of different interpretations of the nature of the sin itself.

A Generalized Sin

It appears that most of the partistic writers who do discuss the nature of the unpardonable sin in the Gospels take a more general approach to it. The tendency is to include a number of specific acts under the heading of blasphemy against the Spirit, any one of which would constitute violation of the sin.

Cyril of Jerusalem

Cyril was probably born in Palestine about 313 and consecrated bishop of Jerusalem between 348 and 350.² About 347, while still a priest, he delivered his famous Catecheses, catechetical instructions to the candidates for baptism and the neophytes. In a discussion of the Holy Spirit, he cites Matthew 12:32 and says: "A man must often fear to say, either from ignorance or assumed reverence, what is improper about the Holy Spirit, and thereby come under

¹Barrett, Holy Spirit, p. 106.

²Hamell, Handbook of Patrology, p. 99.

this condemnation."¹ Thus, according to Cyril the sin is of a very general nature and would include saying anything improper about the Holy Spirit.

Basil

Another patristic writer who took a very general approach to the sin was Basil the Great. He was born about 329 and became bishop of Caesarea in 370.² In one of his letters he says that to call the Holy Spirit a creature is blasphemy against the Spirit as well as any other heretical teaching about the Holy Spirit.³ However, in another work Basil says "that those who see the fruit of the Holy Spirit in a man who maintains on every occasion a consistent life of godliness and do not ascribe it to the Holy Spirit but attribute it to the adversary, blaspheme against the Holy Spirit Himself."⁴ Finally, in another letter he says that the Montanists have committed the sin because they identified Montanus and one of his disciples, Priscilla, as the Paraclete.⁵ Basil apparently believed that almost any false

¹Catecheses 16.1, vol. 2 of The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, trans. Leo P. McCauley and Anthony A. Stephenson, in FC, ed. Bernard M. Peebles et al. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1970), p. 76.

²NIDCC, s.v. "Basil the Great," by G. L. Carey, pp. 109-10.

³Letter 251.4, in NPNFSS, 8:292.

⁴The Morals 35.1, in The Ascetic Works of St. Basil, trans. W. K. L. Clarke (London: S.P.C.K., 1945), p. 111.

⁵Letter 188.1, in LCL, 3:13.

assertion about the person or work of the Holy Spirit would be tantamount to blasphemy against the Spirit and thus render one guilty of the unpardonable sin.

Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory was the younger brother of Basil who became bishop of Nyssa in 371.¹ He was totally dominated by his forceful brother whom he sometimes called "the Master."² Therefore, it is no surprise that he also took a very generalized approach to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.³

Ambrose

Ambrose, who became bishop of Milan in 374, alludes to the blasphemy against the Spirit in several of his works. In Concerning Repentance, he specifically rejects the view of the Novatianists, who by this time had extended the unpardonable sin beyond just a denial of the Christian faith (Novatian's view) to include sins such as murder, adultery, and fornication. Ambrose calls attention to Matthew 12:31, "any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men," as proof that the Novatianists are wrong.⁴ He goes on to suggest that the sin is much more serious, and is primarily committed by

¹Hamell, Handbook of Patrology, p. 106.

²NIDCC, s.v. "Gregory of Nysaa," by G. L. Carey, p. 435.

³Gregory of Nyssa On the Holy Spirit, in NPNFSS, 5:323.

⁴Concerning Repentance 2.4.20, in NPNFSS, 10:347-48.

those who are attempting to destroy the unity of the Church.¹
 Therefore, those who commit it would include "heretics and
 schismatics of all times."²

In his work On the Holy Spirit, Ambrose gives a somewhat different interpretation of the sin: "But if any one should deny the dignity, majesty, and eternal power of the Holy Spirit, and should think that devils are cast out not in the Spirit of God, but in Beelzebub, there can be no attaining of pardon."³ Ambrose, like other writers in this category, apparently believed that any one of a number of different acts might constitute one guilty of the unpardonable sin.

A Specific Sin

A final category which can be delimited in the early church includes those who interpreted the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in a very specific sense. Interestingly, it is writers in this category who generally offer the most detailed analysis of the sin.

Chrysostom and Jerome

No other Greek Father has left so extensive a literary legacy as John Chrysostom. Between the years 386, when he was ordained a priest, and 398, when he became bishop of

¹Concerning Repentance 2.4.25.

²Ibid., 2.4.24.

³1.3.54, in NPNFSS, 10:100.

Constantinople, Chrysostom produced over 600 exegetical sermons, which were delivered at Antioch.¹ In his homily on Matthew he asserts that the blasphemy against the Spirit was committed by the Jews who said that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan.² This sin was unpardonable

because Himself indeed they knew not, who He might be, but of the Spirit they received ample experience. For the prophets also by the Spirit said whatever they said; and indeed all in the Old Testament had a very high notion of Him.³

Chrysostom's interpretation has usually been understood to mean that the blasphemy against the Spirit could only be committed while Christ was on earth.⁴ Although Chrysostom does not actually make such a statement, it may be an accurate assessment of his view since he does not warn his audience to avoid committing this sin. He makes several admonitions to his audience, but none of these make any mention of the blasphemy against the Spirit.

Jerome appears to have interpreted the sin in a similar manner as Chrysostom. In a letter to his friend Marcella, written from Rome in 385, Jerome refutes the Novatian view that the sin against the Spirit is committed

¹Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 3:936-39.

²The Gospel of Matthew 41:5, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff, 1st series, reprint ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 10:266-67 [hereafter cited as NPNF].

³Ibid.

⁴See e.g. L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), p. 252.

by those who deny their own Christian faith. He says:

It must be proved to Novatian, therefore, that the sin which shall never be forgiven is not the blasphemy of men disembowelled by torture who in their agony deny their Lord, but is the captious clamor of those who, while they see that God's works are the fruit of virtue, ascribe the virtue to a demon and declare the signs wrought to belong not to the divine excellence but to the devil.¹

Later he adds:

It is obvious then, that this sin involves blasphemy, calling one Beelzebub for his actions, whose virtues prove him to be God.²

It is difficult to determine if Jerome believed the sin could still be committed after the time of Christ since he does not address that point directly. He was only interested in proving that those who deny their faith during persecutions do not commit the sin. In one place Jerome does seem to suggest, however unlikely it might be, that if while denying one's Christian faith, that person also said that Christ performed His miracles by Beelzebub, then that person would be guilty of the unpardonable sin.³

Athanasius

A rather unusual view of the sin against the Holy Spirit was put forth by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria from 328 till 373.⁴ He believed that it was a sin against

¹The Letter of Jerome 42.1, in NPNFSS, 6:56.

²Ibid., 42.2.

³Ibid.

⁴Hamell, Handbook of Patrology, p. 96.

Christ, not the Holy Spirit. The reference to the Son of Man and Holy Spirit refer to the human and divine natures of Christ respectively.¹ Thus, to blaspheme the Son of Man was to blaspheme His humanity, which was forgivable, but to blaspheme the Spirit was to blaspheme His deity, which was unforgivable.

Augustine

Of all the writers in the early church, it is Augustine who gives the fullest and most detailed analysis of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He makes reference to the sin in several of his works,² but his fullest treatment of the subject is found in his sermon on Matthew 12:32.³

Augustine begins by showing that both pagans and Jews commonly blaspheme the Holy Spirit.⁴ Under the category of blasphemy he includes any false, improper, or sacrilegious statement concerning the person or work of the Holy Spirit. He concludes that this cannot be what the Lord was referring to in Matthew 12:32 since many who have been

¹Letter to Serapion 4:17, in PG, 26:664A.

²The Correction of the Donatists 11.49, in NPNF, 4:650; Faith, Hope, and Charity 22.83, trans. Louis A. Arand, in ACW, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1948), p. 82; The Lord's Sermon on the Mount 22.75, trans. John J. Jepsen, in ACW, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1948), pp. 86-87.

³Sermons on New Testament Lessons 21, in NPNF, 6:318-32.

⁴Ibid., 21.5,6.

forgiven and are now in the church were before guilty of this kind of sin against the Spirit. To those who would argue that the sin is only committed by the regenerate who, having received the Spirit, afterwards commit some deadly sin such as murder, adultery, or apostasy, Augustine replies: "But how this sense of it may be proved, I know not; since the place of repentance is not denied in the Church to any sins whatever."¹

Since it is possible to blaspheme the Holy Spirit and still be forgiven, Augustine reasons that the blasphemy against the Spirit in Matthew 12:32 must be a very special and specific kind of blasphemy.² Also, since the Lord has not specified what the specific sin is, it must be His will for us to figure it out for ourselves.³ Therefore, according to Augustine, it is only logical to reason that since all sins are forgiven when one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit in salvation, the blasphemy against the Spirit for which there is no forgiveness must be impenitence, an unwillingness to repent and be forgiven.⁴ However, because one may still repent as long as he still lives, the blasphemy against the Spirit may be more properly defined as

¹Sermon 21.7.

²Ibid., 21.10.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 21.20.

impenitence persisted in to the end of one's life.¹

Summary

In the early church there was no consensus as to the meaning of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Some followed the lead of Origen and held that only Christians could commit the sin while others like Augustine made the sin only applicable to unbelievers. Because the sin is unpardonable it was commonly asserted that all heretics were guilty of it; however, Augustine argued just the opposite. Although the view of Augustine became dominant in the Roman Catholic Church, these other interpretations did not die out. Many of the theories which surfaced in the early church to explain the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit are still being argued for today.

Middle Ages

The Middle Ages was not a time of detailed exposition of Scripture. Most of the work in this period was a clarification and development of the earlier Fathers. This is especially true of Scholasticism, which was dominant from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. Two representatives of that system, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, illustrate the most important developments in the interpretation of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

¹Sermon 21.21.

Peter Lombard

Lombard has been called the "father of systematic theology in the Catholic Church."¹ He was a famous teacher at the University of Paris and in 1159 was made bishop of Paris.² His Four Books of Sentences (Libri Quatuor Sententiarum) became the standard theological textbook until the seventeenth century.³ Over 180 commentaries were written on it in England alone.⁴ Until the sixteenth century every candidate for the B.A. degree at the University of Paris was required to pass an examination on it.⁵

Lombard did not deny the view of Augustine that final impenitence is a sin against the Holy Spirit; however, it was not, in his view, the only unpardonable sin against the Spirit.⁶ Like other medieval theologians, Lombard divided all sin into three categories: ignorance, weakness or passion, and deliberate malice (certa malitia).⁷

Sins caused by human weakness or frailty, and those caused by ignorance have a certain element of excusability lacking to the sin that comes from pure malice. Sins of weakness, because weakness is opposed to power,

¹Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 5:631.

²Ibid.

³NIDCC, s.v. "Peter Lombard," by Robert C. Clouse, p. 768.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 5:632.

⁶Four Books of Sentences 2:42, in PL, 192:752.

⁷Ibid.

were said to be against the Father, to whom power was appropriated; sins of ignorance were against the Son, to whom, as the Word of God, wisdom and knowledge were appropriated; and sins of malice were against the Holy Spirit, to whom goodness was appropriated. Thus sin ex certa malitia came in medieval theology to be associated or even identified with the sin against the Holy Spirit.¹

According to Lombard, the sin against the Holy Spirit is really a genus or category of sin of which Augustine's final impenitence is only a species. Any sin committed through determined malice is sin against the Holy Spirit. In this category Lombard lists six unforgivable sins: despair, presumption, impenitence, obstinacy, resisting the known truth, and envy of another's spiritual good.² None of these sins is in an absolute sense unpardonable but can be considered in that genus because they put such an obstacle in the way of forgiveness that it is often unattainable.

Thomas Aquinas

The greatest Scholastic philosopher and theologian was Thomas Aquinas, who came on the scene a century after Peter Lombard. He was well acquainted with Lombard as one of his earliest works was a commentary on the Sentences.³ His greatest work was his Summa Theologica which he began

¹NCE, s.v. "Sin Against the Holy Spirit," by C. Bernas and P. K. Meagher, 13:248.

²Four Books of Sentences 2.42, in PL, 192:752.

³Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 5:664.

in 1265 and was uncompleted at his death in 1274.¹ Aquinas's theology had enormous influence on those who followed him, so that today "Thomism" is the official theology of the Roman Catholic Church.²

Aquinas discusses the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in his Summa under the headings of four different questions:

- (1) Whether blasphemy or the sin against the Holy Spirit is the same as the sin committed through certain malice?
- (2) Whether it is fitting to distinguish six kinds of sin against the Holy Spirit?
- (3) Whether the sin against the Holy Spirit can be forgiven?
- (4) Whether³ a man can sin first of all against the Holy Spirit?

He begins by recognizing three legitimate uses of the concept of sin against the Holy Spirit. First, there was the sin of the Jews who ascribed to Satan the work which Christ did by the Spirit. Second, there is the concept of final impenitence taught by Augustine. Third, there is sin committed through certain malice. While all three of these can correctly be called sin against the Holy Spirit, it is only the last one which concerns Aquinas. In answer to the sec-

¹Walker, A History of the Christian Church, p. 245.

²Ibid.

³Summa Theologica 2.2.14, trans. Father of the English Dominican Province, reprint ed. (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981), 3:1227-31. The following discussion is based upon this section.

ond question, Aquinas agrees with Peter Lombard and adopts the same six species of sin against the Spirit.¹ As to the question of forgiveness for the sin against the Holy Spirit, Aquinas argues strongly against any such idea. The concept of sin against the Spirit considered in the first two ways (the sin of the Jews and final impenitence) is clearly unpardonable, and in the sense of sin committed through certain malice, it is best to think of this category as also unpardonable. By its very nature, sin committed through certain malice puts an obstacle in the way of forgiveness. God can, by a miracle, overcome this, but He usually does not. Finally, in response to the last question, Aquinas argues that although it was possible for someone to sin against the Holy Spirit before committing other sins, it is highly unlikely.

Summary

Both Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas agreed with Augustine that final impenitence is a sin against the Holy Spirit. However, like other medieval theologians, they extended the concept to include sins committed through deliberate malice. The primary impetus for this seems to have been the prevalent threefold classification of sins as arising from weakness and thus against the Father, or from ignorance and thus against the Son, or from deliberate malice and

¹See above, p. 23.

thus against the Holy Spirit.

Reformation

With the Protestant Reformation came a renewed interest in the Bible. Numerous exegetical and theological problems, including the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, were re-examined in light of the Scriptures. Luther, Calvin, and Arminius all discussed the problem, and their interpretations have had a profound effect upon subsequent interpreters.

Martin Luther

Luther was well acquainted with the theological system of the Scholastics whose works he studied at the University of Erfurt and later at the Augustinian convent at Erfurt when he became a monk.¹ Shortly after coming to the University of Wittenberg, Luther lectured on Peter Lombard's Sentences.² In spite of his later rejection of Scholasticism, Luther was influenced by what he had studied. This is clearly the case in his treatment of the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Like the Scholastics, Luther distinguished between sins of ignorance and those which are committed in deliberate violation of divine truth; and, like them, he placed

¹Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 7:110,116.

²NIDCC, s.v. "Luther, Martin," by Carl S. Meyer, p. 609.

the sin against the Holy Spirit in this latter category.¹ However, it is difficult to determine his exact view (if he had one) since he makes a number of seemingly incompatible statements about the sin in his writings. For example, in one of his replies to Zwingli and Oecolampadius concerning the Lord's Supper, Luther suggests that their refusal to accept his view of the real presence of Christ in the elements of the Supper was the sin against the Holy Spirit.² However, this was written in the heat of controversy and therefore probably does not reflect Luther's actual view. In his commentary on 1 John 5:16 he says: "In addition, there is the sin against the Spirit, or obstinacy in wickedness, an assault against the acknowledged truth, and impenitence to the end, of which Matt. 12:32 speaks."³ Here Luther includes Augustine's final impenitence as part of his description of the sin. In another place he says that failure to believe in "the forgiveness of sins" is the sin against the Holy Spirit.⁴ Luther preached a sermon on

¹Julius Köstlin, The Theology of Luther, trans. Charles E. Hay, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897), 2:467-68.

²Robert H. Fischer, ed., Word and Sacrament, vol. 3, in vol. 37 of Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 20.

³Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., The Catholic Epistles, in vol. 30 of Luther's Works (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 325.

⁴Theodore Bachmann, ed., Word and Sacrament, vol. 1, in vol. 35 of Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), p. 14.

Matthew 12:31-32 in which he says that "sinning against the Holy Spirit is nothing else than blaspheming His work and office."¹

In spite of these somewhat differing explanations, some scholars have attempted to find a common thread that runs through Luther's statements. Von Loewenich summarizes Luther's view in the following sentence: "Resistance against the mercy of God is the only unpardonable sin."² In a similar vein Plass describes Luther's view of the sin as the blasphemous defiance of God's grace along with the "malicious rejection of the recognized truth."³ Plass points to the fact that in his sermon on Matthew 12:31-32 Luther said: "It is the nature of this sin against the Holy Ghost to resist what is known to be the plain truth."⁴ Köstlin describes Luther's view in similar terms: "The sin against the Holy Ghost is described as that in which the heart resists the illuminating rays of the Spirit which have penetrated it like a flash of lightning--resists the recognized truth and the work of divine grace, and, under all warnings

¹Edward M. Plass, compiler, What Luther Says, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 3:1321.

²Luther als Ausleger der Synopiker, pp. 144-45, quoted in Berkouwer, Sin, p. 350.

³Plass, What Luther Says, p. 1231.

⁴Ibid.

given, becomes but the more hardened."¹ Perhaps this is as definite as one can be about Luther's view except to note that as to the question of whether the sin can be committed by believers, Luther does not explicitly say, though his writings give the impression that believers can commit it.² Later Lutheran theologians have been unanimous in their belief that the regenerate can commit the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit.³ Some of these have held that only the regenerate can commit it.⁴

John Calvin

Calvin discusses the unpardonable sin both in his Institutes and his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels.⁵ In the former work he begins by refuting Augustine's view of the sin which Calvin describes as "persistent stubbornness

¹Köstlin, The Theology of Luther, 2:468.

²Ibid., 2:469.

³Heinrich Schmid, The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, trans. and rev. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1889), pp. 252, 256-57.

⁴George Smeaton, The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, reprint ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 219; Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 253.

⁵John T. McNeill, ed., Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. Ford L. Battles, in vols. 20 and 21 of LCC, ed. John Baille et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 20:617-18; John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, trans. William Pringle, reprint ed., 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 2:73-77.

even to death, with distrust of pardon."¹ This view is disproven by Christ's words that the sin is not to be forgiven in this age. According to Calvin, "either this is said in vain, or the unpardonable sin can be committed within the compass of this life."²

Turning to his own interpretation of the sin, Calvin says that "they sin against the Holy Spirit who, with evil intention, resist God's truth, although by its brightness they are so touched that they cannot claim ignorance. Such resistance alone constitutes this sin."³ Later he adds: "But they whose consciences, though convinced that what they repudiate and impugn is the Word of God, yet cease not to impugn it--these are said to blaspheme against the Spirit, since they strive against the illumination that is the work of the Holy Spirit."⁴ The reason why the sin is not forgiven is because God hardens the hearts of those who commit the sin so that they never have any desire to repent.⁵ Those who have been truly regenerated can never, according to Calvin, commit the sin.⁶

¹Institutes, 20:617.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 20:618.

⁵Commentary on the Evangelists, 2:77.

⁶Ibid.

James Arminius

In 1599 Arminius wrote a letter to a certain John Uytenbogard explaining his view of the sin against the Holy Spirit.¹ Like Calvin, he rejected Augustine's view, and for the same reasons. Arminius defines the sin as follows: "The sin against the Holy Ghost is the rejection and refusing of Jesus Christ through determined malice and hatred against Christ, who through the testifying of the Holy Spirit, has been assuredly acknowledged for the Son of God, (or, which is the same thing, the rejection and refusing of the acknowledged universal truth of the gospel,) against conscience and committed for this purpose--that a sinner may fulfil and gratify his desire of the apparent good which is by no means necessary, and may reject Christ."²

Unlike Calvin, Arminius believed that the sin could be committed by believers as well as unbelievers.³ This he concluded from his understanding of Hebrews chapter six, which he held was also speaking of the blasphemy against the Spirit. The reason the sin is unpardonable is because those who commit it do not repent, and the reason they do not repent is because the sin is so heinous to God that He

¹James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall, trans., The Writings of James Arminius, 3 vols., reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), 2:511-38.

²Ibid., pp. 528-29.

³Ibid., pp. 523-24.

withholds the divine grace necessary for them to repent.¹

Summary

Luther, Calvin, and Arminius all rejected Augustine's explanation of the sin against the Holy Spirit. Their own interpretations have much in common. They all agree that it is a sin which can be committed during a person's life which will leave him without any hope of pardon. As to the nature of the sin, it is primarily a rejection of known truth which has been made clear by the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is not so much a sin against the person of the Spirit, but against His gracious acts. A major difference in their views involves who can commit the sin. Arminius and apparently Luther believed both the regenerate and unregenerate could commit it, while, of course, Calvin denied that genuine believers were capable of the sin. The views of these three men are still seen in Lutheran, Reformed, and Arminian theology today.

Modern Church

Since the Reformation and even up until the present day, numerous views of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit have been propounded. Most of these are not new; many are developments and refinements of earlier ideas. It is difficult to classify these differing viewpoints; however, by looking at the views very broadly, a fourfold classification

¹Nichols and Bagnall, Writings of Arminius, pp. 531-32.

is possible and will be used in this study. First, there are those who deny the very concept of an unpardonable sin. Then, there are those who generally agree with Augustine's view of final impenitence, a sin committed at the end of one's life. Next, there are those who believe the sin could only have been committed during Jesus' day, commonly called the dispensational view. Finally, there are those who argue that it is a sin which can be committed at some point during one's earthly life which renders that person without hope of forgiveness.

Denial of the Sin

The Gospel accounts notwithstanding, there are a few interpreters who seek to deny the idea that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unpardonable sin. Rees, for example, believes that the idea of a sin which God will not pardon would mean the "abandonment of man to eternal condemnation" and thus result in the defeat of God.¹ Since this is unacceptable, he calls the "kenotic theory" into service, suggesting that Christ was incorrect in His pronouncement that this sin was unpardonable.²

A different approach is taken by McNeile. He appeals

¹ISBE, 1939 ed., s.v. "Blasphemy," by T. Rees, 1:486.

²Ibid. Interestingly, the editors of the 1979 edition of ISBE have retained Rees's article except for the few sentences in which he says Jesus spoke out of ignorance.

to several Old Testament Scriptures as well as a passage from Philo which, he suggests, show that in "Jewish phraseology serious sin was often spoken of as unpardonable."¹ Therefore, Jesus "meant, and would be understood to mean, no more than that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, by those whose power He worked, was a terrible sin--more terrible than blasphemy against man."²

Finally, there are a number of interpreters who insist that the statements of Jesus concerning the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit are not authentic.³ For various reasons they agree that Jesus could not or did not make any statement about blasphemy against the Spirit being unpardonable. Scroggs's response is typical:

Whatever the original saying may have been it can hardly be an authentic utterance of Jesus. The evidence

¹Alan H. McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 179.

²Ibid.

³Eugene M. Boring, "The Unforgivable Sin Logion Mark III 28-29/Matt XII 31-32/Luke XII 10: Formal Analysis and History of the Tradition," NovT 18 (October 1976):276-77; B. Harvie Branscomb, The Gospel of Mark, MNTC, ed. James Moffatt (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1937), p. 74; A. J. B. Higgins, The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1980), p. 89; Arland J. Hultgren, Jesus and His Adversaries (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), p. 105; Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), p. 285; Robin Scroggs, "The Exaltation of the Spirit by Some Early Christians," JBL 84 (December 1965):361; H. E. Tödt, The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition, trans. Dorothea M. Barton (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 119.

is convincing that Jesus never spoke of the Spirit of God either as being connected with him or with the disciples (church).¹

A Sin Committed at the End of One's Life

Although the view of Augustine became dominant in the Middle Ages, it has clearly lost ground since the Reformation. In fact, it is difficult to find an interpreter in the modern period who clearly identifies the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as final impenitence. The few that do are mostly in the Roman Catholic tradition.² However, occasionally one will find a Protestant interpreter who thinks that Augustine was correct.³

A Sin Committed during Jesus' Day

A number of interpreters believe that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could only be committed while Jesus was living on earth.⁴ The reason for this is directly

¹Scroggs, "The Exaltation of the Spirit," p. 361.

