## Sin against the Holy Spirit

A biblically holistic approach

*By Gerard Feller*

Every Christian counselor will regularly be dealing with confidants in his work, who think to have committed ‘the sin against the Holy Spirit’. In this article I first of all would like to analyze the biblical meaning of this unpardonable sin. Then I want to pay attention to the possible causes of why Christians think that they live in this sin.

The underlying issue of this problem of approach (1) often has a spiritual, psychosocial or behavioral cause.

Besides a clear biblical exegesis of the concept of unpardonable sin, attention should also be paid to, if necessary, the underlying cause.

**Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit**

Jesus makes an important statement in **Mat. 12:31,32** (and **Mk 3:28,29** and **Lk 12:10**):

“*Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come*”.

The context of this statement is the healing of a demon-possessed blind and mute man by the Lord Jesus.

In Palestine, in the first century, such a person was considered to be a burden, a plague, someone who was to be avoided. But Jesus healed him! Suddenly this man was able to speak and see! How great the joy and the relief must have been to the man himself and to those who took care of him. The response of the Pharisees who were confronted with this undeniable miracle of healing by Jesus, was: *“This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.”*

This response was clearly the result of the hardening of the heart towards the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus.

Jesus refutes this in **verses 25-26** by saying: *“Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?”*

After that response Jesus makes the above-mentioned statement.

The expression ‘sin against the Holy Spirit’ does not appear in the Bible; though ‘blasphemy of the Spirit’ (**v 31**) and ‘speaking against the Holy Spirit’ (**v 32**) or ‘eternal sin’ (**Mark 3:29**) do appear. To speak a word against the Son of men means: not to believe (directly) that Jesus is Whom He says to be, or being uncertain towards His doctrine, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit goes further. What the Pharisees did at the liberation of the deaf and blind man, went further than a mistake. The Greek word for blaspheme is blasphemeo. This means: to mock, to ridicule, to slander and to insult.

According to the vocabulary, to blaspheme is: to damage someone’s honor and good name **against better judgment**. The Pharisees did not speak out of ignorance, but deliberately blasphemed the work of the Holy Spirit again and again. This is in contrast to, for example, Nicodemus who said: *“Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him”* (**Jn 3:2**). This was the only conclusion that an honest person could draw, but the Pharisees were saying against better judgment that the Lord Jesus did His miracles by the ruler of the demons. Joost Verduijn defines ‘the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’ as a hardening of the heart, until the moment that a person reaches the point that he himself doesn’t want to have anything to do with the Spirit or His work. There was a growing hardening of the heart with the Pharisees, so that they finally resisted against the Holy Spirit (**cf. Acts 7:51**). This definition excludes all Christians who fear to have committed ‘the sin against the Holy Spirit’. Indeed, if you are afraid for that, there is no mention of a permanent hardening of the heart. It is therefore not about just doing something once that one was not allowed to, but a gradual and continuous hardening, until such a person comes to the point that he does not even want to have anything to do with the Spirit or His work. Such a person does not experience that condition as a problem.

**Slander and deceit against the Spirit**

Also concerning the slander against the Spirit (**Heb 10:29**) it is not just about one single mistake in the context, but about an attitude of hardening. It is an image of a person who intentionally  lives in sin after he had come to the knowledge of the truth. Also deceiving or lying against the Holy Spirit (**Acts 5**) appears to be a plan which was devised to challenge God (Verduijn). In **Heb 6: 4-6** we read about a sin, which men cannot repent of.

It is pictured as someone who crucifies and openly mocks the Son again.

The well-known theologian Augustine who lived in the fourth and fifth century after Christ, thought that ‘the sin against the Holy Spirit’ was that a person refuses to repent in his whole life.

Others argue against it by saying that it is for example written in **Mat. 12:32** that such a person will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Or they refer to **1Jn 5:16** where we read that we do not need to pray anymore for a person who had committed such a sin leading to death. The latter would mean that it is about an unpardonable sin in the present life. Linked to that is the question whether a reborn Christian can still ever perish.

Christians have different views about that; both views rely on different Bible verses.

**Why does a person think that he has committed the sin against the Holy Spirit?**

As it is said earlier, a person who is asking for help, because he or she is bothered by it, or is afraid to have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, on the contrary have not done that, because this sin includes the persistence of blaspheming God and showing no remorse for that.

But why does a confidant think that he has committed that sin? It is important to find this out. Many confidants relate sexual sins with the sin against the Holy Spirit, for example by committing adultery or by cherishing homosexual contacts, some people think , by masturbation or watching porno sites.

Their fear is based on the text from **1 Cor. 6:18,19** which says:

*“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?”*

It is important to read this text carefully. It says: sinning against his own body, not: against the Holy Spirit Himself, but against the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’.

Also elsewhere in the Bible we read that there is forgiveness for sexual sins, for example the sin of David who committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Of course the pastoral or mental counseling is not sufficient by only explaining to the confidant that this does not refer to the unpardonable sin.