²John P. Meier, Matthew, in vol. 3 of New Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary, ed. Wilfrid Harrington and Donald Senior (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1980), pp. 135-36.

³Smeaton, The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, p. 220

⁴Lewis S. Chafer, Systematic Theology, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 7:48; Barnard Franklin, "The Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit," BSac 93 (April-June 1936):232-33; Arno C. Gaebelin, The Gospel of Matthew, reprint ed. (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1961), p. 250; J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 207; Charles C. Ryrie, The Holy Spirit (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 54.

related to their conception of the sin itself. Chafer explains:

It should be noted that this sin against the Holy Spirit consisted in asserting that Christ's works, which were wrought by the Holy Spirit, were accomplished on the contrary by Satan. Such a setting could not be found now since Christ is not in the world as He was then, nor is He undertaking in the same way to do works by the Holy Spirit. It is therefore impossible for this particular sin to be committed today.¹

Because the sin was limited to the time or dispensation that Christ was on earth, this view is often called the dispensational view.²

A very similar interpretation has been advanced by Broadus. He understands the sin to consist in speaking against the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit.³ Since this miracle-working power was still going on in the apostolic age, the sin could have taken place during this period as well as during the ministry of Christ.⁴

Interestingly, John Wesley held a view almost identical to the dispensational approach. He also defined the sin as ascribing the miracles which Christ did by the power

¹Chafer, Systematic Theology, 7:48.

²While it is true that most of the writers who argue for this view are also proponents of dispensational theology, none of them would actually divide Christ's ministry on earth into a separate dispensation.

³John A. Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, An American Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), p. 272.

⁴Ibid.

of the Holy Spirit to Satan.¹ However, he does not say that the sin could only be committed in Jesus' day, though, for all practical purposes, he ends up with almost that same qualification. It is unlikely, according to Wesley, that anyone today would say that Christ performed His miracles through the power of Satan. Since that is the only way the sin could still be committed, one is "in no more danger of doing this than of pulling the sun out of the firmament."²

An Unpardonable Sin Which Can Be Committed Today

By far the largest group of interpreters understands the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit to be a sin which can be committed at some point in an individual's life and as a result renders that person without any chance of forgiveness. However, there is disagreement as to the exact nature of the sin and whether it can be committed by believers, unbelievers, or both.

Although he never mentions Athanasius, Albert Barnes has adopted the same view as the early church Father in that he understands the words "Holy Spirit" to refer to the divine nature of Christ.³ Therefore, the blasphemy against the

¹John Wesley, Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, 10th ed. (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), p. 44.

²John Wesley, "Sermon 86: A Call to Backsliders," in vol. 6 of The Works of John Wesley, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), pp. 524-25.

³Albert Barnes, Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, ed. Ingram Coblin, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel

Holy Spirit is not a sin against the third person of the Trinity but a "blasphemous attack on the Divine power and nature of Christ," including a denial of His deity.¹ While no other interpreter takes the extreme position of Barnes, a few do infer that the sin is primarily against Christ, rather than the Holy Spirit. Denney, for example, concludes that it is a sin committed "against the person and work of Jesus."² This idea is rare, however, since the majority of interpreters see the sin as being directed toward the Holy Spirit rather than Christ.

Many of the interpreters, if not most, from the Reformed camp have followed Calvin and espouse essentially his position.³ An important characteristic of this view is the belief that Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 John 5:16 are parallel to the blasphemy passages in the Gospels and are speaking of the same sin. Another characteristic is stated by Berkouwer: "The sin against the Spirit is not a particular sin and has no special reference to one of the commandments of God; nor

Publications, 1962), p. 59.

¹Ibid.

²James Denney, Jesus and the Gospel, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), p. 296.

³Berkhof, Systematic Theology, pp. 253-54; Berkouwer, Sin, pp. 347-49; Baker's Dictionary of Theology, s.v. "Blasphemy," by R. Laird Harris, p. 98; Hendriksen, Matthew, pp. 528-29; Kuyper, Work of the Holy Spirit, pp. 608-12; Palmer, Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit, pp. 177-86.

can it be localized in a spectacular form."¹ The tendency of this view is to interpret the Gospel accounts according to the teaching of Hebrews 6:4-6. Therefore, the emphasis of the sin is upon one's rejection of the clear truth of Scripture which has been made understandable through the work of the Spirit. Of course, this sin could not be committed by a genuine believer.

Another group of interpreters holds a view very similar to the Reformed one.² They also understand the sin as a willful rejection of known truth. What distinguishes this group is their confining of the sin to the Gospel passages. They reject any suggestion that Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 John 5:16 are describing the same sin.

Lutheran interpretations of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit have somewhat in common with the Reformed view. Like the Reformed camp, the Lutheran interpreters believe that Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 John 5:16 are dealing with the same sin as the blasphemy passages in the Gospels.³

¹Berkouwer, Sin, pp. 343-44.

²Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, s.v. "Blasphemy," 1:831; William Dale, "Discussions and Notes on the Unpardonable Sin," ExpTim 3 (February 1892):215-17; Theodore H. Epp, The Other Comforter (Lincoln, Nebraska: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1966), pp. 225-30.

³R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), p. 483; H. A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew, trans. Peter Christie, rev. and ed. Frederick Crombie and William Stewart, 6th ed. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 242; Julius

However, there is not as much uniformity with regard to the exact nature of sin. Some, like Pieper, understand the essence of the sin to be the rejection of divine truth of which one has become convinced.¹ This is, of course, identical to the usual Reformed interpretation. However, others, like Müller, define it as "hatred of whatever is known to be divine and godlike."² The most significant difference between the Lutheran and Reformed views concerns who can commit the sin. While the latter insist only unbelievers can be guilty of the blasphemy against the Spirit, the former insist that it may also be committed by believers. In fact, some Lutherans insist that only genuine believers can commit it.³

At least two scholars believe that the essence of the sin is apostasy.⁴ By this is meant the departure of a genuine believer from the Christian faith. This definition of apostasy should be distinguished from some Reformed interpreters who also characterize the sin with the term

Müller, The Christian Doctrine of Sin, trans. William Urwick, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1885), 2:423; Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:571-75.

¹Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 1:573.

²Müller, Christian Doctrine of Sin, 2:422.

³E.g. William F. Arndt, The Gospel According to Luke (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 313.

⁴Barrett, Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition, p. 106; Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 108.

apostasy but use it to refer to professing (not genuine) Christians who depart from the faith.¹

Possibly the most widely held theory as to the nature of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit says that it is the deliberate labeling of good as evil.² As Guthrie explains, "this sin against the Spirit is the deliberate and malicious attempt to deny all true values--to see wrong as right and evil as good."³ This sin is unpardonable because it destroys one's ability to distinguish between good and evil and thus makes repentance impossible.⁴

¹E.g. Berkouwer, Sin, p. 342; Philip E. Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 216.

²William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 2:44; A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in vol. 1 of The Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 189; W. N. Clarke, Commentary on the Gospel of Mark, An American Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881), p. 54; Donald Guthrie, Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 134; R. H. Malden, The Promise of the Father (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 202; R. E. Nixon, "Matthew," in The New Bible Commentary: Revised, ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 832; Theodore H. Robinson, The Gospel of Matthew, MNTC, ed. James Moffatt (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), p. 113; Henry B. Swete, The Holy Spirit in the New Testament, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), p. 117; R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), p. 128; Ernest T. Thompson, The Gospel According to Mark (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1954), p. 81.

³Guthrie, Jesus the Messiah, p. 134.

⁴Malden, Promise of the Father, p. 202.

Several interpreters understand the nature of the sin to be connected with the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit.¹ Buswell defines it as "the irrevocable rejection of the grace of God in the atoning work of Christ, offered to lost men in the convicting work of the Holy Spirit" and adds that the Jews in Mark's account were guilty of the sin.² Therefore, it is committed only by unbelievers who over a period of time fail to respond to the stirring of the Spirit.

Another group of interpreters attempt to understand the sin along the same lines as the dispensational view, but yet feel that it can still be committed today. Robertson, for example, says that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is committed by those who "ridicule the manifest work of God's Spirit in men's lives and attribute the Spirit's work to the devil."³ Thus this view defines the sin as "attributing to Satan what is accomplished by the

¹James O. Buswell, A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), 2:109; Wilson T. Hogue, The Holy Spirit: A Study (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1932), p. 386; Lloyd J. Ogilvie, Life Without Limits: The Message of Mark's Gospel (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1975), p. 69; J. Oswald Sanders, The Holy Spirit of Promise (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1940), p. 135; Ray Summers, Commentary on Luke (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1972), p. 154.

²Buswell, Systematic Theology, 2:109.

³A. T. Robertson, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in vol. 1 of Word Pictures in the New Testament, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 97.

power of God."¹ This view is actually very similar to that which says the essence of the sin consists in the labeling of good as evil. However, in this case the good which is labeled as evil is some special work in the lives of men, particularly regeneration and subsequent sanctification.²

Besides all of the aforementioned attempts to define the nature of the sin, there are some interpreters who have their own individual views which are sufficiently distinct so as to warrant a separate classification. For example, Cox defines the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as a progressive sinning against one's own conscience which can be committed by both believers and unbelievers.³ Foster, on the other hand, believes that it is "a deliberate, vicious, continuous attack upon Christ and the Holy Spirit."⁴ It is not appropriate at this point to make mention of all these unique interpretations.

¹John F. Walvoord, Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 89. See also Charles J. Ellicott, ed. "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," in vol. 6 of Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, reprint ed. 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 73; Owen E. Evans, "Expository Problems: The Unforgivable Sin," ExpTim, 68 (May 1957):243; Hobbs, Matthew, pp. 154-55.

²Hobbs, Matthew, pp. 154-55.

³Cox, "Sin Against the Holy Spirit," pp. 327-38.

⁴R. C. Foster, Studies in the Life of Christ, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), pp. 554-55.

Summary

As the preceding discussion has shown, there is an enormous diversity of opinion about the interpretation of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. However, it should be noted that not all of the previously mentioned views are totally incompatible with one another. Some of these interpretations will be ruled out by the exegesis of the Scriptural data in the chapters which follow, while others will be examined in chapter seven.

CHAPTER III

EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 12:22-32

This section is part of the public ministry of Jesus Christ, which begins in 4:12. At that time, Jesus commenced His ministry in Galilee. Except for a few short excursions to places such as Phoenicia (15:21-28) and Caesarea Philippi (16:5-17:23), all of Matthew's Gospel from 4:12 through 8:35 is taken up with Jesus' Galilean ministry.¹ Hill suggests that chapters 11-13 form a distinct section of the Gospel, which has as its theme, "response, or lack of response, to the Kingdom at work in Jesus' ministry."² In chapter eleven Jesus uses the question of John's disciples to demonstrate that opposition to Himself began with the rejection of His forerunner John (11:2-19). Then beginning in verse twenty, Jesus openly condemns a number of cities which did not accept His message. In chapter twelve the opposition and rejection become more serious. Matthew records a series of events showing the nature of the Pharisees'

¹Homer A. Kent, Jr., "The Gospel According to Matthew," in The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 930.

²David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible, ed. Matthew Black (Greenwood, South Carolina: Attic Press, 1972), p. 197. Cf. also Stanley D. Toussaint, Behold the King: A Study of Matthew (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 147.

hostility toward Jesus. The first involves a controversy over the Sabbath (12:1-21). The second (12:22-37) is the immediate context for Jesus' saying about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The Miracle of Jesus (22-23)

Τότε προσηνέχθη αὐτῷ δαιμονιζόμενος τυφλὸς καὶ κωφός, καὶ ἐθεράπευσεν αὐτόν, ὥστε τὸν κωφὸν λαλεῖν καὶ βλέπειν. (23) καὶ ἐξίσταντο πάντες οἱ ὄχλοι καὶ ἔλεγον, Μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς Δαυίδ;¹

Textual Variants²

None of the textual variants in verse 22 have any exegetical significance. The words προσηνέχθη αὐτῷ διαμονιζόμενος τυφλὸς καὶ κωφός have been replaced by προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δαιμονιζόμενος τυφλὸν καὶ κωφόν in a few manuscripts (B 1424 pc syr^s syr^c syr^p). The evidence for the reading in the text is not cited by NA²⁶, which means, according to the editors, the variant has such poor support that it can in no way be considered as an alternative for the text, but is of interest only for the history of the text.³ Following ὥστε, in addition to the words τὸν κωφόν, some manuscripts

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in Greek are from The Greek New Testament, ed. Kurt Aland et al., 3rd corrected ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1983) [hereafter cited as UBS³].

²Only those textual variants which are cited in UBS³ and Novum Testamentum Graece, ed. by Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, 26th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979) [hereafter cited as NA²⁶] will be evaluated.

³NA²⁶, p. 47.

add that the man was also τυφλόν. This variant has no effect on the meaning of the verse since the first part of verse 22 had already indicated that the man was indeed blind. Finally, there is an additional καί between κωφόν and λαλεῖν in some manuscripts, but it does not change the meaning of the verse either.

Neither NA²⁶ or UBS³ list any variants for verse 23.

Verse 22

The incident which ultimately culminated in Jesus' pronouncement about the blasphemy against the Spirit was His healing of a demon-possessed man. The effect of this demon possession was such as to render the man both dumb and blind. Plummer's suggestion that κωφός means both deaf and dumb cannot be substantiated from its usage elsewhere in the New Testament.¹ Although it can mean either deaf or dumb, the context will determine which of these is correct in any given passage.² In verse 22 it indicates that the demon-possessed man was unable to speak. Jesus healed the man with the result (ὥστε³) that the man was

¹Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, reprint ed. (Minneapolis: James Family Christian Publishers, n.d.), p. 175.

²The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "Κωφός," by P. J. Budd, 1:428-29 (hereafter cited as NIDNTT); BAGD, p. 462.

³Here ὥστε with the infinitive expresses actual rather than just intended result. See BAGD, p. 900 and H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (Toronto: Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 286.

immediately able to speak and to see.

It should be noted that this healing was another example of Christ's many miracles. As Whitcomb has demonstrated, the primary purpose of Jesus' miracles was "to identify Himself as Israel's true Messiah and to confirm the new revelation He was bringing to the nation (John 20: 20-31; Acts 2:22)."¹ In a similar vein, Warfield points toward the "inseparable connection of miracles with revelation."² He goes on to add:

Miracles do not appear on the page of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes.³

The miracles of Christ and later of the apostles were for the purpose of authenticating them as God's spokesmen. Thus these signs would no longer be needed after the

¹John C. Whitcomb, Does God Want Christians to Perform Miracles Today? (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1973), p. 6.

²Benjamin B. Warfield, Counterfeit Miracles, reprint ed. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 25.

³Ibid., pp. 25-26. Numerous other scholars share this same view of the purpose of miracles. See e.g., Alexander B. Bruce, The Miracles of Christ, reprint ed. (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1980), pp. 283-319; Edward J. Carnell, An Introduction to Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 268-70; Thomas R. Edgar, Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today? (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983), pp. 86-107.

messengers had brought the message.¹ This writer shares the view of Warfield that these sign-miracles were a part of the ministry of Jesus and His apostles, but are not occurring today.²

Verse 23

The initial reaction of the crowd to Jesus' healing of the man is expressed by the verb ἐξίσταντο, Matthew's only use of this word. It conveys a "feeling of astonishment mingled with fear, caused by events which are miraculous, extraordinary, or difficult to understand."³ Their astonishment prompted the question, "μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς Δαυίδ." It is generally agreed that a question introduced by μήτι expects a negative answer.⁴ Thus the NASB translates the question: "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" This English translation implies considerable doubt on the part of the crowd. However, this may not be true. Robertson suggests that "the shades of negative expectation and surprise vary very greatly. Each

¹Whitcomb, Does God Want Christians to Perform Miracles Today? p. 6.

²Warfield, Counterfeit Miracles, p. 6. See also Whitcomb, Does God Want Christians to Perform Miracles Today? p. 7 and Charles R. Smith, Tongues in Biblical Perspective (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1973), pp. 57-92.

³BAGD, p. 276.

⁴BDF, p. 220.

context supplies a slightly different tone."¹ The translation of the New International Version is probably to be preferred: "Could this be the Son of David?"² The use of μήτι is not surprising when one takes into account the natural unwillingness of the crowd to make any positive statement about Jesus' Messiahship in the presence of the hostile Pharisees.

"The Son of David" is a clear messianic title in Matthew's Gospel, occurring nine times.³ Some scholars have questioned the idea that first-century Jews expected the Messiah to perform healings or exorcisms.⁴ However, if we believe Matthew, it was precisely the performance of this

¹A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research, 4th ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 917 [hereafter cited as RG].

²The Holy Bible: New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978) [hereafter cited as NIV]. The suggestion of BAGD (p. 520) that here and in John 4:29 μήτι could be translated "perhaps," would make the crowd appear even less doubtful than the NIV translation suggests.

³The use of this title in pre-Christian Judaism is a complex issue, though its occurrence in Pss. Sol. 17 is clear evidence that at least a part of Judaism understood it to be messianic. For a more complete discussion, see Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), pp. 252-58 and D. A. Carson, "Christological Ambiguities in the Gospel of Matthew," in Christ the Lord, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), pp. 103-07.

⁴E.g. Robert H. Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 231 and Hill, Matthew, p. 215.

miracle which prompted the crowd to consider Jesus as a candidate for the Messiah.¹ That the Messiah was expected to perform miracles is clear from verse 38, where the scribes and Pharisees specifically ask Jesus to perform a sign-miracle. Also, Isaiah 61 is an explicit messianic passage which requires miracles of the Messiah; and in Matthew 11:2-5 (cf. Luke 4:17-21), Jesus uses Isaiah 61:1 as proof of His Messiahship.

Although this miraculous healing caused the crowd to entertain the suggestion of Jesus' Messiahship, it also presented them with a seeming contradiction since Jesus corresponded with so little of what was expected of the Messiah. After an excellent survey of the relevant literature, Ladd concludes that most Jews were looking for a "kingly son of David who would be anointed by God to bring Israel political deliverance from the yoke of the heathen, and to establish the earthly kingdom."² The lowly carpenter from Nazareth seemed an unlikely candidate for such a monumental mission.

The Charge of the Pharisees (24)

οἱ δὲ Φαρισαῖοι ἀκούσαντες εἶπον, Οὗτος οὐκ ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ βεελζεβουλ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων.

¹Gundry does not believe the question was ever asked but was actually invented by Matthew (Matthew, p. 215).

²George E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 140.

Textual Variants

The reading βεελζεβοῦλ is found in almost all Greek manuscripts and is almost certainly correct. However, here in verse 24 and in the other six occurrences of the name in the New Testament (Matt 10:25; 12:27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18,19), B and K (except at Mark 3:22) have the reading βεεζεβοῦλ. It is apparently only a phonetical variation of βεελζεβοῦλ, the λ being dropped due to the unnaturalness of the λζ combination in Greek.¹ A final variant, βεελζεβοῦβ, is supported by the Vulgate,² two Old Latin manuscripts (c, ff¹), part of the Old Syriac (syr^c), and the Peshitta. βεελζεβοῦβ is clearly secondary and can be easily explained as a deliberate modification of an original βεελζεβοῦλ.³

The reason for changing the final λ of βεελζεβοῦλ to a β is simply because those who did so thought that it was the same name as Baalzebub, the god of Ekron in 2 Kings 1:2. The reference to the Old Testament Baalzebub is

¹James H. Moulton, Wilbert F. Howard, and Nigel Turner, A Grammar of New Testament Greek, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1908-76), 2:105 [hereafter cited as MHT]. A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, s.v. "Beelzebub or Beelzebul," by Eberhard Nestle, 1:181. Foerster has suggested that βεεζεβοῦλ may be a popular Palestinian form of βεελζεβοῦλ (TDNT, s.v. βεεζεβοῦλ, 1:606).

²As it so often does, the KJV adopts the reading of the Vulgate.

³Some Roman Catholic writers still argue that βεελζεβοῦβ was the original reading. See e.g. Maas, The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1916), p. 125 and New Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. "Beelzebub," by M. R. Ryan, 2:221.

naturally the first thing that comes to one's mind who is attempting to account for the New Testament reference to βεελζεβοῦλ.¹ However, such an association would not be made by someone knowing only Greek since the LXX rendered בללל ללל as βααλ μυλαν.² It transliterated ללל but translated בללל with μυλαν (fly). Thus, the reader of the Greek Bible would not connect βεελζεβοῦλ in the Gospels with βααλ μυλαν, the god of Ekron in the Old Testament. However, to one knowing Hebrew the connection between the two is easily made. βεελζεβοῦλ was faithfully transmitted in the Greek manuscript tradition because the copyists were not familiar with Hebrew.³ βεελζεβοῦβ appears to be the reading behind the Vulgate only because Jerome, who was well versed in Hebrew, made the alternation in line with 2 Kings 1:2 (unlike the LXX, Jerome transliterated בללל ללל as Beelzebub in his Old Testament⁴). The presence of Beelzebub in two Old Latin manuscripts can be explained by the fact that they

¹The difference between the Old Testament Baalzebub and the New Testament Beelzebul is not in the beginning of these words. Baal is a transliteration of the Hebrew ללל, while Beel corresponds to the same word in Aramaic, ללל.

²Alfred Rahlfs, ed., Septuaginta, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1935), 1:693.

³It is a well-known fact that few in the early church knew Hebrew. See Bruce M. Metzger, The Early Versions of the New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 332.

⁴Bonifatio Fisher et al., eds., Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatum Versionem, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969), 1:502.

(c and ff¹) are both late (12th and 8th centuries respectively) and reflect a text in Matthew which has been corrupted by the Vulgate.¹

Support for the reading βεελζεβοῦβ in part of the Syriac tradition can be accounted for by a similar assimilation to 2 Kings 1:2. In the New Testament, Syriac versions tend to assimilate the Greek form of names to those found in the Peshitta Old Testament,² which in 2 Kings 1:2 has the form b'lbub,³ a transliteration of an original Hebrew form בלבל ִלְבָּל.

Verse 24

In contrast (δέ) to the view of the crowd that Jesus might be the Messiah, the Pharisees said: "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." This charge had been made earlier in 9:34. Οὗτός may be used here with a contemptuous sense ("this fellow"), though this is not certain.⁴

The Pharisees did not attempt to deny that a miracle

¹Metzger, Early Versions, pp. 297 and 313.

²Ibid., p. 85. This same principle is followed by modern translators of the English Bible.

³H. Gottlieb, ed., Kings, pt. 2, fas. 4, The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), p. 83.

⁴Numerous commentators hold this view, e.g. Lenski, Matthew, p. 476. It may be that the οὗτός of the Pharisees is simply a repetition of the previous οὗτός of the crowd in verse 23. Robertson believes this first οὗτός (v. 23) is purely deictic (RG, p. 697).

had been performed, that would have been impossible since the evidence was standing before them. However, they still hoped to discredit Jesus by claiming that He had done it ἐν τῷ βεελζεβοῦλ. The syntax of the preposition ἐν in this and similar constructions is often the subject of debate, though some sort of instrumental usage seems undeniable.¹ Some scholars now admit that ἐν may occasionally be used for personal agency and thus equal to ὑπό with the ablative.² Whether one understands ἐν to be denoting personal agency or just instrumentality,³ the point is clear, Jesus was able to perform His exorcisms because He was in league with Beelzebub.

The name βεελζεβοῦλ presents two problems. First, what does it mean, and second, who is this Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons? The second question is the most important one, but it should not be entirely divorced from

¹Robertson insisted that ἐν is always locative and that the phrase in question denotes that "the casting out is located in the prince of demons" (RG, p. 590), whatever that means. Robertson's disciples have not followed him on this point and readily admit the instrumental usage of ἐν. See e.g. Dana and Mantey, Manual Grammar, p. 105 and James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, Syntax of New Testament Greek (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), p. 45.

²MHT, 3:240. BDF (p. 118) specifically cites Matt 12:24 as an example of ἐν used to designate a personal agent.

³For a discussion of the differences between the two, see Daniel B. Wallace, "Selected Notes on the Syntax of the New Testament," 4th ed. (class notes, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), pp. 61 and 142-43.

the first since the meaning of the name may yield important information about the identity of this one. The meaning of the name, however, is complicated by the fact that it is completely unknown in Jewish literature outside the New Testament.¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that many commentators have sought for an answer by looking for some connection between the New Testament Beelzebul and the Old Testament god of Ekron, Baalzebub.² A number of scholars believe that Beelzebul is derived from Baalzebub.³

The name Baalzebub (בַּלְזֵבּוּב) is found in 2 Kings 1:2,3,6, and 16. King Ahaziah of Israel sent messengers to Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, to inquire if he would recover from a fall out of an upper chamber. The first part of the name, זֵבּוּב, is a common Hebrew word meaning "lord," often used as a divine name.⁴ The last part of the name, בַּלְזֵבּוּב, is a perfectly good Hebrew word meaning "fly." Thus a very common interpretation of בַּלְזֵבּוּב זֵבּוּב is "lord of flies."⁵

¹Lloyd Gaston, "Beelzebul," TZ 18 (July-August 1962):247.

²As has been shown above (p. 54), Jerome and others went so far with this connection as to accept the patently false idea that the authentic reading in the Gospels was βαελλζεβοῦβ, simply a transliteration of the Old Testament name.

³E.g. Cheyne says: "We cannot doubt that Beelzebul is identical with Baalzebub" (Encyclopaedia Biblica, s.v. "Beelzebul," 1:514).

⁴BDB, p. 127.

⁵Ibid. This is the view of the LXX (Rahlfs, Septuaginta, 1:693) and Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews

This seems to have been the universal interpretation of Baalzebub until this century, in spite of the difficulty in explaining why the god of Ekron would be called the "lord of flies."¹ The problem for those who say that Beelzebub is derived from Baalzebub is to explain why the final b was changed to an l. The most popular solution to this difficulty was first proposed by Lightfoot in 1652. He suggested that since the postbiblical word 711 means "manure" or "dung," Beelzebub means "lord of dung" and is thus a derogatory way of referring to Baalzebub.² However, if this were true, the name would be spelled Beelzebel, not Beelzebub, in the New Testament.³

9.2.1, in vol. 3 of The Works of Flavius Josephus, trans. William Whiston, reprint ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974], p. 4).

¹Gaston, "Beelzebub," p. 251. Some have thought the god was represented in the form of a fly (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, vol. 3, trans. James Martin in Commentary on the Old Testament [reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975], p. 285). Others have suggested that the god gave oracles by the flight or buzzing of a fly (R. A. Stewart Macalister, The Philistines, Their History and Civilization [London: Oxford University Press, 1913], p. 92). No extra-Biblical evidence for a fly-god or a god who gave oracles by means of flies has been produced. Occasionally a comparison is drawn with the Greek Zeus Apomyios ("Averter of flies"). See IDB, s.v. "Baalzebub," by T. H. Gaster, 1:332 for objections to this idea.

²John Lightfoot, A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica: Matthew-1 Corinthians, reprint ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 2:203-04.

³In place of 711 some have suggested the word 7117 meaning "dung." However, this suggestion still has the wrong orthography (Beelzibbul) as only one of its major

In contrast to the older view which understood Baalzebub as the actual name of the god of Ekron, the general consensus of scholars today is that the real name of the god was Baalzebul.¹ The discovery of the Ras Shamra tablets in the first third of this century brought to light a Ugaritic word zbl which means "prince."² The well-known Canaanite god Baal is often called b'l zbl, "Baal the Prince," or zbl b'l, "Prince Baal," at Ugarit.³ Gray notes that zbl was the "stock epithet of the Canaanite Baal."⁴ It is much more likely that the god of Ekron from whom Ahaziah sought an oracle was the well-known Canaanite god Baal rather than an unknown god of flies. Therefore, Baalzebub is probably a contemptuous alteration of the original Baalzebul by someone who considered the name "lord of flies"

problems. See Gaston, "Beelzebul," pp. 251-52.

¹E.g. TDOT, s.v. "לַיָּא, ba'al," by J. C. de Moor and M. J. Mulder, 2:194; Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, s.v. "לַיָּא (bā'al)," by Bruce K. Waltke, 1:120; Peter F. Ellis, "1-2 Kings," in vol. 1 of JBC, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (Englewood, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 197; J. A. Montgomery, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings, ed. Henry S. Gehman, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 349; Norman H. Snaith, Ralph W. Sockman, and Raymond Calkins, "The First and Second Books of Kings," in vol. 3 of IB, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 189.

²Cyrus H. Gordon, UT (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1965), p. 393.

³Ulf Oldenburg, The Conflict Between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), p. 82.

⁴John Gray, I and II Kings, Old Testament Library, ed. G. Ernest Wright, et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 82.

more appropriate for the pagan god of Ekron. It is not clear whether this change was made by the author of Kings or a later Hebrew scribe.¹

Since the original name in 2 Kings was probably Baalzebul, one would assume that this would only strengthen the case for Beelzebul in the New Testament being a derivative of it. And in fact some scholars are fond of pointing out how the New Testament has preserved the true orthography all along.² However, it must be stressed that there is no direct link between Baalzebul in the Old Testament and Beelzebul in the New Testament. There is no evidence that anyone in the first century A.D. would have known that the name of the god of Ekron was actually Baalzebul. Even if they did, it is impossible to believe that a name for a Philistine god in the tenth century B.C. would suddenly be revived as a name for the ruler of the demons in the first century A.D. As Zahn has pointed out, there is simply no evidence of

¹The changing of names by Hebrew scribes was not an uncommon practice according to Davis (The Birth of a Kingdom [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970], p. 118). Also, Oldenburg says: "So odious did the name of Ba'al become to the true worshiper of Yahweh, that he would not even mention it, but sometimes substituted bosheth (בֹּשֶׁת), meaning 'shame,' for ba'al (cf. Hos 2:16,17; 9:14)" [Conflict Between El and Ba'al, p. 182]. This practice is clearly seen in the change of names such as Eshbaal (1 Chr 8:33) to Ish-Bosheth (2 Sam 3:14) and Jerubbaal (Judg 6:32) to Jerubbesheth (2 Sam 11:21).

²E.g. John L. McKenzie, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in vol. 2 of JBC, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 85.

Jewish interest in the Old Testament name at all.¹ There is no direct link between the two names. It will be shown later that βεελζεβούλ in the Gospels is related to the Canaanite god Baal, but the point being stressed here is that no one who used the name in the Gospels was thinking of 2 Kings chapter one.

The Greek name βεελζεβούλ must be a transliteration of the Aramaic-Hebrew combination ܒܝܝܬ ܠܥܝܝܠ. Beel clearly comes from the Aramaic ܒܝܝܬ,² while ζεβούλ is from the Hebrew ܒܝܝܬ.³ ܒܝܝܬ means "elevation, height," or "lofty abode."⁴ In Isaiah 63:15 it is used as a synonym for heaven: "Look down from heaven, and see from Thy holy and glorious habitation."⁵ In 1 Kings 8:13 it is used as a ceremonious term for the temple: "I have surely built Thee a lofty house, a place for thy dwelling forever" (NIV, "magnificent temple").⁶ In postbiblical Hebrew ܒܝܝܬ is used for heaven and the temple

¹Theodor Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament, trans. John M. Trout et al. 3 vols., reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1953), 1:20.

²BDB, p. 1085.

³Gaston, "Beelzebul," p. 247 note 4. Jeremias, a scholar who argues that Hebrew was not a spoken language in Jesus' day, nevertheless concedes that ܒܝܝܬ is a Hebrew word on the lips of Jesus (New Testament Theology, trans. John Bowden [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971], p. 7). BDB lists no Aramaic word or root spelled ܒܝܬ.

⁴BDB, p. 259.

⁵TDOT, s.v. "ܒܝܬ z^ebhul," by J. Gamberoni, 4:31. Cf. Hab 3:11.

⁶Ibid.

(places where God dwells).¹ Although בְּיָיִן does not etymologically mean "dwelling," it developed that sense from its usage for both heaven and the temple.² The LXX translated בְּיָיִן with οἶκος in Isaiah 63:15 and with κατωκητηρίον in 1 Kings 8:13.³ Therefore, βεελζεβούλ means "lord of the (heavenly) dwelling."⁴

Matthew 10:25 provides strong support for this view: "If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household." Οἶκοδεσπότην ("head of the house") is a translation of the Semitic word Beelzebul which follows it.⁵ This brings up the obvious question of how "lord of the (heavenly) dwelling" would be an appropriate name for the ruler of the demons. The answer is to be found in the fact that in both Judaism and the New Testament, the heathen gods were thought to be demons. In

¹Marcus Jastrow, comp., A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature, 2 vols. reprint ed. (New York: Pardes Publishing House, 1950), 1:378.

²Gaston, "Beelzebul," p. 249.

³Rahlfs, Septuaginta, 2:651 and 1:646.

⁴ISBE, 1979 ed., s.v. "Beelzebul," by D. E. Aune, 1:447; John Bowman, The Gospel of Mark: The New Christian Jewish Passover Haggadah (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), p. 128. For more support for this meaning of בְּיָיִן , see Gaston, "Beelzebul," pp. 249-50 and W. E. M. Aitken, "Beelzebul," JBL 31 (1912):36-43.

⁵E. C. B. MacLaurin, "Beelzebul," NovT 20 (April 1978):156; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in vol. 8 of The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 253.

numerous Old Testament passages which deal with pagan idolatry such as Deuteronomy 32:17, 2 Chronicles 11:15, Psalm 96:5, and Psalm 106:37, the LXX uses the word δαιμόνιον.¹ In the New Testament Paul says: "No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God" (1 Cor 10:20). Therefore, it would be entirely appropriate to call the ruler of the demons by the name of a pagan god.

The chief rival of Yahweh in the Hellenistic age was the cult of the heavenly Baal.² The Canaanite god Baal was known as the "lord of heaven,"³ but with the coming of Hellenism the "lord of heaven," was identified with Zeus Olympius⁴ (Olympus is equal to heaven⁵), which in Aramaic is ܠܝܠܗܝܐ ܕܝܡܝܢ. The proper name of this heathen deity, "lord of heaven" (ܠܝܠܗܝܐ ܕܝܡܝܢ), could not be applied to him directly because this title was also used of Yahweh. The "Lord of heaven" or "God of heaven" is a frequent epithet (eight

¹Whether or not the Old Testament itself understands demons to be involved in these passages is difficult to determine since a number of different Hebrew words are used, whose meanings are contested.

²Gaston, "Beelzebul," p. 252.

³W. F. Albright, From Stone Age to Christianity, 2nd ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), p. 231.

⁴Martin Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism, trans. John Bowden, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 1:297.

⁵TDNT, s.v. "οὐρανός," by Helmut Trauf, 5:500.

times in Ezra alone) for Yahweh in the Old Testament. In Daniel 5:23 He is called "the Lord of heaven" (הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם).¹ Therefore, in order to designate this pagan "lord of heaven" as the ruler of the demons a synonym for אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם had to be used.² The change from Beelshemayin to Beelzebul would be transparent enough to be understood by Jesus and those around Him.³ The substitution of בְּלִזְבוּל for אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם enabled the religious leaders to make reference to the pagan "lord of heaven" without casting any aspersions on Yahweh, the true "Lord of heaven." Thus, as was stated above, there is no direct connection between Beelzebul and the Old Testament Baalzebul because Beelzebul was a name coined by the religious leaders in order to permit them to explain Jesus' miracles as the work of the ruler of the demons.

It is clear that "the⁴ ruler of the demons," Beelzebul, is Satan. In pseudepigraphical Judaism, Satan is clearly the leader of the demons, and they are subject to him.⁵ A comparison of Matthew 12:24 with verses 26-27 shows

¹K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., BHS (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1977), p. 1394.

²For some convincing reasons why בְּלִזְבוּל was chosen, see Gaston, "Beelzebul," pp. 253-55.

³Ibid., p. 253.

⁴Although the article is lacking here, it is present in parallel passages: Matt 9:34; Mark 3:22; and Luke 11:15.

⁵TDNT, s.v. "δαίμων, δαιμόνιον," by Werner Foerster, 2:15.

that Jesus uses Beelzebul interchangeably with Satan.¹

The attitude of the Pharisees who made this charge against Jesus is indefensible. They were willingly ignorant of the truth. Hendriksen suggests it was the result of envy (cf. Matt 27:18). "They felt that they were beginning to lose their following and this they were unable to endure."²

The Refutation by Jesus (25-30)

εἰδὼς δὲ τὰς ἐνθυμήσεις αὐτῶν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Πᾶσα βασι-
 λεία μερισθεῖσα καθ' ἑαυτῆς ἐρημοῦται καὶ πᾶσα πόλις ἢ
 οἰκία μερισθεῖσα καθ' ἑαυτῆς οὐ στήσεται. (26) καὶ εἰ
 ὁ Σατανᾶς τὸν Σατανᾶν ἐκβάλλει, ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν ἐμερίσθη·
 πῶς οὖν σταθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ; (27) καὶ εἰ ἐγὼ ἐν
 Βεελζεβοῦλ ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια, οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν ἐν τίνι
 ἐκβάλλουσιν; διὰ τοῦτο αὐτοὶ κριταὶ ἔσονται ὑμῶν. (28)
 εἰ δὲ ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ ἐγὼ ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια, ἄρα ἔφ-
 θασεν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. (29) ἢ πῶς δύναται
 τις εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ καὶ τὰ σκεύη
 αὐτοῦ ἀρπάσαι, ἐὰν μὴ πρῶτον δῇσῃ τὸν ἰσχυρόν; καὶ τότε
 τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτοῦ διαρπάσει. (30) ὁ μὴ ὦν μετ' ἐμοῦ κατ'
 ἐμοῦ ἔστιν, καὶ ὁ μὴ συνάγων μετ' ἐμοῦ σκορπίζει.

Textual Variants

There are four variants in verse 25, but they basi-
 cally involve two points. Is the participle εἰδὼς or ἰδὼν,
 and is ὁ Ἰησοῦς part of the original or an addition? The
 overwhelming weight of external evidence favors εἰδὼς, though
 admittedly ἰδὼν is the more difficult reading. The differ-
 ence between them is probably not significant since Matthew

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 253; Hendriksen, Matthew,
 p. 468; H. Benedict Green, The Gospel According to Matthew,
 The New Clarendon Bible, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford: At
 the University, 1975), p. 126.

²Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 524.

uses ἰδών in an identical phrase in 9:4. In both English and Greek, "to see" can be used in the metaphorical sense of "to know" or "to understand."¹ Ὁ Ἰησοῦς is probably an addition; it is difficult to explain why it would have been omitted from p²¹ N*,^{b,c} B D 892* it^{d,k} syr^{e,s} cop^{b,s} Chrysostom.² However, it is clear from the context that it was Jesus who knew their thoughts.

Verse 27 contains the same sort of variation relative to Beelzebul as in verse 24. In this verse βεελζεβοὺλ is also the correct reading.³ The last four words in verse 27 are transposed in some manuscripts, but the meaning of the verse is not affected.

In place of ἀπάσαι in verse 29, there is strong attestation for the reading διαρπάσαι (N C² D L Θ f¹³ Byz). This reading has as strong external support as ἀπάσαι (B C* N W f¹ 892 1424 al). In relation to internal evidence, ἀπάσαι is probably to be preferred, for one can understand the tendency to harmonize it with διαρπάσει at the end of the verse. Also, if διαρπάσαι were original, there does not seem to be any reason for the change. In any case, the meaning of the verse is not greatly affected since both

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 223, note 4; McNeile, Matthew, p. 175.

²Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), pp. 31-32 [hereafter cited as UBSC].

³See above, pp. 53-55.

words have similar meanings.¹

Finally, in verse 30 the addition of με after σκορπίζει in two manuscripts (N 33) is clearly not original. It probably was added in order to supply an object for σκορπίζει which is normally a transitive verb.²

Verse 25

Jesus begins His refutation of the charge made by the Pharisees with a reductio ad absurdum in verses 25 and 26, showing how absurd it was to suggest that He was casting out demons by Beelzebul.³ Although the mention of the Pharisees' "thoughts" has been interpreted to mean that what they said in verse 24 was said within themselves,⁴ this is probably not the case since verse 24 gives no hint that the Pharisees were speaking only to themselves. More likely, they did not say anything in Jesus' presence, but spoke to the crowd when He was not around.⁵ The δέ at the beginning

¹Although McNeile (Matthew, p. 177) suggests that the words are interchangeable, it is more likely that the addition of δὲ gives some intensification to the verb ("thoroughly plunder"). BAGD, p. 188; Broadus, Matthew, p. 270.

²UBSC, p. 32.

³Francis W. Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew (San Francisco: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1981), p. 278.

⁴Gundry, Matthew, p. 233.

⁵Henry Alford, The Greek Testament, rev. Everett F. Harrison, 4 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 1:128. This would explain why Jesus "called them to Himself" in Mark's account (3:23).

of this verse is adversative, as it was in verse 24, contrasting Jesus with the Pharisees: "But because¹ He knew their thoughts, he said to them."

The essence of Jesus' argument is that any kingdom, city, or household which develops internal strife will destroy itself. Jesus' statement is proverbial; it is commonly true. He is not making an absolute pronouncement about every literal kingdom, city, or household, but only stating what is generally true. Verse 25 is the major premise in Jesus' argument.²

Verse 26

Verse 26a is the minor premise in Jesus' argument: "And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself." It is stated in the form of a first class condition. This does not, of course, in any way imply that it is in fact true that "Satan casts out Satan" nor even that Jesus believed it to be true, but only that if it were true, then the consequences of the apodosis ("he is divided against himself") would follow.³ The aorist tense of ἐμπερίσθη is

¹Εἰδώς could be causal or attendant circumstance as in the NIV ("Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them").

²Lenski, Matthew, p. 477.

³Robertson's discussion is excellent at this point (RG, p. 1008). The use of the word "real" by scholars such as Zerwick (Biblical Greek, trans. Joseph Smith [Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963], pp. 103-04) to describe this condition should be avoided. See James L. Boyer, "First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" GTJ 2 (Spring 1981):77-82.

probably to be explained as an ingressive aorist, "he is beginning to be divided against himself."¹ If Satan were casting out himself, then it would be the beginning of a policy that would end with the total destruction of his kingdom. Jesus can speak of Satan casting out Satan instead of Satan casting out demons because the former is for all practical purposes the same as the latter since the demons are doing Satan's work. Of course, Satan (ὁ Σατανᾶς) is the Hebrew name for the well-known archenemy of God in the Old Testament (Job 1:6-13; 2:1-7; Zech 3:1-2), who is also called "the devil" (διάβολος²) in the New Testament. Jesus' argument assumes the equation, Satan equals Beelzebul.³ It cannot be argued that Jesus' premise is invalid on the assumption that Satan might allow one expulsion to somehow further his cause, for this expulsion was not an isolated case; Jesus expelled all demons with whom He came in contact.⁴

The conclusion (οὕν) of Jesus' argument is stated in the form of a rhetorical question in 26b: "How then shall his kingdom stand."⁵ Jesus has shown the utter

¹Randolph O. Yeager, The Renaissance New Testament, 9 vols. (Bowling Green, Kentucky: Renaissance Press, 1976--), 2:291. Another possible explanation is offered by Robertson (RG, pp. 846-47).

²Διάβολος is the normal translation of יְהוֹשָׁפָט in the LXX (BAGD, p. 182).

³See above, pp. 64-65.

⁴Kent, "Matthew," p. 950; Lenski, Matthew, pp. 477-78.

⁵RG, p. 876.

absurdity of the Pharisees' charge. If Jesus is casting out demons by Beelzebul, then Satan is fighting against himself. No one can be expected to believe that Satan is so foolish. In truth Jesus and Satan are on opposite sides of the fence; they are locked in mortal combat with one another. The Pharisees cannot have acted out of ignorance. They were driven to make this ridiculous charge out of desperation to explain the miracle and, at the same time, to slander and ridicule Jesus.

Verse 27

Jesus continues (καί) His refutation of the charge made by the Pharisees in verse 24 by demonstrating that, not only is it absurd (vv. 25-26), it is also inconsistent.¹ Jesus' argument is developed ad hominem.² As in the previous verse, it is stated as a first class condition, which says nothing about the reality of Jesus' statement, but only that if it were true that Jesus were casting out demons by Beelzebul, then the apodosis ("by whom do your sons cast them out?") would follow.³ Thus Jesus presents the Pharisees with a dilemma. If they allow the exorcisms of their "sons," how can they oppose those of Jesus? If Jesus is able to

¹Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 525.

²Floyd V. Filson, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, 2nd ed., HNTC, ed. Henry Chadwick (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1971), p. 149.

³See above, p. 68.

perform exorcisms only because he is in league with Satan, what does that say for their "sons"?

The meaning of οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν is not easy to determine. It cannot refer to the apostles of Jesus as Chrysostom, Augustine, and other early Fathers believed.¹ It is difficult to believe that Jesus would ever call His disciples, "your sons." There is certainly no evidence for such a usage anywhere else in Scripture. More important is the fact that such an identification would destroy Jesus' argument. This interpretation may have arisen because of an unwillingness to admit that Jewish exorcists were actually casting out demons. It fails to recognize that the form of Jesus' argument (first class condition) in no way affirms that He Himself believed the exorcisms were genuine.² It makes no difference to Jesus' argument (ad hominem) whether the Jews performed genuine exorcisms or not. "The fact that the Pharisees claimed it made the argument effective."³ That exorcisms were an accepted practice among Jews is clear from the New Testament (cf. Luke 9:49 and Acts 19:13) and other

¹Chrysostom The Gospel of Matthew 41.2, in NPNF, 10:265; Augustine Sermons on New Testament Lessons 21.5, in NPNF, 6:318. According to Augustine, the apostles were the "sons" of the Pharisees in the sense that the apostles were children of the Jewish people.

²Broadus, Matthew, p. 269.

³Kent, "Matthew," p. 950. Alford unfortunately misses this point and thus says that Jesus' argument demanded real exorcisms on the part of the Jews (Greek Testament, 1:129).

sources.¹

Although it is possible that the "sons" of the Pharisees could be their literal offspring as Plummer believes,² most commentators rightly suggest that it is either a reference to the disciples of the Pharisees³ or their associates⁴ as in the Old Testament expression "sons of the prophets." Whatever may be the exact nuance, it has no effect upon Jesus' argument. If the Pharisees insist that Jesus' exorcisms are possible only because He is in league with Beelzebul, they will be forced to acknowledge that their "sons" are performing their exorcisms by means of the same

¹See Josephus Ant. 8.2.5, Wars 7.6.3; Tob 8:2-3; and Justin Martyr Dialogue 85. For a good survey of the subject see ISBE, 1979 ed., s.v. "Exorcism," by D. E. Aune, 2:242-45.

²Plummer, Matthew, p. 177.

³E.g. Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, p. 58; A. Carr, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1908), p. 106; J. C. Fenton, Saint Matthew, Westminster Pelican Commentaries, ed., D. E. Nineham (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 198; Filson, Matthew, p. 149; Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 525; Hill, Matthew, p. 216; Frank Stagg, "Matthew," in vol. 8 of The Broadman Bible Commentary, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), p. 148; BAGD, p. 833.

⁴A. B. Bruce, Matthew, p. 187; John Gill, An Exposition of the New Testament, 2 vols. (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1852), 1:108; Sherman E. Johnson and George A. Buttrick, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," in vol. 7 of IB, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1951), p. 398; Kent, "Matthew," p. 950; Lenski, Matthew, p. 478; McKenzie, "Matthew," p. 85; T. W. Manson, The Sayings of Jesus, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), p. 86; Meyer, Matthew, p. 240.

collusion. And, if the Pharisees do that, their "sons" will be their "judges."

The expression "they shall be your judges" has prompted a number of widely different interpretations. Danker suggests that κριτής means "instructor," but there is no evidence for such a meaning.¹ It is possible that Jesus has reference to a literal eschatological judgment.² However, it is more likely that "they shall be your judges" is a Jewish expression with κριτής denoting a person whose conduct is made the standard for judging someone else and convicting that one of wrong.³ Thus the "sons" of the Pharisees become the standard for judging the Pharisees. Jesus has shown that if the Pharisees want to insist that He is able to cast out demons because He is in league with Satan, they will also be forced to say the same thing about their

¹Frederick W. Danker, Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on the Third Gospel (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1972), p. 138. The lexicons never suggest that κριτής ever means "instructor." See e.g. BAGD, p. 453; LSJ, p. 997.

²I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 475; F. Godet, A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, trans. E. W. Shadders and M. D. Cusin, 2nd ed. (New York: I. K. Funk and Co., 1881), p. 322.

³TDNT, s.v. "κρίνω," by Friedrich Büchsel and Volkm. Hertrich, 3:943; Joseph H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, n.d.), p. 362; W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, 4 vols. in one, reprint ed. (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), 2:280.

"sons." Since the Pharisees would agree that this is untrue with respect to their own "sons," they are thus judged to be wrong in their statement.

By arguing ad hominem, Jesus has shown that the charge of the Pharisees is totally inconsistent. If they say that He casts out demons by Beelzebul, they must say the same thing about their "sons." If they deny this is true of their "sons," then they must admit it cannot be true of Jesus. Therefore the Pharisees will be forced to agree that their charge was incorrect.

Verse 28

The false charge of the Pharisees (vv. 24 and 27) only obscures the truth. The actual facts are contrary (δὲ) to what they were saying. The logical and true explanation which should have been drawn by the Pharisees was that Jesus was casting out demons by the Spirit of God. To emphasize this fact, ἐν πνεύματι Θεοῦ is placed at the beginning of the sentence. The truth that Jesus is casting out demons is also put in the form of a first class condition, but here the assumption is true. Jesus' exorcisms are genuine; the Pharisees never denied that. If they are genuine, then the only two options are that they are performed with the help of God or Satan.¹ Since Jesus has shown that a connection with Satan is impossible (vv. 25-27), the only conclusion

¹Lenski, Matthew, p. 479.

which can be reached is that He is casting out demons "by the Spirit of God."

Because πνεύματι is anarthrous, it has been argued that the reference is not to the third person of the Trinity but to "a divine spirit."¹ However, this interpretation is incorrect for a number of reasons. First, objects of prepositions may be definite though they are anarthrous.² Second, nouns in regimen usually both have the article or both are anarthrous.³ If the anarthrous noun in the genitive is definite, the noun it modifies is definite.⁴ Thus πνεύματι is definite because θεοῦ is definite. Third, it is clear from the context that the πνεύματι θεοῦ by whom Jesus was casting out demons is the same Spirit whom Jesus speaks of being blasphemed in verses 31 and 32, and that Spirit is τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, the third person of the Trinity.

The conclusion which the Pharisees should have inferred (ἀπα⁵) from the fact that Jesus is casting out demons by the Spirit of God is that "the kingdom of God has come upon" them. The meaning of ἐφθασεν has been the subject of a good deal of debate, chiefly in connection with C. H.

¹E.g. Yeager, Renaissance New Testament, 2:295.

²BDF, p. 133; MHT, 3:179; RG, p. 791.

³MHT, 3:180.

⁴BDF, p. 135; RG, p. 791; Wallace, "Selected Notes," p. 93; Zerwick, Biblical Greek, p. 59.

⁵BAGD, p. 103.

Dodd's realized eschatology.¹ Matthew 12:28 was one of the central proofs for Dodd's position that the kingdom of God was fully realized in the ministry of Jesus.² The verb $\varphi\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega$ is used seven times in the New Testament. Once it has its normal classical meaning of "come before" or "precede" (1 Thess 4:15), and the rest of the time it means simply "arrive" or "come" (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20; Rom 9:31; 2 Cor 10:14; Phil 3:16; 1 Thess 2:16).³ Some commentators argue for an additional idea of suddenness or unexpectedness in verse 28. That is, the kingdom of God has come suddenly or unexpectedly; it is taking the Pharisees by surprise.⁴ Whether or not this additional sense is warranted is unclear.⁵ What is clear is that dispensationalists have not paid enough attention to this verse.⁶ The fact that Jesus is casting

¹For a good survey of the discussion of this issue, see Robert F. Berkey, "EFTIZEIN, $\Phi\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota\text{N}$, and Realized Eschatology," JBL 82 (June 1963):173-87.

²Ibid., p. 178.

³BAGD, pp. 856-57; TDNT, s.v. " $\varphi\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega$, $\pi\rho\omicron\varphi\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega$," by Gottfried Fitzer, 9:90.

⁴Carr, Matthew, p. 106; Hobbs, Matthew, p. 151; John P. Lange, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. John P. Lange, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 224; McKenzie, "Matthew," 2:85.

⁵Thayer (Lexicon, p. 652) and BAGD (p. 856) seem to suggest that such a meaning is possible.

⁶Gaebelein sees the verse as teaching only that the king of the kingdom is present (Matthew, p. 247). McClain interprets it as teaching no more than that the kingdom was "impending" (The Greatness of the Kingdom [Chicago: Moody Press, 1959], p. 314). Pentecost seems to interpret the

out demons by the Spirit of God means that in some sense the kingdom of God has come. The aorist tense of ἐφθασεν is best understood as referring to something that has just happened.¹ Just because the kingdom has in some sense arrived does not deny that there still awaits a literal eschatological kingdom. As Ladd has shown, Jesus can speak of the kingdom as both present and future.²

This is the first occurrence in Matthew's Gospel of the "kingdom of God," which he uses only three other times (19:24; 21:31,43). His usual expression is "kingdom of heaven" (32 times). Although a distinction is sometimes drawn between the two, they seem to be speaking of the same

verse similarly (Words and Works of Jesus, p. 206 and Things to Come [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958], pp. 450-51). Ryrie incorrectly says the verse is dealing with the eternal kingdom (Biblical Theology of the New Testament [Chicago: Moody Press, 1959], p. 76).

¹MHT, 1:140; RG, p. 842.

²George E. Ladd, Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), pp. 63-98; The Gospel of the Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), pp. 24-51; The Presence of the Future (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 122-217; Theology, pp. 57-69. David L. Turner offers a helpful critique:

"It is George Ladd, however, who has paid the most attention to the presence of the kingdom. In this writer's opinion he has done more justice to it than McClain. However, one need not accept all of Ladd's conclusions regarding Israel and the church in giving him credit for a proper emphasis of the 'presence of the future.' Ladd errs in viewing the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed as not identical with the OT kingdom" ("C. H. Dodd and the Kingdom of God: The Validity of Realized Eschatology for Premillennialism" [Major Field Seminar, Grace Theological Seminary, 29 April 1981], pp. 28-29).

thing since parallel passages in Mark and Luke use "kingdom of God" in place of "kingdom of heaven," and Matthew himself uses them interchangeably in 19:23 and 24.¹ It may be that Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven" rather than "kingdom of God" in order to avoid any unnecessary offense to Jews who often used circumlocutions like "heaven" to refer to God (e.g. Dan 4:26; 1 Macc 3:50,60; 4:55; Luke 15:18,21).² Although it cannot be proven, Matthew may have used "kingdom of God" at this point in order to contrast with the previous reference to Satan's kingdom (v. 26) and to complement the reference to the Spirit of God (v. 28a).³

¹Some dispensationalists see a sharp distinction between the two terms. See e.g. Ryrie, Theology of the New Testament, pp. 75-77; Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), p. 49; John F. Walvoord, "The Kingdom of Heaven," BSac 124 (July-September 1967):195-205. For a refutation of this view by a dispensationalist and non-dispensationalist respectively, see Toussaint, Behold the King, pp. 65-68 and Ladd, Critical Questions, pp. 107-17. Some non-dispensationalists have also distinguished between the terms. Allen (A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, ICC, ed. S. R. Driver et al. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925], p. 135) and Plummer (Matthew, p. 177) believe that the kingdom of heaven always has an eschatological sense. However this distinction breaks down in Matt 19:23-24. For an even more elaborate but unconvincing attempt to distinguish the two terms, see W. Albright and C. S. Mann, Matthew, AB, ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1974), pp. 155-56.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 100; Guthrie, Theology, p. 409; New Bible Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. "Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven," by H. N. Ridderbos, p. 656.

³Gundry, Matthew, p. 235.

Verse 29

Some commentators connect this verse with the question of verse 26.¹ Although both questions begin with πῶς, there is really no logical connection between the two. Actually, this verse naturally follows verse 28 and is an illustration to make clear and reinforce what Jesus has said about His relationship to Satan. The conjunction ἢ means "or, look at it another way."² This other way of looking at the situation is by means of what may have been a proverb in Jesus' day: "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house" (NIV).³ Whether this is a proverb or not, it is an easily understood illustration. Satan is the strong man and his property (τὰ σκεύη) are those who are demon possessed. Because Jesus is stronger than Satan, He is able to enter his domain (οἶκόν) and free those who are under Satan's control, that is, "thoroughly plunder" (διαρπάσει)⁴ his house.

¹Johnson and Buttrick, "Matthew," p. 399; McNeile, Matthew, p. 176; Yeager, Renaissance New Testament, 2:297.

²Broadus, Matthew, p. 270; Carson, "Matthew," p. 290.

³Allen, Matthew, p. 135; Plummer, Matthew, p. 177. Similar expressions are found in Isa 49:24 and Pss. Sol. 5:4. Since this is a proverb or general truth, τοῦ (ἰσχυροῦ) is generic and thus should be translated "a strong man" (NIV), not "the strong man" (NASB). See RG, p. 757 and Marshall, Luke, p. 477.

⁴BAGD, p. 188; Broadus, Matthew, p. 270.

However, in order to do this Jesus must first bind Satan.

Binding is of course a metaphor and designates in some real sense a victory over Satan so that his power is curbed. Sometimes the metaphorical nature of the idiom is not recognized, and it is thought that the saying must mean that Satan is rendered completely powerless. However, Satan continues to be active; he snatches away the word of the Kingdom when it does not find real acceptance among men (Matt 13:19); he was able to speak through Peter (Mark 8:33); he entered into Judas (Luke 22:3); and he wanted also to take possession of Peter (Luke 22:31). . . . Satan is not powerless but his power has been broken. . . . The whole mission of Jesus, including his words, deeds, death, and resurrection, constituted an initial defeat of satanic power that makes the final outcome and triumph of God's Kingdom certain. "Every occasion in which Jesus drives out an evil spirit is an anticipation of the hour in which Satan will be visibly robbed of his power. The victories over his instruments are a foretaste of the eschaton."¹

Contrary to what some have said, there is a sense in which Satan is bound and his kingdom invaded.² This is proven by Jesus' power over demons. This binding of Satan by Jesus is not the same as Revelation 20:3, which is the complete restraining of Satan before the millennium so that he is powerless during that period. Jesus' victory over Satan during His earthly ministry is only a foretaste of that future complete victory over Satan at the commencement of the millennial kingdom.³ Jesus is not in league with Satan as the Pharisees charge; Satan is His enemy with

¹Ladd, Theology, p. 66.

²E.g. Toussaint says: "Jesus does not say He has bound Satan or is even in the process of doing so" (Matthew, p. 164).

³Amillennialists incorrectly equate Matt 12:29 with Rev 20:3. See e.g. Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 527.

whom He is locked in combat.

Verse 30

Jesus concludes His refutation of the Pharisees' false charge with a general warning. In the great struggle between Christ and Satan there can be no neutrality. There are only two sides, two kingdoms, with no neutral ground. Men are either with Jesus or they are with Satan; they are part of the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness. Although this saying may have served as a rebuke to the Pharisees, it was probably directed more as a warning to the questioning crowd which was present (cf. v. 23).¹ It is sometimes suggested that Jesus makes a contradictory statement in Mark 9:40: "For he who is not against us is for us."² However, as McNeile has demonstrated, they are not contradictory if one understands to whom they were spoken.³ Matthew 12:30 was directed to the indifferent about themselves, while Mark 9:40 was directed to Jesus' disciples about someone else. It is difficult to decide whether the image conveyed by "gather" and "scatters" has reference to grain or sheep since *συνάγω* is found in contexts dealing

¹Carr understands Jesus to mean that "neutrality is impossible in the Christian life" (Matthew, p. 107). But that is not the emphasis of Jesus' statement. Christians are not neutral; they are already "with Him." Jesus' statement is directed toward the uncommitted, that is, unbelievers.

²E.g. Johnson and Buttrick, "Matthew," p. 399.

³McNeile, Matthew, p. 177.

with the former (Matt 3:12; 6:26) and σκοπίζει with the latter (John 10:12). Jesus' meaning would be the same in either case.

The Charge of Blasphemy (31-32)

Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, πᾶσα ἁμαρτία καὶ βλασφημία ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἡ δὲ τοῦ πνεύματος βλασφημία οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται. (32) καὶ ὃς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ ὃς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι.

Textual Variants

Before τοῖς ἀνθρώποις in verse 31, B and a few other witnesses add ὑμῖν ("you men") which is probably due to a scribal error.¹ At the end of verse 31 there is excellent support for the addition of the words τοῖς ἀνθρώποις (C D L W Θ 0271 f¹³ Byz it sy^{ph}). However, it is difficult to explain their omission from κ B f¹ 892 1424 pc aur k vg sa bo. There is apparently no reason for deliberately omitting them since they are clearly implied by the context. They are more likely a scribal addition introduced because of their appearance with ἀφεθήσεται earlier in the verse.²

In verse 32 before the first ἀφεθήσεται, B* has οὐκ, making the verse read, "And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall not be forgiven him."

¹UBSC, p. 32.

²Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 187.

This is certainly a scribal error.¹ In place of the original οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται, N* has a slightly stronger expression, οὐ μὴ ἀφεθήσεται. B also has the οὐ μὴ but has changed the future ἀφεθήσεται to the aorist subjunctive ἀφεθῇ, which is the more normal tense and mood in οὐ μὴ constructions.²

Verse 31

Διὰ τοῦτο connects this verse not only with verse 30 but with the whole preceding argument.³ Even without the asseverative particle ἀμήν, the next two words, λέγω ὑμῖν, are used by Jesus to call special attention to what follows as being important and certainly true (cf. Matt 5:20, 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 6:25, etc.).⁴ Gundry argues that by his use of διὰ τοῦτο, Matthew "identifies the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus exorcises demons by means of Satanic power with the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit."⁵ Although it is true that διὰ τοῦτο indicates Jesus is inferring something from the previous verses, there is disagreement over the question of whether the Pharisees actually

¹UBSC, p. 32.

²Robertson notes that of the 100 examples of οὐ μὴ in the New Testament, 86 are with the aorist subjunctive and 14 with the future indicative (RG, p. 854). Manuscripts vary greatly between the two tenses (RG, p. 874).

³Broadus, Matthew, p. 271; Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 189; Gundry, Matthew, p. 237; Meyer, Matthew, p. 241.

⁴Broadus, Matthew, p. 100; Carson, "Matthew," p. 291.

⁵Gundry, Matthew, p. 237.

committed the sin. Some commentators agree with Gundry that the Pharisees actually blasphemed the Holy Spirit.¹ Another group argues just the opposite, that they did not commit the sin.² Finally, others believe that text is unclear about the question.³ Those who argue that Jesus did not accuse the Pharisees of actually committing the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit understand verse 31 as only a warning to them that they were close to it. However, it is questionable if this verse can be understood as only a warning. While it may be granted that just the mention of an unpardonable sin could in itself be a warning, this verse is mainly concerned with the distinction between blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is unpardonable, and all other forms of sin and blasphemy, which are pardonable. If, in fact, verse 31 is only a warning to the Pharisees that they are dangerously close to committing the sin, Jesus certainly leaves them in the dark as to how much further they would have to go in order to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. While it may not be possible to be as dogmatic about the significance of $\delta\iota\alpha\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron$ as is Gundry, it does appear, as

¹Allen, Matthew, p. 136; Meyer, Matthew, p. 242; Plummer, Matthew, p. 178; Toussaint, Matthew, p. 165.

²Suzanne de Dietrich, The Gospel According to Matthew, trans. Donald G. Miller, The Layman's Bible Commentary, ed. Balmer H. Kelly (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1961), p. 77; Lange, "Matthew," p. 224.

³Alford, The Greek Testament, 1:130; Kent, "Matthew," p. 950.

Broadus has wisely noted, that there is at the least a strong implication that the accusation of the Pharisees was an instance of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.¹

Therefore, having rebuked the Pharisees and warned the indifferent crowd in verse 30, Jesus appears to formally charge the Pharisees in verse 31 by implying that they were guilty of the most serious sin of all, the blasphemy against the Spirit. Ultimately, however, the question of whether or not the Pharisees were guilty of the unpardonable sin is inexorably tied to the nature of the sin itself. Thus a final answer to this question must await the later, more detailed discussion of the sin itself.

As was suggested above, verse 31 draws a distinction between sin in general and a very specific sin, the blasphemy against² the Holy Spirit. The addition of the words "and blasphemy" to those sins which will be forgiven serves to make even more specific the nature of the sin which will not be forgiven. "Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven³ men⁴" except for one specific form of blasphemy, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Of course it goes almost without saying that forgiveness for "any sin and

¹Broadus, Matthew, p. 271.

²Clearly τοῦ πνεύματος is an objective genitive. See RG, p. 500. Cf. also κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος in v. 32.

³Ἀφεθήσεται may be a predictive future (RG, p. 873).

⁴The article τοῖς with ἀνθρώποις is generic, designating men as a class.

blasphemy" is limited by the conditions of repentance etc., laid down elsewhere in Scripture.

The Greek noun βλασφημία and the verb βλασφημέω have a wider field of meaning than the English term "blasphemy," which is generally restricted to speech, writing, or action concerning God.¹ In classical Greek, βλασφημία means "abusive speech," which may be directed toward God or men.² In the LXX the word group is only used with reference to God as its object.³ Here it represents a "trait more execrable, contemptible, and sacrilegious."⁴ Both the weaker classical sense of slanderous language addressed to men and the more serious offense toward God appear in the New Testament.⁵ In its first occurrence in verse 31 ("any sin and blasphemy"), βλασφημία could be used in its more general sense of "abusive speech," but more probably it has reference to the narrower technical sense of extreme slander directed toward God and thus is practically synonymous with our English word "blasphemy."⁶ In support of

¹Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. "blasphemy."

²TDNT, s.v. "βλασφημέω," by Hebert W. Beyer, 1:621.

³Ibid.

⁴Nigel Turner, Christian Words (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1980), p. 46.

⁵Ibid.; New Bible Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. "Blasphemy," by Ralph P. Martin, p. 144.

⁶Benjamin B. Warfield, "Misconception of Jesus,

this interpretation is the fact that the narrow sense of the LXX seems to prevail in the Gospels. Blasphemy is covered by the word "sin," but it is added ("sin and blasphemy") to insure that the unpardonable sin is equated with only a very specific form of blasphemy, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. As, Berkouwer has keenly observed, this distinction demonstrates that the concept of blasphemy in and of itself is not the characteristic feature of the unpardonable sin.¹ Blasphemy certainly is involved, but it is the nature of that blasphemy which holds the key to understanding the sin.

Verse 32

The purpose of verse 32 has been variously explained as, among other things, either a fuller restatement of verse 31 or an explanation of it.² It will be best to delay discussion of this point until the meaning of the verse is ascertained.

To "speak a word against" the Son of Man is a

and Blasphemy of the Son of Man," Princeton Theological Review 12 (July 1914):399.

¹Berkouwer, Sin, p. 328. Therefore, a detailed study of the word βλασφημία will not provide many clues to unlock the mystery of the sin. Cf. Robert Arend ("The Unpardonable Sin in the Synoptic Gospels," M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1970) who devotes an entire chapter to the study of the concept of blasphemy (pp. 4-28).

²For the former, see Lenski, Matthew, p. 483 and Yeager, Renaissance New Testament, 2:303. For the latter, see Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 189.

Semitism which is equivalent to blasphemy against the Son of Man.¹ This is evident from its usage in the next clause where to "speak against" the Holy Spirit is obviously equal to "blasphemy against the Spirit" in verse 31.²

Verse 32 presents a major interpretive problem. Why is blasphemy against the Son of Man a forgivable sin and not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? It would seem to be obvious that by the words τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου Jesus is referring to the third member of the Trinity. However, Barnes boldly suggests that there is "no evidence" that the phrase refers to the third member of the Trinity but instead refers to the divine nature of Christ.³ This idea is patently false. There is, of course, no parallel in the New Testament where the words πνεῦμα ἁγίου refer to the divine nature of Christ. In every instance, these words always have reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. There are also some interpreters who for various reasons believe that it would have been impossible for Jesus to draw such a distinction between members of the

¹Matthew Black, An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 195; BAGD, p. 477.

²Cf. also Luke 12:10. There is no difference between ὅς ἐάν εἴπῃ in the first clause and ὅς (δ') ἂν εἴπῃ in the second. Ἐάν and ἂν are interchangeable. See James L. Boyer, "Other Conditional Elements in New Testament Greek," GTJ 4 (Fall 1983):183-84.

³Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, p. 59. This was also the view of Athanasius. See above, pp. 19-20.

Godhead as the text seems to suggest by singling out the Holy Spirit. According to this view, such distinctions were unknown at this point in redemptive history.¹ But Warfield has wisely noted that

we must not be stumbled by the indications of a Trinitarian background in Jesus' speech. Such indications pervade His speech in much greater measure than is commonly recognized. They are present, indeed, in all the expressions of His divine self-consciousness, and we should not forget that it is in His words that the Trinitarian formula finds its most precise enunciation in the New Testament (Matt 28:19).²

The υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is one of the most important messianic designations in the Gospels, where it occurs eighty-one times, sixty-nine in the synoptics.³ In the Gospels it is found only on the lips of Jesus.⁴ The literature on the Son of Man is enormous; it is simply beyond the scope of this dissertation to enter into an extended discussion of the title. The best recent conservative treatments have come from Ladd, Guthrie, and Carson.⁵ From the second century up to and including modern times, the most common interpretation sought to explain the Son of

¹E.g. Barclay, Matthew, p. 43.

²Warfield, "Misconception of Jesus," p. 391.

³Carson, "Matthew," p. 209.

⁴Luke 24:7 and John 12:34 are not really exceptions since they are both simply quotations of Jesus' own words.

⁵Ladd, Theology, pp. 145-58; Guthrie, Theology, pp. 270-91; Carson, "Matthew," pp. 209-13. Their discussions make reference to all the important books and articles on this subject.

Man by contrasting it with the Son of God. The former designated Jesus in His humanity and the latter in His deity. Carson has observed that this view "is not so much wrong as simplistic."¹

There is a general consensus among conservative scholars that the background for the Son of Man is to be primarily found in Daniel 7. Guthrie has conveniently summarized this view:

The Daniel passage is the main pre-Christian passage which furnishes a clue to the meaning of the phrase Son of Man on the lips of Jesus. Since this passage links suffering and glory, it is highly probable that Jesus had this combination in mind in his own use of the title.

Since the Daniel passage was later interpreted in a messianic way, it is not improbable that Jesus used it with some understanding of his messianic office, while its veiled character would be suitable to his present purpose. Indeed, it is highly probable that the ambiguity of the title was part of the reason for its use.²

As Guthrie noted, Jesus probably chose the expression because it was ambiguous; "it could conceal as well as reveal."³

By designating himself the Son of Man, Jesus claimed to be the Messiah; but by the way in which he used the term, he indicated that his messiahship was of a very different order from that which was popularly expected. The "Son of Man" permitted him to lay claim to messianic dignity but to interpret that messianic office in his own way.⁴

The occurrences of the expression "Son of Man" in

¹Carson, "Matthew," p. 213.

²Guthrie, Theology, p. 279.

³Carson, "Matthew," p. 212.

⁴Ladd, Theology, p. 158.

the synoptics fall into three distinct categories: (1) the apocalyptic Son of Man who comes at the end of the age; (2) the suffering and dying Son of Man; and (3) the earthly Son of Man, engaged in a number of present ministries.¹ Matthew 12:32 belongs to the third category.²

It should not be thought that the reason Jesus distinguishes between Himself and the Holy Spirit with reference to blasphemy has anything to do with any intrinsic difference between their two persons. If by the expression "Son of Man" Jesus meant to say no more than that He was an ordinary man as McNeile suggests, verse 32 is tautology, or, at the least, a strange anticlimax since that ground had already been covered in verse 31.³ Son of Man is a title of dignity. "That it is possible to blaspheme the Son of Man, itself means that the Son of Man is divine."⁴ Verse 32 advances the thought of verse 31, bringing it to a sharper point. Blasphemy against the Son of Man is the extremity of blasphemy which can be forgiven. Verse 32 also contrasts the greatest of forgivable sins, blasphemy against the Son of Man, with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, showing that the latter is even more heinous than

¹See Ladd (Theology, pp. 149-51) for a typical breakdown of the passages.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 210; Guthrie, Theology, p. 275; Ladd, Theology, p. 155.

³McNeile, Matthew, p. 178.

⁴Warfield, "Misconception of Jesus," p. 397.

the former.¹ The effect of the whole verse is to single out the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as the only sin which will never be forgiven.

It can now be seen that the καί at the beginning of verse 32 serves to advance the argument of verse 31.

What follows is not merely an illustration of the general principle or a consequence drawn from it. The "and" has an ascensive force and introduces what is in effect a climax. . . . It is not merely an instance which is adduced; but the instance, which will illustrate above every other instance the incredible reach of forgiveness that is extended, and which will therefore supply the best background up against which may be thrown the heinousness of blasphemy against the Spirit which cannot be forgiven.²

If the reason for distinguishing between blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and blasphemy against the Son of Man has nothing to do with a distinction between the intrinsic dignity of the two persons, what then is the reason? One might reasonably ask why Jesus would even draw a distinction between Himself and the Holy Spirit. How would it be possible to distinguish between blasphemy against the Son of Man and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit since it was by the power of the Spirit that Jesus was casting out demons?³ Admittedly, in the present incident it would

¹Warfield, "Misconception of Jesus," p. 399.

²Ibid., p. 400.

³Some think Jesus never made this distinction. See e.g. Allen, *Matthew*, p. 137 and McNeile, *Matthew*, p. 178. To support this view one has to hold that Matthew erred or he copied a source (Q) which erred. For a discussion of this problem, see below pp. 113-14. This dissertation presumes the truthfulness of Matthew's account.

be impossible to distinguish between the two because the Pharisees had blasphemed both the Son of Man and the Holy Spirit. However, not everything Jesus said or did involved the miraculous display of the Spirit's power, as was true of this exorcism. In His general teaching ministry, it would be possible to blaspheme Jesus and not the Holy Spirit.¹ The Son of Man refers to the Messiah in His humiliation, a man who could easily be misunderstood and at whom people might easily take offense (cf. Matt 11:6). This was deplorable, but it was forgivable. The reason why the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable is ultimately related to the nature of the sin itself, and this entire question will be taken up in chapter seven of this dissertation.

The expression "in this age or in the age to come" is commonly found in Jewish apocalyptic and Rabbinic literature and refers to the present age and to the messianic age.² Here the phrase is simply a dramatic way of saying "never" and corresponds to Mark's "never has forgiveness" (3:29).³ Contrary to what some interpreters have suggested, there is no implication in this phrase of forgiveness for

¹Guthrie, Theology, p. 521.

²TDNT, s.v. "αἰών, αἰώνιος," by Hermann Sasse, 1:206-207; Hill, Matthew, p. 218.

³Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, p. 59; Broadus, Matthew, p. 273; Carson, "Matthew," p. 292; Gundry, Matthew, p. 238; Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 528; Hill, Matthew, p. 218; McNeile, Matthew, p. 178; Plummer, Matthew, p. 180.

sins at some point in the future.¹ The point of the expression is to communicate in the very strongest way the absolute unforgivability of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The expression is not essential to the meaning of the verse, as a comparison with Luke 12:10 will show.² There Jesus says the same thing as He does in Matthew 12:32 using almost identical language yet He omits "in this age or in the age to come." Jesus included the phrase in Matthew in order to strengthen the "not" (οὐκ) so as to exhaust any possibility of forgiveness.

Summary

Matthew's account opens with the healing of a demon-possessed man by Jesus. This miracle so amazed the crowd that they began to entertain the idea that Jesus might be the Messiah. The Pharisees were extremely distressed by the increasing popularity of Jesus. They apparently were afraid they might lose their hold on the people. They may have also been jealous of His ability to perform such extraordinary miracles. Since it was impossible for them to deny the reality of the miracle, the Pharisees sought to discredit Jesus by repeating a charge which they had made previously (9:34): "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." It is not recorded whether the Pharisees

¹E.g. de Dietrich, Matthew, p. 77 and Ellicott, "Matthew," p. 73.

²See below, p. 132.

made reference to Beelzebul on this earlier occasion, but it seems likely since Jesus refers to such a charge in 10:25. The accusation of the Pharisees amounted to saying that Jesus was in league with Satan himself.

Jesus chose to refute the false charge of the Pharisees by first showing how utterly absurd it was. It is ludicrous to imagine that Satan would be casting out his own demons. The Pharisees cannot claim that they made a mistake, that they acted out of ignorance. They knowingly and deliberately rejected the truth for a lie. Next Jesus pointed to the inconsistency of the Pharisees' accusation against Him. They cannot logically sanction the exorcisms of their "sons" and at the same time oppose those of Jesus. If the Pharisees had been truthful, they would have had to admit that He was casting out demons by the Spirit of God. Jesus was not in league with Satan; on the contrary, His exorcisms demonstrated that there was a sense in which He was "binding" Satan. Jesus ends His refutation of the false accusation made by the Pharisees with a general warning to the indifferent crowd.

Although not conclusive, there is a strong implication that in verses 31 and 32, Jesus formally charged the Pharisees with having committed the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit when they accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebul. In verse 31 Jesus first makes a general statement which is designed to demonstrate the possibility of

forgiveness for all sins that men commit, even the more serious sin of blasphemy. However, there is one exception, one sin for which there is no forgiveness possible. That sin, of course, is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In verse 32 Jesus elaborates upon the seriousness of this sin by comparing it with sin against Himself. Even the grave sin of blaspheming the Son of Man is not outside the possibility of God's forgiveness, but there is no hope for one who commits the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER IV

EXEGESIS OF MARK 3:22-30

Mark 3:22-30 is a description of the same incident described in Matthew 12:22-32. It takes place in the later stages of Jesus' Galilean ministry.¹ There is, therefore, no need for a detailed analysis of the Markan passage in light of the previous chapter of this dissertation. Both passages can be easily harmonized, yet there are some important differences between them. This chapter will concentrate on those elements which are unique to Mark's account, especially those which will add to our understanding of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The Charge of the Scribes (22)

καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς οἱ ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων καταβάντες ἔλεγον ὅτι Βεελζεβοὺλ ἔχει καὶ ὅτι ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια.

Textual Variants

The only variant in verse 22 involves the spelling of Beelzebul. B has βεεζεβοὺλ while vg sy^{s,p} read Beelzebub. As was explained in the previous chapter, βεελζεβοὺλ is the

¹C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to Saint Mark, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary, ed. C. F. D Moule (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1972), p. 14. This point is universally accepted.

correct spelling.¹

Verse 22

The incident which precipitated the slanderous charge of the scribes, "He is possessed by Beelzebul and He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons," was the healing of the demoniac (Matt 12:22). Mark did not record this incident, possibly because he wished to contrast the reaction of Jesus' family² in verses 20 and 21, a section which is unique to Mark, with that of the scribes in verses 22-30. Lane believes that the connection between verses 20-21 and 22-30 is emphasized by Mark's formulation of the charges against Jesus in verses 21 and 30: "for they [his family] said, He is beside himself; for they [the scribes] said, He has an unclean spirit."³ If this is correct, then Mark probably conceived of verses 20-32 as one section.⁴ Thus, Mark is contrasting the well-meant, although misguided, interference of Jesus' family with the malicious and hostile

¹See above, pp. 53-55.

²There is some question about the meaning of οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ. The consensus of scholars believes the phrase refers to Jesus' relatives. See BAGD, p. 610; BDF, p. 124; MHT, 1:106, 3:273; RG, p. 614; and C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek, 2nd ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 52.

³William L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, NICNT, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 137.

⁴Verses 20-32 are taken as one section by UBS³ and the NASB while NA²⁶ and the NIV make verses 20-21 a separate paragraph.

calumny of His enemies.¹

In Matthew it is the Pharisees who bring the blasphemous charge against Jesus, but here in Mark it is the scribes. Vos implies that these were two separate groups who were both making the same charge, but this is probably incorrect.² More likely, one group is in view, that is, scribes who were also Pharisees.³ The two groups were not mutually exclusive; in fact, the leaders and influential members of Pharisaic communities were scribes.⁴ Jeremias says that at this time the Pharisaic party in the Sanhedrin was composed entirely of scribes.⁵ The fact that these legal experts were from Jerusalem suggests that the Galilean ministry of Jesus had attracted the attention of the Sanhedrin. It is possible, as Lane suggests, that

¹A. E. J. Rawlinson, St. Mark, 7th ed., Westminster Commentaries, ed. Walter Lock and D. C. Simpson (London: Methuen and Co., 1949), p. 43.

²Howard F. Vos, Mark: A Study Guide Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 36.

³Alfred Plummer, The Gospel According to St. Mark, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges, ed. R. St. John Parry (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1914), p. 111.

⁴Joachim Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 254.

⁵Ibid., p. 236. He points to the fact that in the New Testament the Pharisaic group in the Sanhedrin is always called "the Pharisees," or "the scribes"; whereas nowhere do the Pharisees and scribes appear together as groups within the Sanhedrin. Cf. e.g. Matt 21:45, "the chief priests and the Pharisees" with the parallel in Luke 20:19, "the scribes and the chief priests."

they were official emissaries from the Great Sanhedrin who came to examine Jesus' miracles and to determine whether Capernaum should be declared a "seduced city," the prey of an apostate preacher. Such a declaration required a thorough investigation made on the spot by official envoys in order to determine the extent of the defection and to distinguish between the instigators, the apostates and the innocent.¹

The scribes bring two charges against Jesus as indicated by the repeated *ὅτι*. Both times, *ὅτι* is recitative, introducing direct speech.² The first charge, *Βεελζεβοὺλ ἔχει*, means "He is possessed by Beelzebul" (NASB and NIV).³ This charge of demon possession was also made against Jesus in John 7:20; 8:48,52; and 10:20. The second charge is that Jesus is able to cast out demons because He is in league with the ruler of the demons. The preposition *ἐν* denotes agency or instrumentality as it did in Matthew 12:24.⁴ Although the charges are stated separately, they in effect amount to the same thing. To be able to perform exorcisms by the power of the ruler of the demons requires that one be under his control.⁵ Matthew's account (12:24) probably

¹Lane, Mark, p. 141.

²Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark (N.p.: United Bible Societies, 1961), p. 118; Cranfield, Mark, p. 136; Lane, Mark, p. 141; BAGD, p. 468. The NASB and the NIV also punctuate the charges as direct speech.

³BAGD, p. 332. Cf. Mark 3:30; 7:25; and 9:17.

⁴See above, p. 56.

⁵Turlington suggests that the reason for the difference between Mark and Matthew is that Mark has retained a Hebrew parallelism from his source ("Mark," in vol. 8 of

reflects a summary of the two charges. Although Mark's account does not precisely equate Beelzebul with the ruler of the demons, Matthew 12:24 and Luke 11:15 do. It has been shown in Matthew's account that Jesus uses Beelzebul interchangeably with Satan. The same equation is also suggested by verse 23 of Mark's account.

The imperfect tense of the introductory verb ἔλεγεν may indicate that the blasphemous charges were spoken more than once on this occasion.¹ This was not just a slip of the tongue on the part of the scribes. The same charge was also made on other occasions (Matt 9:34).²

The Refutation by Jesus (23-27)

καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος αὐτοὺς ἐν παραβολαῖς ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς, Πῶς δύναται Σατανᾶς Σατανᾶν ἐκβάλλειν; (24) καὶ ἐὰν βασιλεία ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν μερισθῇ, οὐ δύναται σταθῆναι ἡ βασιλεία ἐκείνη (25) καὶ ἐὰν οἰκία ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν μερισθῇ, οὐ δυνήσεται ἡ οἰκία ἐκείνη σταθῆναι. (26) καὶ εἰ ὁ Σατανᾶς ἀνέστη ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐμερίσθη, οὐ δύναται στῆναι ἀλλὰ τέλος ἔχει. (27) ἀλλ' οὐ δύναται οὐδεὶς εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ εἰσελθὼν τὰ σκεύη αὐτοῦ διαρπάσαι, ἐὰν μὴ πρῶτον τὸν ἰσχυρὸν δῇσῃ, καὶ τότε τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτοῦ διαρπάσει.

Textual Variants

Several types of variations occur in verse 25 with

The Broadman Bible Commentary, ed. Clifton J. Allen [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969], p. 292).

¹Bratcher and Nida, Mark, p. 118; Cranfield, Mark, p. 136; Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan and Co., 1957), p. 238.

²Since Luke 11 will be shown below (pp. 122-29) to be a later incident in the life of Jesus than Mark 3 and Matthew 12, Luke 11:15 would be an additional occasion.

the words ἡ οἰκία ἐκείνη σταθῆναι. The only important one concerns whether σταθῆναι (N C Δ Θ 28) or στῆναι (B L 892 pc) is the correct reading. This is a difficult decision, but fortunately it has no bearing on the meaning of the verse since the two forms are identical in meaning.¹

In verse 26 the words καὶ ἐμερίσθη are supported by (N¹) B L 892* pc. Most manuscripts (A C² (D) Θ 0134 f¹ f¹³ (1241) Byz) have the perfect tense form μεμέρισται instead of the aorist ἐμερίσθη. Since there was a preference for the perfect tense in the later Koine period, this might possibly be a scribal improvement.² More difficult to explain is the transposition of the words (ἐμερίσθη καί) in N* C*^{vid} Δ lat. This reading might be judged to be superior to καὶ ἐμερίσθη based upon the canon of the more difficult reading since it (ἐμερίσθη καί) places an aorist verb in the apodosis of the conditional sentence with a present tense verb (δύναται), while the reading καὶ ἐμερίσθη keeps the aorist verb in the protasis parallel to another aorist verb (ἀνέστη).³ Since it is not possible to make a clear-cut decision with respect to the correct reading, each of these variants will be examined during the discussion of

¹BDF, pp. 48-49, 164-65; RG, p. 817; Taylor, Mark, p. 240.

²MHT, 1:141.

³Ezra P. Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark, ICC, ed. S. R. Driver et al. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 64.

verse 26 in order to evaluate their effect upon the meaning of the verse.

Also in verse 26, instead of $\sigma\tau\eta\nu\alpha\iota$ (\aleph B C L Θ 892 pc), other manuscripts have $\sigma\tau\alpha\theta\eta\nu\alpha\iota$ (A 0134 f^1 f^{13} Byz). As was explained above in connection with verse 25, this variant has no effect on the meaning of the verse since the two forms are identical in meaning.

The first two words in verse 27, $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda' \omicron\upsilon$, although found in \aleph B C⁽²⁾ Δ pc, are omitted in A D W Θ 0133 0134 Byz lat sy sa^{ms}. The $\omicron\upsilon$ is omitted from L f^1 f^{13} 28 33 700 892 pc sy^{hmg} sa^{ms}. These words can more easily be accounted for as original since there would seem to be no good reason for adding them. The $\omicron\upsilon$ was probably omitted to eliminate the double negative. However, double negatives are not uncharacteristic of Mark's style.¹ The $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$ may have seemed unnatural coming so closely after another $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$ in verse 26, and at first glance it might appear to contradict the truth of verse 26. This scenario is far from certain, so it is fortunate that this problem has no appreciable effect on the meaning of the verse.

Verse 23

This verse is peculiar to Mark's account, but the saying, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" is implied by Matthew

¹Taylor, Mark, p. 46.

12:26.¹ Also, Mark does not say, as does Matthew 12:25, that Jesus knew their thoughts, but Mark does note that Jesus called "them to Himself." This supports the suggestion made in conjunction with Matthew's account that the charges of verse 22 were made behind His back in an attempt to discredit Him.² The rhetorical question, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" states the general principle which shows the absurdity of the charge that Jesus was casting out demons because He was in league with and under the control of Satan. This general principle is followed by two hypothetical illustrations of the principle in verses 24 and 25. Verses 23-26 correspond to Matthew 12:25-26 and present the same reductio ad absurdum.

The refutation by Jesus of the charges against Him, which is found in verses 23-27, is characterized by Mark as "speaking to them in parables." In classical Greek παραβολή was a comparison, illustration, or analogy.³ In the LXX it was used to render ἑρμηνεία which had an even wider range of meaning. Thus παραβολή came to be used for a whole range of figurative language including parables, proverbs, riddles, taunts, and similitudes.⁴ Cranfield has noted that "παραβολή

¹Taylor, Mark, p. 239.

²See above, p. 67.

³LSJ, p. 1305.

⁴TDNT, s.v. "παραβολή," by Friedrich Hauck, 5:747-51; Bratcher and Nida, Mark, p. 119; Taylor, Mark, p. 239.

in the Synoptic Gospels is simply $\psi\eta$ in Greek dress."¹ Verses 24-27 probably fall more into the category of similitudes, that is, illustrations taken from everyday life which are used to make a point.² Mark's reason for emphasizing the fact that Jesus spoke in parables may possibly be explained if one understands the phrase $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \pi\alpha\rho\alpha\beta\omicron\lambda\alpha\iota\varsigma$ adverbially.³ The emphasis would then be on the manner or mode of Jesus' teaching.⁴ Anderson explains:

Mark lays a great deal of stress on Jesus' teaching activity (note the incidence of the words "taught" and "teaching" in the seams of the Gospel narrative). . . . The fact is no less striking that Mark conveys relatively very little of the content of Jesus' teaching (virtually nothing up to this point in the Gospel). We may infer that he desires to focus on the person and deed of Jesus: by putting the speaker and his actions . . . before his spoken words. . . . Even here in 3:23 Mark's first concern is with the mode of Jesus' teaching. He teaches parabolically, in a veiled sort of way, or as one might say, by indirection.⁵

Verses 24-25

To illustrate the impossibility of Satan actually casting out his own demons, Jesus gives two hypothetical

¹Cranfield, Mark, p. 148.

²Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 125.

³A prepositional phrase with $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ is sometimes used as a periphrasis for an adverb. See BAGD, p. 261.

⁴Bratcher and Nida, Mark, p. 119.

⁵Hugh Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, New Century Bible, ed. Matthew Black (Greenwood, South Carolina: Attic Press, 1976. See also Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Mark, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1970), p. 85.

illustrations which are expressed in the form of third class conditions. Cranfield suggests that the καί which begins verse 24 is to be explained as Semitic, which would allow it to be translated "for."¹ These are basically the same illustrations which are found in Matthew 12:25, and here the same point is made.² Since common sense dictates that a kingdom or a household (οἶκος) engaged in an internal war would not be able to continue its existence, it is absurd to suggest that such is the case in Satan's kingdom. which is what the scribes were in effect saying by their charges against Jesus. The switch from the present δύναται in verse 24 to the future συνήσεται in verse 25 is probably only a stylistic change.³

Verse 26

Jesus now moves from the two hypothetical illustrations in verses 24 and 25 to the case in point.⁴ His argument reaches a climax as He deals with the actual implications of the scribes' charges. Jesus' argument is the same as Matthew 12:26 though phrased slightly differently.⁵

¹Mark, p. 137. Cf. BAGD, p. 392.

²See above, pp. 67-68.

³Bratcher and Nida, Mark, p. 120.

⁴This is probably the significance of the change from the third class conditions in verse 25 to the first class in verse 26. See Zerwick, Biblical Greek, p. 103 and BDF, p. 189.

⁵See above, pp. 68-70.

If Jesus were casting out demons by the ruler of the demons, this would mean that Satan is fighting against himself and his destruction is sure. Because of the textual problem, it is difficult to determine if ἐμειόθη belongs with the protasis ("if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, [then] he cannot stand") or the apodosis ("if Satan has risen up against himself, [then] he is divided and cannot stand").¹ The difference is one of emphasis with its position in the apodosis being a little more emphatic.² The presence of the perfect μεμέρισται is probably secondary as noted above, but, if original, it has no effect upon the actual argument of Jesus.³ The perfect tense would probably be understood as intensive.

The phrase τέλος ἔχει means that Satan has come to an end.⁴ In this context it does not, of course, refer to his personal existence but to his position as ruler of the demonic world.⁵ If Satan were fighting against himself as the scribes' argument implied, then his kingdom is coming to an end and he is losing all power over his subjects, the demons.

¹See above, p. 102.

²Taylor, Mark, p. 240.

³See above, p. 102.

⁴TDNT, s.v. "τέλος," by Gerhard Delling, 8:56.

⁵D. Edmond Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of a Servant (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 93.

Verse 27

Having shown the utter absurdity of the scribes' charges in verses 23-26, Jesus turns to explain His real relation to Satan, specifically as it involves His exorcism of demons. He does this by means of a fourth parable which is almost identical to Matthew 12:29 except that there it is framed as a rhetorical question while here it becomes a positive statement. The exorcisms of Jesus do not imply, as the scribes contend, that He is under Satan's control, but, on the contrary (ἀλλά), they demonstrate that someone stronger than Satan has come and bound him.¹

The Charge of Blasphemy (28-29)

Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πάντα ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὰ ἁμαρτήματα καὶ αἱ βλασφημίαι ὅσα ἂν βλασφημῶσιν· (29) ὃς δ' ἂν βλασφημήσῃ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, οὐκ ἔχει ἄφεσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ ἐνοχος ἐστὶν αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος.

Textual Variants

In verse 28, in place of ὅσα, which is found in κ B D Δ Θ f¹³ pm sa^{ms} bo^{ms}, other manuscripts, A C K L Γ 0134 f¹ 28 33 565 700 892 1010 (1241) 1424 pm, have ὅσας. The latter form is almost surely an attempt by a copyist to make the text more grammatically correct by changing the neuter ὅσα to the feminine ὅσας in order to bring it

¹See above, pp. 79-80 for the interpretation of this "parable."

into agreement with βλασφηημία.¹ This variant only involves a change of gender; it in no way affects the meaning of the verse. The neuter form ὅσα is to be explained as an example of constructio ad sensum.²

In verse 29 a few, though important, manuscripts (N D L Δ 33 892 1241) read the future ἔσται instead of the present ἐστίν. Besides the more impressive support for the present tense (A B C K W Θ Π 074 0134 f¹ f¹³ etc.), it is also more probable that because of the future time element conveyed by the subjunctive mood in the preceding clause, the text developed from the present tense to the future tense rather than vice versa.³ Also in this verse, the reading ἀμαρτήματος supported by N B L Δ Θ 28 33 565 892* is to be preferred. It is certainly the most difficult, and the other readings can more easily be explained if it was original. Ἀμαρτίας was substituted by some copyists because it was more familiar than ἀμαρτήματος, which occurs in the four Gospels only here and in verse 28.⁴ Both κρίσεως ("judgment") and κολάσεως ("torment") were probably introduced by copyists to relieve the difficulty of a very

¹Alford, Greek Testament, 1:330; Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 362.

²BDF, p. 155; Plummer, Mark, p. 114; Taylor, Mark, p. 243.

³UBSC, p. 82.

⁴Ibid.

unusual expression ("eternal sin").¹

Verse 28

This verse marks the first occurrence of the solemn formula ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν (or σοι) in Mark.² In the New Testament it is found only on the lips of Jesus. Ἀμήν is actually the transliteration of the Hebrew adverb ʾmēn, which means "truly" or "verily."³ In the Old Testament ʾmēn is used to affirm something that has just been said, whereas Jesus uses it to introduce His words. Jesus' usage is unique in the whole of Jewish literature and the remainder of the New Testament.⁴ Not only does the phrase introduce a truth of solemn importance, but it guarantees the truth of what Jesus is about to say. Hendriksen seems to have caught the essence of the phrase with his translation: "I solemnly declare."⁵ Apparently Matthew (12:31) chose not to record

¹UBSC, p. 82; Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 362.

²It occurs 13 times in Mark, 30 or 31 times in Matthew (18:19?), 6 times in Luke, and 25 times in John (W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, A Concordance to the Greek Testament, 5th ed., rev. H. K. Moulton [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1978], p. 51). In John, ἀμήν is always doubled. Lenski suggests that Jesus actually spoke the word twice when He spoke Aramaic, and the Synoptic Gospel writers deemed the single ἀμήν sufficient when converting this into Greek (Mark, p. 153).

³BDB, p. 53; NIDNTT, s.v. "ἀμήν," by H. Bietenhand, 1:97.

⁴Lane, Mark, p. 144.

⁵William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 138.

the ἀμῆν.

The solemn declaration which Jesus makes is that "all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter." This translation (NASB), which has been adopted by most English versions, understands πάντα to be an adjective modifying the subject τὰ ἁμαρτήματα.¹ However, it is also possible that πάντα should be understood as the subject of ἀφεθήσεται with τὰ ἁμαρτήματα καὶ αἱ βλασφημίαι in apposition to πάντα.² In fact, the distance between πάντα and τὰ ἁμαρτήματα argues for this view.³ Which ever is correct, it seems certain that the position of πάντα gives it a prominent emphasis. It serves to underscore the universality of God's forgiveness and mercy.⁴

The "all things" (πάντα) for which men will be forgiven is more closely defined as τὰ ἁμαρτήματα καὶ αἱ βλασφημίαι ὅσα ἐὰν βλασφημήσωσιν. It is, of course, understood that here, as also in Matthew, Jesus is not making an absolute statement as if to say that all sins will be forgiven regardless of whether or not men repent. He is emphasizing

¹This is the way UBS³ and NA²⁶ are punctuated, no comma after ἀνθρώπων.

²E.g. Goodspeed translates v. 28: "I tell you, men will be forgiven for everything, for all their sins and all the abusive things they say." Edgar J. Goodspeed, J. M. Powis Smith, et al., The Complete Bible: An American Translation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 34.

³Plummer, Mark, p. 114; Gundry, Matthew, p. 237.

⁴Warfield, "Misconception of Jesus," pp. 388-89.

that there is forgiveness for all sins; all sins are capable of being forgiven, except the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will not be forgiven. The word for sin in this verse and verse 29 is ἁμάρτημα rather than the usual ἁμαρτία, which is the more inclusive term. Ἀμάρτημα always has reference to an act of sin.¹ The meaning of βλασφημία has already been discussed in the previous chapter.² Here it has the narrower sense of extreme slander directed toward God, the same meaning it had in Matthew 12:31 and 32. This is the only meaning which fits the context. The contextual argument has been lucidly explained by Warfield:

Why should such solemn assurance be given that among all the sins which will be forgiven the sons of men shall be included even (the "and" has a slight ascensive force) "the railings wherewith they may rail"--unless those "railings" possessed some special heinousness, as, for example, sins against the majesty of God? Otherwise, this sentence, in other respects so impressive in diction, would end on a sad anti-climax. It would be equivalent to saying: All their robberies and adulteries and murders shall be forgiven to men, yea even whatever bad language they may use.³

Those to whom God's forgiveness is extended are called by Mark "the sons of men." This is simply a Semitic way of saying "men." This expression is not in Matthew; instead, there the reference is to the Son of Man. Many scholars believe that there is a literary connection between

¹TDNT, s.v. "ἁμαρτάνω, ἁμάρτημα, ἁμαρτία," by Gottfried Quell et al., 1:295; NIDNTT, s.v. "ἁμαρτία," by W. Günther, 3:579; Turner, Christian Words, p. 412.

²See above, pp. 86-87.

³Warfield, "Misconception of Jesus," p. 390.

the two. The most common view suggests that Jesus did not distinguish between blasphemy against the Son of Man and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as Matthew 12:32 reports. The original Aramaic form, according to this view, spoke of sins and blasphemies against men, using ܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ as a generic term. Mark understood the term correctly, but Q, which was the source for Luke 12:10 and Matthew 12:32, misunderstood ܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ , taking it to be a reference to the Son of Man. This view apparently originated with Wellhausen and has been adopted by many other scholars.¹ The opposite view, which says that the original Aramaic was a reference to Jesus which was correctly retained by Q but misunderstood or intentionally changed by Mark, is also defended.² Still others believe that both Mark and Q go back to an ambiguous Aramaic original.³ All three of these views involve error on the part of one or more of the Evangelists, and therefore must be rejected.

It is not necessary to suppose any direct literary connection between Mark's "sons of men" and Matthew's "Son

¹Julius Wellhausen, Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1911), p. 62; J. C. O'Neill, "The Unforgivable Sin," Journal for the Study of the New Testament 19 (October 1983):37-38; Manson, Sayings of Jesus, pp. 109-10; Taylor, Mark, p. 242.

²Higgins, Son of Man, pp. 85-90; Rawlinson, Mark, pp. 44-45; Tödt, Son of Man, pp. 118-20; 312-18.

³Boring, "Unforgivable Sin Logion," p. 274; James D. G. Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 49-50; Evans, "Expository Problems," p. 240; Marshall, Luke, pp. 518-19.

of Man." Such a correlation faces a number of problems, not the least of which is the fact that Mark's "sons of men" are the recipients of forgiveness while Matthew's "Son of Man" is the object of blasphemy.¹ A very probable solution is that Jesus did distinguish between blasphemy against Himself and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as Matthew 12:32 records; however, Jesus also made a general statement about the forgivability of sin and blasphemy which Matthew recorded in 12:31 and Mark in 3:28. Mark chose not to bring up the specific case of blasphemy against the Son of Man, possibly because he considered it to be already sufficiently covered in the declaration that all blasphemies against the sons of men would be forgiven, the Son of Man being one of the sons of men.²

Verse 29

The one exception to the universality of God's mercy and forgiveness pronounced in verse 28 is the blasphemy against (εἰς³) the Holy Spirit. It will never (οὐκ . . . εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα⁴) be forgiven. The next clause, "but is guilty

¹Gundry, Matthew, pp. 238-39.

²Turlington, "Mark," p. 293; Warfield, "Misconception of Jesus," pp. 393-94.

³The preposition εἰς has a hostile sense. BAGD, p. 229.

⁴BAGD, p. 27; Cranfield, Mark, p. 141; Henry B. Swete, Commentary on Mark, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), p. 68.

of an eternal sin," is not in contrast to what has just been said in spite of the fact it begins with ἀλλά. The ἀλλά does not indicate a contrast but is "confirmatory and continuative."¹ It amplifies what is means to never have forgiveness, bringing it to a climax. The English word "indeed" may best approximate the sense of ἀλλά in this verse: "but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness; indeed, he is guilty of an eternal sin."² Ἐνοχος is used with the genitive case (αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος) to indicate the crime of which one is guilty.³ One who commits the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is guilty of or charged with the crime of an eternal (αἰωνίου⁴) sin. It is eternal because there is no forgiveness granted for it. It will never be expiated or remitted in all of

¹RG, pp. 1185-86. BAGD, p. 38.

²The NIV translation conveys a similar idea by omitting the conjunction: "But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." The last clause is apparently to be understood in an explanatory sense.

³BAGD, p. 268; NIDNTT, s.v. "ἔνοχος," by F. Thiele, 2:143; Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 1:282; TDNT, s.v. "ἐνέχω, ἔνοχος," by Hermann Hanse, 2:828. Ronald Edwards incorrectly understands ἔνοχος to mean "is bound by" or "held in the grip of" an eternal sin, that is, "a sin which last forever" ("The Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit" [M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1973], p. 41). Ἐνοχος does have that meaning once in the New Testament (Heb 2:15), but certainly not in Mark 3:29, where the sense is not that of a "sin which lasts forever" (one which eternally repeats itself) but one whose guilt lasts forever.

⁴BAGD, p. 28.

eternity. Thus, it has commonly been called "the unpardonable sin."

Mark's Explanatory Comment (30)

ὅτι ἔλεγον, Πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ἔχει.

Textual Variants

Neither UBS³ or NA²⁶ list any variant readings for this verse.

Verse 30

A number of things can be said about this verse over which there is no disagreement. It is obviously an editorial comment made by Mark to in some way explain the previous narrative. The ὅτι is clearly causal.¹ The direct discourse statement, "He has an unclean spirit," points back to verse 22.² It is equal to the scribes' charge: "He is possessed by Beelzebul."³ As was true in verse 22, so also here in verse 39, ἔχει denotes possession.⁴ Of course πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is a common expression in the synoptics for an evil spirit, that is, a demon.⁵ Mark may have

¹Barbara Friberg and Timothy Friberg, Analytical Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 175; Both the NASB and the NIV translate ὅτι as "because."

²Cranfield, Mark, p. 143; Hiebert, Mark, p. 94; Hendriksen, Mark, p. 139; Taylor, Mark, p. 244.

³Bratcher and Nida, Mark, p. 124.

⁴BAGD, p. 332.

⁵BAGD, p. 676.

substituted πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον in verse 30 for the actual charge in verse 22 of being possessed by Beelzebul in order to contrast πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον with τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον in verse 29.¹ The introductory ἔλεγον is in the imperfect tense and thus is reminiscent of verse 22. Here, as in verse 22, it may again point to the conclusion that the charges voiced by the scribes were not made just once but were probably repeated a number of times.²

A more difficult problem is the relationship between verse 30 and what has gone before. Verse 30 is apparently elliptical.³ Something must be supplied as in the NIV translation: "He said this because they were saying." The question is what is the antecedent of "this"? To what exactly does verse 30 logically connect? John Wesley's comments on this verse are most interesting:

Is it not astonishing, that men who have ever read these words, should doubt, what is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? Can any words declare more plainly, that it is "the ascribing those miracles to the power of the devil which Christ wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost."⁴

Wesley dogmatically connects verse 30 with what Jesus has just said in verse 29. Verse 30, then, gives the reason why Jesus said what He did about the blasphemy

¹Gould, Mark, p. 30; Plummer, Mark, p. 116.

²Lane, Mark, p. 146; Hiebert, Mark, p. 94.

³Taylor, Mark, p. 244.

⁴Explanatory Notes, p. 105.

against the Holy Spirit. Those commentators who speak to this point seem to agree that verse 30 logically connects with the preceding verse.¹ Thus the reason Jesus issues His solemn pronouncement in verses 28 and 29 is because of the blasphemous accusation of the scribes that He is performing His exorcisms by the power of Satan. This is certainly a strong indication that the scribes were in fact guilty of the unpardonable sin.

Summary

Mark's account records the same incident as found in Matthew 12. The charge of the Pharisees was precipitated by the healing of a demoniac, though this is not recorded by Mark in order that he might contrast the attitude of Jesus' family with that of the religious leaders. Mark has recorded two distinct though similar charges made against Jesus, while Matthew chose to summarize them. The substance of the charges is that Jesus is able to exorcise demons because He is in league with Satan.

Mark's record of Jesus' refutation of the charge against Him follows the same general line of argumentation

¹Anderson, Mark, p. 124; Bratcher and Nida, Mark, p. 124; Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 362; Charles W. Carter, The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 111; Gill, Exposition of the New Testament, p. 322; Wilfrid Harrington, Mark, in vol. 4 of New Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary, ed. Wilfrid Harrington and Donald Senior (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1979), p. 47; Yeager, Renaissance New Testament, 5:208.

as in Matthew. The refutation in Mark begins with the same reductio ad absurdum, and the same two illustrations are used in verses 24 and 25 which are found in Matthew 12:25. This argument is concluded in Mark 3:26 by a reference to the real situation with Satan, just as in Matthew 12:26. Satan cannot be casting out his own demons since that would mean he would be fighting against himself.

Mark omits Jesus' ad hominem argument found in Matthew 12:27 and skips right to Jesus' explanation of His real relationship to Satan. This is explained in Matthew by verses 12:28 and 29. Mark apparently does not wish to emphasize, as does Matthew, Jesus' relationship to the kingdom of God, and therefore he omits the material of Matthew 12:28 but includes the material of verse 29 in 3:27, which still allows Jesus to assert His true relationship to Satan. Jesus is stronger than Satan and has in a sense bound him.

In verses 28 and 29 Mark also records Jesus' statement about the unforgivability of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He did not include Jesus' further clarification that even blasphemy against Himself could be forgiven, apparently feeling that the general statement of verse 28 was sufficient to cover that possibility. Mark does amplify what it means to never have forgiveness by explaining that commission of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in effect makes one guilty of an eternal sin.

What is most interesting in Mark's account is his

own explanatory comment in verse 30. He clearly wished to tie the false charge of the religious leaders in verse 22 to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in verse 29. This may be the same thing Matthew was doing with his διὰ τοῦτο at the beginning of 12:31. To this writer, Mark seems to equate the action of the Pharisees with the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Mark's use of imperfect tense verbs in verses 22 and 30 ("they were saying") suggests that the false accusations of the religious leaders cannot be excused as offhand, flippant remarks but were the repeated blasphemies of men who knew exactly what they were saying.

CHAPTER V

EXEGESIS OF LUKE 11:14-23 AND 12:10

The relationship of Luke 11:14-23 and 12:10 to the other Synoptic Gospels is a difficult problem. At first glance it would appear that the saying about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (12:10) has been separated from its original historical context (11:14-23), where it is found in the other synoptics, and placed in another context by Luke. Luke 11:14-23 appears to be a parallel account of the same incident which is recorded in Matthew 12 and Mark 3, covering the charge that Jesus was casting out demons by Beelzebul, along with His refutation of that charge. However, there is no mention of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit at the end of that pericope in Luke 11 or anywhere else in the chapter. Instead, the blasphemy saying shows up later in chapter 12 (v. 10) in a completely different context but in a form very similar to Matthew 12:32. It is possible that Luke 11:14-23 and 12:10 are not parallel accounts of the incident in Matthew 12 and Mark 3 but are two entirely different events in the life of Jesus. Luke 11:14-23 and 12:10 will each be examined in this chapter in order to determine their relationship to the other synoptics. Afterward, if it is found that they are applicable, they can each be analyzed to determine what contribution

they might make toward understanding the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Luke 11:14-23

As one examines the relevant literature, it quickly becomes apparent that the majority of scholars believe that Luke 11:14-23 describes the same series of events depicted in Matthew 12 and Mark 3.¹ A minority opinion argues just the opposite, that the Lukan passage describes events which take place later in the ministry of Jesus.² If the majority opinion is correct, it is difficult to see how the doctrine of inerrancy can be maintained. Morris's statement that the particular incident in Luke 11:14-23 "is not placed in the

¹E.g. John M. Creed, The Gospel According to St. Luke (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930), p. 159; Burton S. Easton, The Gospel According to St. Luke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 182; Gundry, Matthew, p. 230; William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 617; T. W. Manson, Sayings of Jesus, pp. 83-84; William Manson, The Gospel of Luke, MNTC, ed. James Moffatt (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), p. 138; H. K. Luce, The Gospel According to St. Luke, Cambridge Greek Testament, ed. A. Nairne (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1949), p. 212; Marshall; Luke, p. 471; Leon Morris, The Gospel According to St. Luke, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 197; Schweizer, Mark, p. 83; Taylor, Mark, p. 237.

²E.g. Broadus, Matthew, p. 267; Godet, Luke, pp. 283-88; A. T. Robertson, A Harmony of the Gospels (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), p. 123; H. D. M. Spence, "The Gospel According to St. Luke," in vol. 16 of The Pulpit Commentary, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 243-44; Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, A Harmony of the Gospels (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 139; Warfield, "Misconception of Jesus," p. 394.

chronological sequence with any precision" must be seen as the height of understatement if the majority view is correct since Luke would be placing an event that took place during Jesus' Galilean ministry in a historical setting outside of Galilee one year later.¹ In order to demonstrate that Luke 11:14-23 is not the same historical incident as Matthew 12 and Mark 3, the pericope in Luke will be examined in relation to what may be called external and internal evidence. External evidence will focus on data outside of Luke 11 while internal evidence will deal with the passage itself along with its immediate context.

External Evidence

Luke 11:14-23 is part of a larger section (9:51-18:14), unique to Luke, which constitutes the central division of the Gospel. Generally, however, all three synoptics follow the same basic plan. They each record the ministry of John the Baptist, the baptism and temptation of Jesus, and His great Galilean ministry. This Galilean ministry comes to an end in Matthew 18, Mark 9, and Luke 9:50. All three Gospels come to a close with a description of the events of the passion week at Jerusalem, commencing with the triumphal entry in Matthew 21, Mark 11 and Luke 19:29. The journey between Galilee and Jerusalem is covered by two chapters in Matthew (19 and 20) and one chapter in Mark (10).

¹Morris, Luke, p. 197.

Amazingly, Luke devotes almost ten chapters to the same time period (9:51-19:28). What would appear to have been a journey of a few weeks at the most, given the amount of material in Matthew and Mark, was in reality one of six or seven months, corresponding to John 7:2-11:54.¹ Since Luke 11:14-23 falls within the period of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem after He had left Galilee, it cannot be a record of the same event described in Matthew 12 and Mark 3, which occurred during Jesus' Galilean ministry.

If all this is true, why do so many scholars still regard all three synoptic accounts as the same event? It is difficult to find a single answer to this question, but primarily it relates to the uniqueness of the central section of Luke's Gospel (9:51-18:14) and the accepted theories of synoptic origins. The widely adopted theory of direct literary dependence between the Gospels naturally seeks to find as many parallels in the Gospel material as possible. The very idea of almost nine chapters in Luke which find no parallel in Matthew or Mark is not readily compatible with most popular theories of synoptic origins. Therefore, many scholars, while allowing for some unique material in Luke 9:51-18:14, believe that to a large degree Luke has

¹For evidence supporting this understanding of the duration of Jesus' ministry, see Godet, Luke, pp. 283-88; Harold W. Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ: The Duration of Christ's Ministry," BSac 131 (April-June 1974):161; Robertson, Harmony, pp. 276-79; Spence, "Luke," pp. 243-44; Thomas and Gundry, Harmony, pp. 326-27.

incorporated episodes from various times in Jesus' ministry without regard to their chronological sequence.¹ Luke 11:14-23 is one of those episodes.²

This explanation is difficult to reconcile with Luke's express statement (1:3) that he had "investigated everything carefully from the beginning" in order to write out his account "in consecutive order" (καθ' ἑξῆς).³ It also fails to understand the distinctive contribution which Luke intended to make with the central section of his Gospel (9:51-18:14). Robertson explains that Luke

has condensed his account of the withdrawals from Galilee, apparently to make room for the description of another part of Christ's work. Matthew and Mark almost confine themselves to the ministry in Galilee, while Luke thus devotes the bulk of his narrative to what seems to be a later ministry, after Jesus has left Galilee. It is hardly unlikely that this account should be a mere jumble of scattered details.⁴

When one examines the examples which are usually adduced as parallels between Luke 9:51-18:14 and the other synoptics, it is certainly not obvious, at least to this

¹E. Earle Ellis, The Gospel of Luke, New Century Bible, ed. Matthew Black (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 148.

²Hendriksen, Luke, p. 617; Morris, Luke, p. 197.

³While it is true that this order may be one of "time, space, or logic" (BAGD, p. 388), a number of commentators believe that Luke had chronological order in mind. See e.g. Creed, Luke, p. 5 and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke, ICC, ed. S. R. Driver et al. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1922), p. 5. Godet goes so far as to say that "here the term must stand for a chronological order" (Luke, p. 38).

⁴Robertson, Harmony, p. 277.

writer, that these proposed parallels are in fact genuine.¹ There must be an allowance made for the strong possibility that Jesus may have performed similar miracles at different times in His ministry as well as speaking the same or similar sayings. Robertson notes that this would not be the least bit unusual; in fact, it is something that every popular preacher or teacher knows from his own experience.

Repetition is not only common with public speakers to different audiences in different localities, but to the same audience, if one is to be understood. Not only may one use similar sayings, but he must repeat the same sayings to drive the point home. Those critics forget this fact who insist that Luke has here dumped together a mass of material that he did not know what else to do with, material that really belongs elsewhere, as we see from Matthew.²

Internal Evidence

When one looks at the pericope of Luke 11:14-23 itself, there is good evidence to suggest that it is not the same incident as in Matthew 12 and Mark 3. While not intending to do so, nevertheless, Barrett makes quite a concession with regard to the supposed parallel between this passage in Luke and the other synoptics: "It is apparent that for the most part, Mark and Luke are saying the same thing. It is therefore a little surprising to

¹It is simply beyond the scope of this paper to discuss each suggested parallel. However, one of these, Luke 11:14-23, the case in point, will be examined shortly.

²A. T. Robertson, Luke the Historian in the Light of Research, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 73.

discover that they use almost entirely different words for the same purpose."¹

The pericope in Luke begins with the exorcism of a demon by Jesus as does Matthew, but this kind of miracle was probably repeated numerous times in Jesus' ministry (e.g. Matt 9:32-34).² In verse 15 Luke records the charge that Jesus was casting out demons by Beelzebul, but again, this may have been an often repeated charge (cf. Matt 9:34). In Matthew and Mark it is the Pharisaic scribes who make the charge, while in Luke it is some of the ὄχλοι, probably a different group. At the same time as some of the crowd were making this charge, others, according to Luke (v. 16), "were demanding of Him a sign from heaven." No such request is made in Matthew and Mark. Luke 11:17-23 presents the same basic arguments as Matthew 12:25-30 but with enough differences to easily allow for the possibility that Jesus is presenting the same arguments on a different occasion. For example, in verse 20 Luke records Jesus as saying that He is casting out demons by the "finger of God," while Matthew has the "Spirit of God." There has been considerable

¹Barrett, Holy Spirit and Gospel Tradition, p. 60.

²Thomas and Gundry (Harmony, p. 139) argue that the episode in Luke is different from that in Matthew because in Matthew's account the demon-possessed man is dumb and blind while in Luke the man is dumb, and "Luke, in line with his medical orientation, would hardly have failed to mention the blindness if this were the man's condition." This argument is weakened by the assumption that Luke had knowledge about facts of which, in actuality, he may have been ignorant.

debate over which writer has the original statement and which has made the change.¹ If Luke and Matthew are separate incidents, there is no difficulty. In verses 21 and 22 Luke has an analogy about a strong man as do the other synoptics. However, in Luke the illustration is quite different. The picture is that of a castle or palace guarded by a man possessing equipment of a heavily armed soldier on watch against border raids.² In fact the only thing the accounts have in common, as Barrett is forced to concede, is the use of ὁ ἰσχυρός. Although both Marshall and Thompson believe that the incident in Luke is parallel with the other synoptics, they nevertheless admit that the differences in the Lukan analogy are so great as to suggest that Luke is following a different saying of Jesus.³

The events which follow the pericope in Luke are also very different from the picture in Matthew and Mark. In Matthew and Mark Jesus goes down by the sea and delivers the parables of the kingdom, while in Luke He goes to eat at the house of a Pharisee and gives some instructions wholly unlike the kingdom parables.

¹See e.g. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, "A Note on Matthew XII.28: Par. Luke XI.20," NTS 11 (January 1965): 167-69 and C. S. Rodd, "Spirit or Finger," ExpTim 72 (February 1961):157-58.

²G. H. P. Thompson, The Gospel According to Luke, The New Clarendon Bible, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 174.

³Marshall, Luke, p. 477; Thompson, Luke, p. 174.

Conclusion

An examination of both internal and external evidence has shown that Luke 11:14-23 is a later event in the ministry of Jesus than the one in Matthew 12 and Mark 3. Therefore, there is nothing unusual about Luke not recording the saying about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus apparently never made reference to it at the time of the incident in Luke. Luke 11:14-23 has, therefore, no major bearing on the interpretation of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It can be excluded from the present discussion.¹

Luke 12:10

καὶ πᾶς ὃς ἐρεῖ λόγον εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ τῷ δὲ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα βλασφημήσαντι οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται.

Textual Variants

The only textual variant in this verse is a modification of the verse after αὐτῷ by D (c e) to make it correspond more nearly with Matthew 12:32. This is clearly a secondary Western modification.

Verse 10

This verse is another warning about the blasphemy

¹Luke 11:14-23 presents the same line of argumentation as Matthew 12:22-30 and Mark 3:22-27. If for some reason the flow of the argument in these latter two passages was not understood, then Luke 11:14-23 might have something to contribute to the discussion at hand. However, that is not the case.

against the Holy Spirit. It is a different incident than Matthew 12 and Mark 3. This can be seen from the fact that the context is completely different from the other synoptics. Also, this verse is part of Luke 9:51-18:14, a section which has been previously demonstrated to have transpired later in Jesus' ministry than the episode in Matthew 12 and Mark 3, which was in Jesus' Galilean ministry.¹

Opposite opinions have been voiced concerning the relationship between verse 10 and its context. Godet suggests that its relationship "to what precedes and what follows, is not difficult to apprehend."² On the other hand, Luce believes that it is "impossible to establish any satisfactory connection of thought between this verse and the preceding section."³ While it may be acknowledged that understanding the blasphemy saying in this context may not be as easy as was the case in the other synoptics, it certainly is not the impossible task which Luce suggests. Chapter 12 begins with Jesus talking primarily to His disciples (v. 1) in order to encourage and exhort them. Verses 8-12 should be understood as one paragraph (cf. UBS³), which opens with the solemn λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν as does also the previous paragraph (vv. 4-7). Warfield has correctly pointed to a certain parallelism between the two clauses of verse

¹See above, pp. 123-26.

²Godet, Luke, p. 341.

³Luce, Luke, p. 228.

10 and those of verses 8 and 9.¹ They should be understood as "two pairs" of antitheses which are both governed by λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν. Note the continuative καί at the beginning of verse 10 along with the initial πᾶς ὅς in verses 8 and 10.

It is critical to a proper interpretation of verses 8-12 that the distinction between to whom Jesus is speaking and about whom He is speaking be observed. As Gundry has noted, in this section it is the Holy Spirit speaking through the disciples to nondisciples (cf. vv. 11-12).² In verses 8-10 Jesus is not speaking about His disciples. These verses are not an admonition for the disciples to remain faithful. "Verse 10 would not be appropriate to that, inasmuch as there was no occasion to be anxious at all about their speaking against the Son of Man, and it would have been even more inappropriate to bid them beware of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."³ In verses 8-10 Jesus informs His disciples about the types of reactions they may experience as the Holy Spirit witnesses to nondisciples through them. Before verse 8 Jesus uses the second person ("you") because He is addressing His disciples. In verses 8-10 He uses the third person ("everyone") because He is

¹Warfield, "Misconception of Jesus," p. 394.

²Gundry, Matthew, p. 238. Also cf. Ellis, Luke, p. 175.

³H. A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, trans. Robert E. Walls, rev. and ed. William P. Dickson, 5th ed. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 415.

talking about nondisciples. In verses 11-12 Jesus returns to the second person because He is addressing His own disciples again.

Verse 10 draws the same distinction between the blasphemy against the Son of Man versus that which is against the Holy Spirit. The slight difference in wording is not significant. The meaning of verse 10 is identical to Matthew 12:32.¹ In the context of Luke 12, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not actually being committed, and Jesus offers no explanation of the exact nature of the sin. Therefore, one must look to the other synoptics for the historical situation in which the sin was actually being committed in order to determine more precisely the nature of the sin. However, there is one important fact which this passage would seem to imply very strongly. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was not limited to just the ministry of Jesus but could also be committed in connection with the ministries of Jesus' disciples.

¹See above, pp. 87-94.

CHAPTER VI

POSSIBLE PARALLELS OUTSIDE THE GOSPELS

It is commonly asserted by a number of scholars that other New Testament passages outside of the Synoptic Gospels make reference to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 John 5:16 are the two passages which are most often cited as parallel with the synoptic accounts.¹ This connection is not immediately obvious since neither passage makes specific reference to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This chapter will interact briefly with both Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 John 5:16 in order to determine if there is any genuine connection with the Gospel accounts.

Hebrews 6:4-6

According to verse 6, it is "impossible to renew . . . again to repentance" a certain group of people who are described in verses 4-6 as "those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been

¹E.g. Berkouwer, Sin, pp. 334-37; Hughes, Hebrews, p. 215; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1946), p. 180; Roger Nicole, "Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of God with the Saints," in Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 362.

made partners of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age," and "have fallen away." The fact that these people cannot experience repentance because they have "fallen away" suggests that they are in a state without any hope of recovery. If it is impossible for them to repent, then they must remain in their fallen state with no hope of forgiveness and restoration. Thus a parallel is drawn between these who have no possibility of forgiveness and those who commit the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, who also have no hope of forgiveness.

Whether or not one accepts this parallel depends to some degree upon how one understands the spiritual condition of those described in Hebrews 6:4-6. If it is decided that this is a description of truly regenerate people, there is usually no parallel drawn with the Gospels.¹ This is especially true for those who take the so-called "hypothetical" view, which says that the situation described

¹E.g. Thomas Hewitt, The Epistles to the Hebrews, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 110-11; Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), pp. 794-95; A. C. Kendrick, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, An American Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1889), pp. 76-77; Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 108-14.

could not possibly occur.¹ If Hebrews 6:4-6 describes an

¹Hewitt, Hebrews, pp. 110-11; Kent, Hebrews, pp. 113-14; Charles C. Ryrie, ed., The Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Translation (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 1843. The designation of this view as "hypothetical" is somewhat misleading. It fails to take into account the fact that hypothetical events may fall into two categories. These might be termed possible hypothetical ("if men land on the planet Mars") and impossible hypothetical ("if apples turn into monkeys"). There is a sense in which any interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6 might be called hypothetical. Guthrie has made a key observation: "That the writer is thinking of a hypothetical case is hardly to be disputed. He cannot be referring to an actual case, as Hebrews 6:9 shows ('in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things')" (Theology, p. 632). In other words, as far as the readers of Hebrews were concerned the "falling away" was hypothetical; it was not true of them. The distinction which is important in understanding Hebrews 6:4-6 is not the difference between an actual or hypothetical situation but between a possible or impossible hypothetical situation.

The discussion of Hebrews 6:4-6 has been confused by the fact that commentators use the term hypothetical in two different ways without being careful to explain their meaning. For example, both Hewitt (Hebrews, p. 111) and Kent (Hebrews, p. 114) cite Westcott as a proponent of their view, which is the impossible hypothetical interpretation. They believe that the "falling away" is really impossible because of the doctrine of eternal security. But Westcott does not hold their view. It is true that he says the "case is hypothetical" (B. F. Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, reprint ed. [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974], p. 165), but Westcott means hypothetical yet possible, not impossible, as Hewitt and Kent believe. This is clear from Westcott's next statement:

"But though the case is only supposed it is one which must be taken into account. It is possible for us to see how it can arise. The state of a man may become such as to make the application to him of the appointed help towards the divine life not only difficult but impossible" (Hebrews, p. 165).

Westcott goes on to say that the case of Hebrews 6:4-6 is found in other Scripture passages such as 1 John 5:16. Westcott, Hewitt, and Kent all believe that the persons described in Hebrews 6:4-6 are truly regenerate people. Hewitt and Kent, because they also hold to eternal security, conclude the "falling away" is impossible, but to Westcott the "falling away" is possible. He did not hold to eternal security as can be seen from his comments on John 10:27,28

impossible sin (one that could never be committed), it obviously has no relationship to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. No one, at the very least, denies that the latter sin could have been committed at some point in time.

Others believe that the writer of Hebrews has regenerate people in view and that the "falling away" is possible. The result of such a view is either to believe that truly regenerate people can fall away from salvation (a denial of eternal security¹), or to reinterpret the "falling away," not as from salvation, but from Christian commitment.² In either case, as long as one understands

(The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes, ed. A. Westcott, reprint ed., 2 vols. in 1 [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980], 2:67).

Misunderstanding of the use of the term "hypothetical" also caused Kent to incorrectly categorize Ryrie's position. Because Ryrie says that the writer of Hebrews is not speaking hypothetically (Theology, p. 256), Kent assumes Ryrie does not hold his view. Kent therefore classifies Ryrie with those who believe Hebrews 6:4-6 is speaking of saved persons who backslide (Hebrews, p. 112). This view understands the "falling away" as being possible, but it is a Christian falling into sin, not a "falling away" from salvation. However, this is not Ryrie's view. He believes the "falling away" is impossible (Theology, p. 257) just like Kent. In reality their views are identical, as can be seen from Ryrie's discussion in his Study Bible (p. 1843).

¹E.g. Lenski, Hebrews, pp. 180-87. For an excellent discussion of the incompatibility of this view, not only with the rest of the New Testament, but with the book of Hebrews itself, see Nicole, "Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6," pp. 358-59.

²Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 795. The difficulty for this view is that the "falling away" is from the condition depicted by the preceding participles, which according to Hodges describe a regenerate Christian. The "falling away" is not from Christian commitment but from Christianity (or

the people in question to be truly regenerate, the situations described in Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Gospel accounts of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would seem to be quite different. By no stretch of the imagination can the Pharisees who made the blasphemous attack against Jesus be considered regenerate.

It is usually those who believe that Hebrews 6:4-6 describes the sin of apostasy (the falling away or rejection of unregenerate people who at one time profess to be believers) who argue that blasphemy against the Spirit is the same sin.¹ However, the only real common factor between the two passages is that in both cases unbelievers are involved; all the other details are different. Dale explains:

The point of invincible obduracy is vastly different in the two cases. There (in Hebrews) it lies in the previous spiritual fervour, the glow of love for Jesus, the reverent worship of Him as Lord and Saviour, the joy of knowing Him. To come down from that height of spiritual enthusiasm, "to fall away," to become callous, is to reach a hardness which can never be broken through.

professed Christianity) itself. This is the normal understanding of παραπεσόντας. See F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 123; Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in vol. 4 of The Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicole, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 297-98; Kent, Hebrews, pp. 109-10; James Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, ICC, ed. S. R. Driver et al. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1924), p. 79; Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in vol. 12 of The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 55.

²E.g. Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 207-15; Nicole, "Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6," p. 362; Palmer, Holy Spirit, pp. 177-83.

Here (in the Gospels) the sin spoken of marks the end of a career of malignant hate of Jesus, a hatred of Jesus just because He is holy and merciful. The blasphemy ("he hath an unclean spirit") is the last stage of growing malignity. Both conditions of soul are "eternal." But they are of different kinds, and are reached by very different roads.¹

It is the position of this writer that the sin in Hebrews 6 is not the same as, or even very similar to, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospels. Beyond what has already been said, no more evidence can be given for this position until the exact nature of the sin is discussed in the next chapter.

1 John 5:16

Some interpreters who believe that Hebrews 6:4-6 is to be equated with the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospels are more cautious when it comes to a possible connection with 1 John 5:16.² This is partly due to the difficulty in interpreting John's meaning. The many debated and unresolved problems associated with this text have led Bultmann to conclude. "A decision can scarcely be taken, as the diverse efforts of exegetes indicate."³ It is generally agreed that πρὸς θάνατον means "leading

¹Dale, "Discussions on the Unpardonable Sin," p. 215.

²E.g. Berkouwer, Sin, pp. 333-34.

³Rudolf Bultmann, The Johannine Epistles, trans. R. Philip O'Hara et al., Hermeneia, ed. Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 87.

to death,"¹ but is this death and the corresponding life to be understood as spiritual death and eternal life² or physical death and physical life?³ Is the one who gives (δώσει) this life God⁴ or the intercessor?⁵ Is the one who commits the "sin leading to death" a Christian⁶ or an

¹NASB; NIV; BAGD, p. 710; Glenn W. Barker, "1 John," in vol. 12 of The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 355; Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, p. 87; I. Howard Marshall, The Epistles of John, NICNT, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 246-47; B. F. Westcott, The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 210.

²Barker, "1 John," p. 355; Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, p. 87; Robert Law, The Tests of Life, reprint of 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 139; Marshall, Epistles of John, p. 247; John R. W. Stott, The Epistles of John, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 187; Westcott, Epistles of St. John, p. 191.

³James L. Boyer, "Greek Exegesis: Johannine Epistles" (Class syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, 1975), p. 86; Zane C. Hodges, "1 John," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), p. 902.

⁴NASB; NIV; Hodges, "1 John," pp. 902-03; Law, Tests of Life, p. 407; Marshall, Epistles of John, p. 246.

⁵A. E. Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, ICC, ed. S. R. Driver et al. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1912), p. 146; Bultmann, Johannine Epistles, p. 87; C. Haas, M. De Jonge, and J. L. Swellengrebel, A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John (London: United Bible Societies, 1972), p. 127.

⁶Hodges, "1 John," p. 902; Marshall, Epistles of John, p. 246; Curtis Vaughan, 1, 2, 3, John: A Study Guide Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 131; Westcott, Epistles of St. John, p. 191.

unbeliever?¹ Should the sin be thought of as one particular sin² or as a series of sinful acts?³

The main reason for such diversity of opinion stems from the meager information which John himself supplies. Basically, he simply says that there is such a thing as ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον, but he does not explicitly set forth how the phrase is to be interpreted. Practically speaking, this verse has almost no bearing on the interpretation of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. For instance, if one were to assume that by the phrase "sin leading to death" John was intending to refer to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, this would add nothing to the understanding of that sin. It would not help in explaining the exact nature of the sin. One might argue that John's reference would at least prove the sin is committed by Christians. However, this is not certain since, contrary to popular belief, John does not explicitly say that the sin leading to death is committed by a "brother."⁴ Therefore,

¹David M. Scholer, "Sins Within and Sins Without: An Interpretation of 1 John 5:16-17," in Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Studies, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 232; Stott, Epistles of John, p. 190.

²Brooke, Johannine Epistles, p. 146; Law, Tests of Life, pp. 140-41.

³Hodges, "1 John," p. 903; Westcott, Epistles of St. John, p. 192.

⁴John says that a "brother" commits "sin not leading to death." With regard to "sin leading to death," John only declares that such a thing exists, not who may commit

since 1 John 5:16 could not provide any definitive data on the nature of the sin in the Gospels, it will be excluded from further discussion.

it. See Scholer, "Sins Within and Sins Without," pp. 232, 238-44. Stott believes that John infers that it is a brother who commits the sin leading to death, but he argues that "brother" can refer to a professing Christian (Epistles of John, p. 190).

CHAPTER VII
INTERPRETATION OF THE BLASPHEMY
AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

Having surveyed the history of interpretation and investigated in some detail the Scriptural data, this chapter will seek to bring all these facts to bear on a fresh analysis of the problem. In order to proceed logically and to allow for an intelligible presentation, it is essential that the analysis of the problem be broken down into a series of problems. The major areas of debate can be conveniently put in the form of four questions, as was explained in chapter one of this dissertation.¹

What Is the Precise Nature of the Blasphemy
against the Holy Spirit?

This is, of course, the most important question and, as one would expect, the most difficult. Chapter two has already demonstrated both the number and variety of answers which have been given to this question. Because of the exegetical background which has been laid, some of these can be dispensed with rather easily since they cannot at all be harmonized with the evidence from the Gospels. Others will require much closer scrutiny.

¹See above, p. 3.

Denial of the Sin

Although they are really very different, several interpretations of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit lead to the same result, a denial of the concept of an unforgivable sin. For some, the concept of an unpardonable sin is one that they simply refuse to accept. Rees, for example, believes that it would conflict with "God's saving grace."¹ Contrary to Rees, there is no conflict, but that point will not be debated here. Rees solves the conflict created for him by Jesus' words by resorting to the "kenotic theory."² However, the kenosis does not demand that Jesus was involved in error, and any kenotic theory which suggests that was the case must be rejected. If Jesus could have erred about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, then any or all of His other teachings are subject to the same error, including those which proclaimed "God's saving mercy." Rees's objection to Jesus' words is totally unfounded.

Another group of interpreters deny the reality of the sin, not by calling into question the veracity of Jesus, but the Gospel writers themselves. They believe that Jesus did not actually utter any such saying about blasphemy; instead, it was a formulation of the early church which the Gospel writers attributed to Jesus.³ This view must

¹ ISBE, 1939 ed., s.v. "Blasphemy," 1:486.

² Ibid.

³ Boring, "The Unforgivable Sin Logion," pp. 276-77;

also be rejected. There is no compelling evidence to suggest that the Gospel writers did not accurately report Jesus' statements about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit or anything else He said. There is even less reason to believe they would have fabricated historical situations in order to portray Jesus as the originator of theological concepts which were actually a later development of the church. This view requires error on the part of the Gospel writers, and, as was stated in chapter one, this dissertation presupposes the truthfulness of the Gospel accounts.

Finally, there are some who accept the accuracy of the Gospel records but whose interpretations still result in a practical denial of the sin because they claim Jesus was only speaking hyperbolically.¹ McNeile, for example, appeals to Numbers 15:30f., 1 Samuel 3:14, and Isaiah 22:14 as instances where Jewish phraseology uses hyperbole in describing serious sin as though it were unpardonable.² The consensus of scholars has always rejected this view. It is very doubtful if any of the Old Testament examples cited by McNeile are really examples of hyperbole.³ Even

Branscomb, Mark, p. 74; Higgins, The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus, p. 89; Hultgren, Jesus and His Adversaries, p. 105; Schweizer, Matthew, p. 285; Scroggs, "The Exaltation of the Spirit," p. 361; Tödt, The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition, p. 119.

¹McNeile, Matthew, p. 179; Luce, Luke, p. 228.

²McNeile, Matthew, p. 179.

³See Vincent, Mark, p. 142. A random check of a

if they were, there is nothing in the context of Jesus' statements to suggest that He is only speaking figuratively. Cranfield reminds us that there is no reason to attempt to tone down the severity of Jesus' statement because this kind of solemn warning is not uncommon in the teaching of Jesus (e.g. Matt 25:41-6 and Mark 9:42-48).¹

A Generalized Sin

Most of the patristic writers took a very broad view of the sin.² The tendency of these writers was to suggest that almost any false assertion about the person or work of the Holy Spirit would qualify as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Cyril of Jerusalem went so far as to say that false statements made in ignorance could

number of commentaries by this writer failed to locate anyone who supported McNeile's interpretation of the Old Testament passages. See e.g. Ronald C. Clements, Isaiah 1-39, New Century Bible, ed. Ronald E. Clements (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 186-87; Davis, Birth of a Kingdom, p. 36; George B. Gray, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers, ICC, ed. S. R. Driver et al. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1903), pp. 181-82; H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Isaiah, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 1:351-52; A. Nooradtzij, Numbers, trans. Ed van der Maas, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), pp. 138-39; Henry P. Smith, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel, ICC, ed. S. R. Driver et al. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1899), pp. 28-29; Edward J. Young, The Book of Isaiah, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 2:104; and Gordon J. Wenham, Numbers, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 131.

¹Cranfield, Mark, p. 142.

²See above, pp. 14-17.

render one guilty.¹

This view is totally discounted today. It simply generalizes a sin which is obviously referring to something more specific. Augustine himself demonstrated how ridiculous this view is.² Also, this understanding of the sin would seem to require a distinction between members of the Godhead. It flirts with the suggestion that the Holy Spirit is somehow more holy or more divine than Christ, and so one must guard what is said about the Spirit.

Medieval theologians made the sin even more general than the early Fathers.³ This was done primarily on the basis of two false premises. Previously, patristic writers had usually generalized the sin by extending the meaning of blasphemy against the Spirit to include any serious sin which even remotely could be considered to be against the Spirit. Later scholastic scholars like Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas took a different approach. Having first made the equation that the blasphemy against the Spirit is an unpardonable sin, they dispensed with the concept of a sin against the Holy Spirit and carried on their discussions under the broader heading of the unpardonable sin. This allowed them to include sins which they believed to be

¹Catecheses 16:1, in vol. 2 of The Works of Saint Cyril, p. 76.

²See above, p. 20.

³See above, pp. 23-26.

unpardonable but which could not be even remotely tied to blasphemy against the Spirit. The second premise which allowed a more general approach to the sin to be taken was the belief that all sins committed out of deliberate malice were somehow especially directed toward the Holy Spirit. Clearly, any view which makes the sin of despair an unpardonable sin is patently false.¹

Rejection of Clear Truth

The usual Reformed view of the sin is that it is apostasy, the falling away or rejection of unregenerate people who at one time professed to be believers.² They can be said to blaspheme the Spirit because they reject the truth of Christianity which was made known to them through the ministry of the Spirit. The essence of the sin is generally pinpointed to be a rejection of clear truth.

The problem with this interpretation is that, although it is a good explanation of Hebrews 6:4-6, it fails to deal with the distinctive features of the Gospel passages. It is characteristic of this view to ignore the situation in the Gospel accounts and to explain the sin entirely in

¹See above, p. 24.

²See above, pp. 39-40.

³Berkouwer, Sin, p. 342.

terms of Hebrews 6:4-6.¹ It has already been suggested in the previous chapter that Hebrews 6 is not referring to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospels.² There is no indication in the Gospel passages that the Pharisees were partakers of the tremendous spiritual experiences described in Hebrews. The Pharisees were not apostates; they never professed to believe in Christ.

Most Lutherans and a few other interpreters also identify the essence of the sin as rejection of clear truth, that is, the truth of Christianity.³ They also use the word apostasy to denote their interpretation; however, they believe the sin can be committed by believers as well as unbelievers. They also explain the sin in terms of Hebrews 6:4-6. Thus, this interpretation is subject to the same objections raised against the Reformed view, not to speak of the theological error of genuine Christians being capable

¹Palmer's discussion is a good example of this. After first discussing what the sin is not, he explains the nature of the sin using a six-point outline. Each point is one of the participles in Heb 6:4-6 (Holy Spirit, pp. 181-83).

²See above, pp. 133-38.

³Lenski, Matthew, p. 483; Meyer, Matthew, p. 242; Müller, Christian Doctrine of Sin, 2:423; Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 1:571-75. Lutherans tend to be a little broader in their description of the sin than Reformed theologians. Müller, for example, speaks more of a hatred of the truth than a rejection of it, but the result is the same (Christian Doctrine of Sin, 2:422). Non-Lutherans who espouse the same view include Barrett (Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition, p. 106) and Richardson (Theology of the New Testament, p. 108).

of apostasy.

Labeling Good as Evil

As judged by the number of commentators who support it, this is the most popular opinion of the nature of the sin.¹ Despite its popularity, this understanding of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit must be rejected. First, it is simply too broad a description of the sin. It is undoubtedly true that the Pharisees were guilty of calling good evil, but that in and of itself is not unpardonable. To blaspheme the Son of Man is also to call good evil, but Jesus specifically notes that such an act is not unpardonable. Second, this view is not so much an explanation of the nature of the sin but of the nature of the person who commits it. This can be seen from explanations given by the advocates of this interpretation. Massie, for example, says: "Any man who, with such demonstration before his eyes, declared this power to be immoral (Mark 3:30), openly denouncing as evil that which was plainly good, exhibited a state of heart which was hopeless and beyond the scope of divine influence."² In other words, calling good evil

¹Barclay, Matthew, 2:44; Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels," p. 189; Clarke, Mark, p. 54; Guthrie, Jesus the Messiah, p. 134; Malden, Promise of the Father, p. 202; Nixon, "Matthew," p. 832; Robinson, Matthew, p. 113; Swete, Holy Spirit in the New Testament, p. 117; Tasker, Matthew, p. 128; Thompson, Mark, p. 81; Hiebert, Mark, p. 94; A Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. "Blasphemy," by J. Massie, 1:305; Morris, Luke, p. 211.

²Dictionary of the Bible, "Blasphemy," 1:305.

is really more of an indicator which may be used to identify someone who has committed the sin.

Probably what makes this explanation of the sin so popular is that it offers what appears to be a very logical answer to the question of why there can be no forgiveness for the sin. Something has happened inside the sinner, spiritually or psychologically, which has rendered him incapable of repentance; he confuses good and evil.¹ This particular explanation will be discussed thoroughly in the next section. What is important to note here is that this view of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has gained its popularity by skillfully moving attention away from the question of the sin's essence to a logical explanation of another difficult question, why is the sin unpardonable?

Rejection of the Convicting Work of the Spirit

A number of interpreters believe that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is committed by unbelievers who resist and reject the working of the Holy Spirit to bring them to salvation.² The chief difficulty for this viewpoint

¹Robinson, Matthew, p. 113.

²Buswell, Systematic Theology, 2:109; Hogue, Holy Spirit, p. 386; Ogilvie, Life Without Limits, p. 69; Sanders, Holy Spirit of Promise, p. 135; Summers, Luke, p. 154; Fred D. Howard, The Gospel of Matthew, Shield Bible Study Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), p. 48; Kent, "Matthew," p. 950; David S. Slusher, "The Significance of the Unpardonable Sin and the Sin unto Death" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1982), pp. 24-28; Richard Wolf,

is that it has little correspondence with the historical situation in the Gospels. There is no reference in the Gospel accounts to the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit nor any evidence that the Pharisees were experiencing any such ministry. If the Pharisees were in fact rejecting the working of the Spirit in their lives, one might expect to hear Jesus say something similar to Stephen's statement: "You men . . . are always resisting the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51). Also, it seems difficult to imagine why Jesus would have used the word blasphemy to describe such a sin. Resisting the convicting ministry of the Spirit hardly falls within the semantic range of the word "blasphemy."

Another group of interpreters can also be considered under this category. Although they describe the sin differently, in essence it is the same. For example, Moore says that "the sin against the Holy Ghost, as it has been called, is the sin of deliberate and persistent rejection of Jesus Christ."¹ This view emphasizes the rejection of

The Gospel According to Mark, Contemporary Commentaries (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1969), p. 30. It could be debated if Slusher's view of the sin places him in this category. He quotes Vincent Taylor in support of his view, but Taylor actually believes that the sin consists of calling good evil (Taylor, Mark, p. 244). However, statements such as "this sin against the Holy Spirit may begin as a single act of resistance to the voice and leading of the Spirit" (p. 26), seem to indicate that Slusher falls within the category under discussion.

¹D. Moore, "Discussions and Notes on the Unpardonable Sin," ExpTim 3 (February 1892):219.

the salvation message, whereas the previous view emphasized rejection of the working of the Holy Spirit who is pressing home the message. Both views amount to the same thing and both are subject to the same objections.

Most of the interpreters whose views have been explained in this category imply that they believe it is possible for the sin to be committed during one's life so that after that point in time he is in a hopeless state. However, since one can never know if a person has reached that point, this view often becomes synonymous with Augustine's interpretation of the sin, impenitence persisted in to the end of one's life.¹ This is because the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit is often viewed as being made available to all unbelievers. Therefore, since all unbelievers end up rejecting the convicting ministry of the Spirit, all unbelievers also become guilty of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus' statement is thus stripped of all its solemnity and becomes only another way of stating the obvious truism, "no repentance, no forgiveness."²

Attacking the Divine Power and Nature of Christ

Contrary to all other interpretations of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, this view suggests that the

¹See above, p. 20-22.

²Amazingly, Cox believes that this was all Jesus meant to say ("Sin against the Holy Spirit," pp. 324-25).

sin really has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit at all. By the expression "Holy Spirit," Jesus actually was referring to His own divine nature. The sin is basically an attack on and the denial of the deity of Christ. This view was held by Athanasius¹ in the early church and in modern times by Albert Barnes.² The main support for this interpretation is its reasonable explanation of the distinction between blasphemy against the Son of Man and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in Matthew 12:32 and Luke 12:10. The former is pardonable because it is an attack upon the humanity of Jesus while the latter is unpardonable because it is an attack upon His deity.³ The insurmountable objection against this view is the impossibility of understanding the phrase "Holy Spirit" as a reference to Christ's divine nature. This has already been explained in chapter three.⁴

Attributing the Spirit's Work to Satan

All of the other interpretations of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which have been discussed and rejected so far have a common weakness. They do not pay enough attention to the historical context in the Gospels.

¹See above, pp. 19-20.

²See above, pp. 38-39.

³Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, p. 59.

⁴See above, p. 88.

That cannot be said for this view.¹ The Pharisees were clearly attributing the Spirit's work to Satan. However, this view still suffers from a serious flaw. It is not specific enough as to the nature of the Spirit's work which, when attributed to Satan, would make one guilty of this sin. The advocates of this view realize that the Holy Spirit is not performing the same kind of miracles today which He did during the first century, but they believe that the "miracle" of the new birth and the Spirit's subsequent work in sanctification are both situations in which the Spirit may be blasphemed and the sin committed today.²

Broadus's objection to this view is well taken:

Can any other divine work, as, for instance, the conversion of a friend, or a general revival of spirituality, be so unquestionably and unmistakably the work of God, that a person ascribing it to Satan is guilty, not merely of sin, but of that flagrant and deeply malignant blasphemy against God which is unpardonable? This is the question to be decided; and it can hardly be decided in the affirmative.³

Regeneration and subsequent sanctification are not sign-miracles.⁴ Whereas sign-miracles are undeniable, there is nothing compelling about the effects of regeneration

¹See e.g. Ellicott, Ellicott's Commentary, p. 73; Evans, "Expository Problems," p. 243; Hobbs, Matthew, pp. 154-55; Robertson, Word Pictures, 1:97; Walvoord, Matthew, p. 89.

²Ibid.

³Broadus, Matthew, p. 272.

⁴John C. Whitcomb, Jr., "The Limitations and Values of Christian Evidences," BSas 135 (January-March 1978):25-26.

or sanctification which require one to admit that they are works of God.¹ These experiences are sometimes counterfeited by false professors. No human being can infallibly decide whether or not the conversion experience of another person is genuine. Unbelievers can easily (and often do) misinterpret and ridicule the salvation experience of another out of ignorance. This is not the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The unpardonable sin is not committed out of ignorance, as was shown from the Gospel accounts.² This point will be developed more fully shortly.

Attributing the Miracles of Christ to Satan

This interpretation of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is almost identical to the previous view, which said that the sin consisted in attributing the Spirit's work to Satan. In the present view the Spirit's work is limited to the miracles which Christ was performing through the power of the Holy Spirit during His earthly ministry. Therefore, those who espouse this view believe that the sin could only have been committed while Jesus was on earth.³ Those interpreters who advocate this view are almost

¹Ibid; Whitcomb, Does God Want Christians to Perform Miracles Today? p. 9.

²See above, pp. 65, 70, 94-95, and 120.

³See above, pp. 36-37.

exclusively dispensationalists.¹

As with the previous interpretation of the sin, this one also has much to commend it. It has correctly interpreted the historical situation, for the Pharisees were certainly attributing the miracles of Christ to Satan. However, it is incorrect to limit the sin to the ministry of Christ. First, it does not appear from Jesus' own words in Matthew 12:32 and Luke 12:10 that His presence was necessary for the sin to be committed. He identifies the sin as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, not blasphemy against Himself. In fact, Jesus makes a special point of the fact that the sin is not a sin against Himself. Second, the exegesis of Luke 12:10 has shown that Jesus informed His disciples that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could also be committed during their own ministries.²

Blaspheming the Miracle-Working Power of the Spirit

The present writer believes that this is the correct interpretation of what Jesus meant by the blasphemy

¹Barbieri, "Matthew," p. 47; Chafer, Systematic Theology, 7:48; Franklin, "Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," p. 232-33; Gaebeline, Matthew, p. 250; Pentecost, Words and Works of Jesus, p. 207; Ryrie, Holy Spirit, p. 5. The only exception to this was apparently John Wesley (see above, pp. 37-38). It is unclear whether or not Chrysostom and Jerome also held this exact view (see above, pp. 17-19).

²See above, pp. 129-32.

against the Holy Spirit.¹ Not only does it fit the historical situation in the Gospels, but it also stands up to the objections raised against all the previously discussed interpretations. The Pharisees were indeed blaspheming the miracle-working power of the Spirit by their accusation that Jesus' miracles were accomplished by Satan's power rather than the Holy Spirit's. Mark's explanatory ὅτι clause in 3:30, which probably corresponds to Matthew's διὰ τοῦτο (12:31), seems to equate the accusation of the Pharisees with the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

This view is not without its critics. The most common objection is stated by Foster: "It seems to be counter to the entire New Testament to hold that a person can speak a single, dreadful word and then never be able to repent of it and reconstruct the life, no matter how great is the desire for forgiveness and redemption."² Actually Foster has constructed a straw man. This writer has not found anyone who would equate the sin with this kind of single irreversible act, nor does it produce a situation in which a person who has committed the sin seeks forgiveness but is denied it by God.

What can be said about the nature of this sin? First, it is not a one-time act, not simply an impulsive unguarded remark which is never repeated again. A slip

¹See Broadus, Matthew, pp. 272-73.

²Foster, Studies in the Life of Christ, p. 544.

of the tongue or any other accidental saying of the words would not make one guilty of the sin. Müller wisely explains: "It is impossible for a man, as if by mere magic of certain words, which do not spring from the depth of his heart, to commit the very worst of all sins, and to abandon himself irremediably to eternal ruin."¹ Mark's use of the imperfect tense in 3:22 and 3:30 may indicate that the charges of the religious leaders were made a number of times. The same charges were made earlier in Jesus' ministry (Matt 9:34) as well as after the incident in Matthew 12 and Mark 3 (cf. Luke 11:15;² John 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20).

Second, although it cannot be thought of as a flip-pant one-time act, it is a definite act. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not simply an act which is only a manifestation of a hardened state of the soul.³ This is not to say that the sin can be divorced from man's sinful nature; all sin is ultimately rooted in man's depravity. But the blasphemy against the Spirit is an act which does not depend upon a prior history of other sinful acts. Mark uses the word ἀνόρημα because it is an act that is committed

¹Christian Doctrine of Sin, 2:419.

²It has been demonstrated in chapter five of this paper that Luke 11:14-23 is a later incident in the life of Jesus than Matthew 12 and Mark 3. See above, pp. 122-29.

³Cf. Edwards, "Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," pp. 42-49 and Herman Olshausen, Biblical Commentary on the New Testament, trans. A. C. Kendrick, 6 vols. (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Co., 1858), 1:454.

at a particular point in time. It is the act of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The exact form of the blasphemy is made clear by the context. The Pharisees were blaspheming the miracle-working power of the Spirit. Although blasphemy is basically a sin which involves speaking and though this is normally how the sin would be committed, audible speaking is probably not necessary. That is, someone without the ability to speak would not be immune from the sin. What is required is a positive speaking of the heart, so to speak, against the miracle-working power of the Spirit.

Third, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not a sin of ignorance. The charges made by the Pharisees were not the accusations of well-intentioned men. They had not simply gotten their facts mixed up and made a mistake. Jesus' refutation of the charges made by the Pharisees, as recorded by both Matthew (12:25-26)² and Mark (3:23-26),³ very pointedly demonstrated how ridiculous and absurd the Pharisees' charges were. These men were not misinformed, they were willingly ignorant of the truth. Whitcomb has observed that supernatural sign-miracles, such as Jesus was performing, "were presented to human minds with such force and clarity, that no one was able

¹See above, p. 112.

²See above, pp. 67-70.

³See above, pp. 103-07.

to deny them."¹ The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an attempt to dispute the indisputable. It is a conscious effort to deny the undeniable. The one who commits this sin is fully aware of what he is doing.

Why Is the Sin Unpardonable?

As a first step toward answering this question, it can be said that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable because one never repents of it.² All would agree that genuine repentance brings forgiveness. The person who commits the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not seek forgiveness. The concept of a sinner seeking for God's pardon and yet being refused that pardon is contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture. The person who commits this sin has no desire for forgiveness.

This logically leads to another question; why do not those who commit the sin seek to be forgiven, and why do they have no desire for forgiveness? It is not enough to say that they simply refuse to seek forgiveness for some unexplained reason. No rational person would logically permit his own doom. The reason the sinner does not seek forgiveness for the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is that he is unable to do so. It is certainly not because of any inability on God's part or lack of

¹"Limitations and Values of Christian Evidences," p. 25.

²Lenski, Matthew, p. 485.

efficacy in the blood of Christ. The sin is unpardonable because of some inability in the sinner.

A common view of this inability is that it has been produced by the one who commits the sin. That is, in the commission of this sin, the individual has done something to himself which inhibits him from seeking forgiveness.¹ What happens according to Howard, is that the one who commits the sin "loses his ability to discern spiritual truth."² Similarly, Morris says: "This kind of sinner no longer has the capacity to repent and believe."³ According to Clarke, "if any sin is unpardonable, it is so because of its effect upon the sinner's heart, rendering him incapable of receiving pardon."⁴ This view can also be explained in purely psychological terms.⁵ The problem with this explanation of the inability is that it ignores or denies the total depravity of man, which is the real

¹Clarke, Mark, p. 55; Evans, "Expository Problems," p. 244; Frederick C. Grant and Halford E. Luccock, "The Gospel according to St. Mark," in vol. 7 of IB, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1951), p. 93; Hiebert, Mark, p. 94; Howard, Matthew, p. 48; A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, s.v. "Unpardonable Sin," by J. C. Lambert, 2:787; Malden, Promise of the Father, p. 202; Morris, Luke, p. 211; Nixon, "Matthew," p. 832; Oglivie, Life Without Limits, p. 70; Robinson, Matthew, p. 113; Slusher, "Significance of the Unpardonable Sin," pp. 24-25.

²Matthew, p. 48.

³Luke, p. 211.

⁴Mark, p. 55.

⁵Grant and Luccock, "Matthew," p. 698.

source of the inability. The unsaved Pharisees did not have the ability to discern spiritual truth (1 Cor 2:14). They did not have the capacity within themselves to repent and believe even before they committed the sin (John 6:44, 65; Rom 3:10-11).

The reason why those who commit the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit do not repent and find forgiveness is due to their own depravity. Their inability is the result of total depravity. The unpardonable sin or, for that matter, any other sin does not change man's nature. He does not become any more depraved. The blasphemy against the Spirit does nothing to man's nature which renders God impotent. No amount or quality of sin can make a person unsusceptible to the work of God's Spirit if He so chooses. Ultimately then, the reason why the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable is because God chooses to allow the one who commits the sin to remain in his own depraved condition. God simply refuses to grant that person the grace necessary to repent.

All of this naturally leads to the most important question; why this particular sin? Why has God singled out this particular sin? Apparently the answer is related to the nature of the sin itself. The Gospel accounts clearly demonstrate the fact that the Pharisees were willingly ignorant of the truth. Both Matthew and Mark indicate that the first step taken by Jesus in His refutation of

the false charges against Him made by the Pharisees was to show that they were totally absurd.¹ There was absolutely no reason for them to conclude that His exorcisms were accomplished by the power of Satan. The one who commits this sin seeks to deny the undeniable miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. He attempts to dispute the indisputable. Whitcomb says that sign-miracles "were presented to human minds with such force and clarity that no one was able to deny them."² But the Pharisees attempted to deny that Jesus' miracles had been accomplished by the power of the Spirit. Although they knew the truth, they insisted on ascribing the miracle to Satan's power. This is the unpardonable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The key is the undeniability of sign-miracles. This is, of course, true only for those who actually saw Jesus performing the miracle. The sin cannot be committed by someone who blasphemes the miracles of Jesus after reading about them in the Bible.

Who Can Commit the Sin?

The question to be decided here is whether the sin can be committed by unbelievers, unbelievers and believers, or just believers. As was demonstrated in chapter one of this dissertation, all of these positions have been advocated

¹See above, pp. 67-70 and 103-107.

²Whitcomb, "Limitations and Values of Christian Evidences," p. 25.

by various interpreters. Generally speaking, it is only when the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospel accounts is equated with passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 John 5:16 that the sin is seen as pertaining to believers. It has been previously shown in chapter six that these equations are invalid. Also, Luke 12:10 is sometimes used as proof that genuine believers can commit the sin. But here again it has been demonstrated in chapter five that this verse is not directed toward the disciples themselves but to nondisciples to whom the disciples are ministering.¹

It is clear from the accounts in Matthew 12 and Mark 3 that Jesus' charge of blasphemy was directed toward the unbelieving Pharisees. If the sin could be committed by believers, it would be in conflict with the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer (John 5:24; 6:37; 10:27-30; etc.). Truly, only the unregenerate can commit the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Can the Sin Be Committed Today?

The answer to this question depends, of course, on the interpretation of the sin itself. It has been shown that the sin is best understood as the blasphemy of the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit. Since this is the case, then obviously the sin could only be committed during a period of supernatural sign-miracles. It has been

¹See above, pp. 131-32.

argued in chapter three of this dissertation that sign-miracles are not occurring today.¹ They ceased at the end of the first century. Therefore, the sin could not be committed in this age.

The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could have been committed during Jesus' ministry as well as during the ministries of His apostles, who also performed the same kind of supernatural sign-miracles (cf. Acts 3:1-11; 8:5-7; 9:32-42; and 19:11-12). It also appears that the sin can be committed in the future tribulation period during the ministry of God's two witnesses in Revelation 11:3-6. These two individuals will also apparently be given the power to perform supernatural sign-miracles.

¹See above, pp. 49-50.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to examine Jesus' statements about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit from a detailed historical, exegetical, and theological perspective in order to hopefully shed some new insights on the problem and come to a conclusion which is fully supported by all the data.

As a first step, a survey of the history of interpretation of the unpardonable sin in the Gospels was undertaken since good exegesis cannot be performed apart from historical considerations. The first period considered was the early church. It was possible to deal with practically all the early church Fathers since the number who made reference to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is limited. Because of the tremendous variety among their interpretations, it was decided to attempt a classification under three broad categories: nonspecific views, a generalized sin, and a specific sin. A number of these early writers were placed in the first category because many of them only made passing reference to the sin, or if they devoted more space to the problem, they still failed to discuss the nature of the sin itself. Most of the patristic writers took a very general approach to the sin. The

tendency here was to include a number of specific acts under the heading of blasphemy against the Spirit with the commission of any one of them being sufficient to make one guilty of the sin. Those patristic writers who attempted a detailed study of the problem in their writings were the ones who interpreted the sin in a more specific fashion. All the Fathers in this category influenced later interpreters, especially Augustine, whose view of the sin, impenitence persisted in to the end of one's life, became the predominant interpretation of the sin in the Middle Ages.

In the Middle Ages there was apparently little, if any, detailed exegetical study of the sin. Instead the sin was approached from the theological and philosophical perspective of Scholasticism. Representatives of this period, such as Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, accepted Augustine's view as only one form of the sin. They believed that any sin committed through certain malice was also unpardonable.

The Reformation leaders generally rejected the theories of Scholasticism in favor of a more biblical approach. Augustine's view was also rejected though Luther seems to have been influenced to some degree by Scholastic thinking in his interpretation of the sin. This influence may be the reason why Luther's view of the nature of the sin proved so difficult to pin down. Calvin and Arminius both believed

that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the sin of apostasy. Calvin, however, held that only unbelievers were capable of committing the sin, while Arminius and apparently Luther believed that even the regenerate could fall prey to it.

The final period considered was the modern church. The various interpretations were categorized using a broad fourfold system of classification. First, there were those who denied that there is any such thing as an unpardonable sin. Second, there were those who supported Augustine's view of the sin, chiefly Roman Catholics. Third were those who generally limited the time frame during which the sin could have been committed to roughly the ministry of Jesus. The final class of interpreters was the largest and consisted of those who said the sin can be committed today, though their individual views of the sin varied widely.

The next chapter of this dissertation began the exegetical treatment of the blasphemy against the Spirit with a detailed analysis of the account in Matthew 12:22-32. It was determined that the incident described in this passage took place during Jesus' Galilean ministry. The narrative begins with Jesus' healing of a demon-possessed man. The Pharisees attempted to discredit Jesus by accusing Him of performing this miracle by the power of Satan. Although it was obvious that this man had been healed by the power of God, the Pharisees, either out of fear, pride, jealousy,

or some other sinful motive or combination of motives, resorted to this patently false charge.

Jesus refuted the charge of the Pharisees by first proving the utter absurdity of it. Next He used an ad hominem argument to demonstrate that by making such an accusation against Himself they were being logically inconsistent since they accepted the exorcisms of their own "sons." Jesus continued His refutation by turning to the positive implications of His exorcisms. The Pharisees should have realized that exorcisms cannot be performed by one who is in league with Satan, as they were accusing Jesus of being, but by one who is the enemy of Satan and who is stronger than him. Jesus concluded His refutation with a general warning addressed to the indifferent crowd which was listening to all these proceedings.

In the final two verses of this pericope Jesus charged the Pharisees with having committed the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit by their continued affirmation that His miracles were the work of Satan rather than the Holy Spirit. Jesus made it clear that there is no forgiveness for this sin. He also pointed out that He was not talking about a sin that relates directly to Himself since even those who would go to the extreme of blaspheming Him have not necessarily committed the unpardonable sin.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation was an exegesis of the parallel passage in Mark 3:22-30. Since it

is an account of the same incident as Matthew 12:22-32, it was not necessary to present it in the same detailed fashion as was done in Matthew's account. This chapter concentrated on the elements which were unique to Mark and which furnished additional insight into understanding the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Mark did not record the healing of the demon-possessed man because he wished to contrast the attitude of Jesus' family (3:20-21) toward Him with that of the Pharisees, who in Mark's account are called scribes. Mark recorded two distinct charges which the scribes brought against Jesus, while Matthew chose to summarize them as one accusation. The substance of the charges in both Matthew and Mark is identical.

The refutation of the charge that Jesus was able to perform exorcisms because He was in league with Satan followed the same general line of argument in Mark as in Matthew. Mark's narrative begins with Jesus reducing the scribes' accusation against Him to the level of absurdity. However, Mark omitted Jesus' ad hominem argument and proceeded immediately to explain His real relationship to Satan. Mark also omitted Jesus' reference to the kingdom. Mark concluded his account of Jesus' refutation of the scribes with the parable about the strong man which is almost identical to Matthew's version.

As in Matthew's narrative, Mark concluded his account with Jesus' charge that the scribes had committed

the unpardonable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Mark chose not to record Jesus' added statement distinguishing blasphemy against Himself from blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Mark did emphasize the seriousness of the sin by calling it an eternal sin, a sin whose guilt will never be pardoned. The most important difference between Matthew and Mark is Mark's explanatory comment in verse 30. Here he clearly equated the charge of the scribes that Jesus was casting out demons by the prince of demons with the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The next chapter of this dissertation dealt with Luke 11:14-23 and 12:10. The former passage has often been understood as Luke's version of the same event otherwise recorded in Matthew 12 and Mark 3. In order to determine if this were in fact the case, the narrative in Luke was examined both from the standpoint of external as well as internal evidence. A study of the external evidence demonstrated that Luke 11:14-23 is part of a larger section of Luke's Gospel (9:51-18:14) which takes place after Jesus' Galilean ministry. Therefore, Luke 11:14-23 is not the same event recorded in Matthew 12 and Mark 3.

A study of the internal evidence, that is, the data of the passage itself, produced the same conclusion. Although the incident in Luke has a number of similarities to the other synoptics, it also contains significant differences. This is especially true when one examines the

events which follow the pericope in Luke. Therefore, since the passage in Luke was found to be a different incident in Jesus' ministry and since it contains no mention of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, it was excluded from further discussion.

Luke 12:10 was next examined. Since it had been shown before that Luke 9:51-18:14 was Luke's record of Jesus' post-Galilean ministry, it was evident that Luke 12:10 was a different occasion than Matthew 12 and Mark 3 on which Jesus made reference to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This was also proven by the fact that Luke 12:10 is in a totally different context from which the sin is found in the other synoptics. The sin in Luke is stated in terms almost identical to Matthew 12:32 and is to be interpreted in the same way. Luke 12:10 does, however, make it clear that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could also be committed during the ministry of Jesus' own disciples.

Chapter six of this dissertation was an examination of Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 John 5:16 in order to determine if they were also referring to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. An exegesis of the passage in Hebrews was not attempted nor was any particular interpretation adopted as the correct view. Instead, the various interpretations of the passage were divided into two categories depending upon whether those in the passage were thought to be believers or unbelievers. If it is determined that believers are in

view, the situation in Hebrews 6 was shown to be quite different from that in the Gospels where unbelievers are in view. However, even if one understands those in Hebrews 6 to be unbelievers, this is the only connection between it and the Gospels. The spiritual experience of those in Hebrews 6 can hardly be applied to the Pharisees in the Gospels.

In the case of 1 John 5:16, an approach similar to that used with Hebrews 6 was followed. It was shown that even if one could prove that John was in fact speaking of the same sin as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, it would not add to our understanding of the sin since John did not elaborate at all upon the sin leading to death but only admitted that there is such a thing. 1 John 5:16 was shown to have no real bearing on the problem at hand.

In the next chapter the data from the previous chapters of this dissertation was brought to bear on a fresh analysis of the problem of the sin. The major areas of debate were considered under the headings of four questions. The first and most important of these was concerned with the nature of the sin itself. Interpretations of the sin which had not already been shown to be incorrect from the exegesis of the scriptural data were examined and evaluated. It was determined that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit consists in blaspheming the miracle-working power of the

Spirit. It is not a flippant act or slip of the tongue. It is an act which can be characterized as a positive speaking of the heart. Also, it is not a sin of ignorance but is done in full knowledge of the truth. It is an attempt to deny the undeniable.

The second question was concerned with why the sin is unpardonable. It was concluded that this was due first of all to the fact that the one who commits the sin never seeks forgiveness because of some inability within himself. This inability was ultimately found to come from man's total depravity. The person who is guilty of the sin is allowed by God to simply remain in his depraved condition.

The next question to be decided was concerned with who can commit the sin. It was determined that there is nothing in the Gospel accounts themselves to suggest that anyone other than unbelievers can commit it. This was, of course, also found to be in harmony with the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer, which itself would rule out the possibility of genuine believers committing the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The final question involved whether or not the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could be committed today. Since the sin consists in blaspheming the miracle-working power of the Spirit, it was concluded that only during a period of supernatural sign-miracles could someone be guilty of the sin. It could not be committed after the age of

miracles ceased at the end of the first century. It is possible that the future ministry of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3-6 may qualify as a period in which the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit may again be committed.

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