They surely have to continue the counseling of the confidant concerning the problem of sexual sin, amongst others by a process of confession, repentance and forgiveness and to hate sin. But certainly also through restoration and by starting with healthy relationships.

**To speak evil about God**

In **Leviticus 24:16** we read that whoever blasphemes the Name of the Lord (but also concerning other sins in the time of the Old Testament), shall surely be put to death. That is the reason why confidants think that if they have spoken evil about God, they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. However, in the text of Leviticus it is not written that there is no forgiveness for such a person. Every evil speaking against God is not always blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as it is meant in **Matthew 12**. That appears from the fact that the Lord Jesus particularly makes clear in that portion, that whoever speaks a word against the Son, he shall be forgiven. Also here it is of course important that such a person will be purified from sin through the confession of his sin (Pro. 28:13; 1 Jn. 1:9).

**Who can commit the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?**

In **Matthew 12** Jesus warns the Pharisees about labeling the work of the Son as work of the devil.

There was still an opportunity to be forgiven. That was going to change soon thereafter. As a matter of fact, the time that Jesus made that statement, the Holy Spirit had not been poured out in the heart of the people yet (**Jn. 7:39).** But after Pentecost, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is possible and therefore the Spirit can lead us into the words of Jesus (**Jn. 14: 12-22**). Unbelievers cannot blaspheme the Spirit in the meaning of this context of the Bible. In **Heb.6:4-6** it is about people *“who have once been enlightened and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit”.* For those people it is possible to publicly blaspheme the ministry of the Holy Spirit against their better judgment and ascribe His works to satan and his demons.

In **Heb. 6** the Holy Spirit let it be recorded that men who have committed that very sin, cannot possibly be brought again to repentance.

Unrepentance does not always necessarily mean a sin against the Holy Spirit; unrepentance may actually be a result of blaspheming the Holy Spirit (**2 Thes. 2:11**). I want to emphasize once more that the fact that confidants who fear to have committed the ‘sin against the Holy Spirit’, are often the last ones who would publicly blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

**To curse internally**

Curses can have a terrible effect. Like Solomon already made clear, even though he does not always use the word ‘curse’ (**cf. Pro. 11:9a; 12:18; 15:4; 18:21**).

James says: *“The tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.**With it we bless our  Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.”* (**Jam. 3:8-10**). Cursing God consciously is often not what confidants do. It is more the compulsive thoughts, which may repeatedly come up unwillingly in a believer, without him being able to stop them. In many cases they try to suppress or neglect the obsessive thoughts, impulses or imaginations. Thoughts like ‘an awful God’ or sadistic or unclean imaginations about God or curses against God, are torturing the mind and emotional life of believers. These compulsive thoughts can often arise in two ways.

First by occult contacts. People can consciously and unconsciously be contaminated with occult persons, thoughts, methods or objects, which may lead, amongst others, to great fears, that can cause a believer to curse internally, which in its turn can cause a believer to think that he has committed the ‘sin against the Holy Spirit’.

For a detailed checklist of such possible occult contacts, please see our website under: ‘Deliverance Counseling’. An example of a confidant who thought to have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, is mrs. K. (a fictional name). For more than ten years she had struggled with cursing internally and was afraid of being perished forever. She had already received many assistance such as, a lot of cognitive behavioral therapies and pastoral care, but nothing seemed to be of any help. She became chronically depressive and her whole family suffered from her almost unbearable symptoms. During pastoral conversations and in prayer she remembered that ten years ago, while attending another church, she allowed a man who was a stranger to her, to lay his hands on her. At the laying of hands on her, this man ‘prophesied’ that she would experience a lot of hardships and burdens in her life. This actually caused a curse in her life (1 Tim. 5:22). It brought her fears which grew stronger and stronger, the more she experienced stress in her daily life. After she had prayed for purification and received further edification in the blessings of faith, her fears and compulsive thoughts of the internal cursing disappeared.

This is a form of contamination which can even occur within the church and which not all pastoral counselors are alert to.

**Emotional weakness and derailment (from a neurological point of view)**

The **second** possibility of internal cursing which often occurs, has got nothing to do with occultism or personal sins.

It is more to be considered a weakness which can arise when the emotional system in the brains is not well organized or built up.

It is often a result of A-traumas: skills that people have not learnt and/or a lack of emotional skills in their education.

The result can be a reduced emotional stability because the deep attachments in the thalamus are not stable (level 1).

It is often also a mixture of B-traumas, ugly situations that a person has gone through.

This causes the amygdale to be sensitized and that such strong fears increase rationally and also irrationally (level 2).

When a person has not learnt how to deal with emotional conflicts or with peak –end emotions, he can get problems in the cingulate cortex, the part of the brains where synchronization with others take place (level 3).

People may for example ‘get stuck’ in depressive feelings and fear, which cannot be controlled well by the pre-frontal cortex, which is our controlling and identity center (level 4).

Due to this emotional instability, an overwhelming power of emotions arises, which cannot be controlled anymore by our rational thinking.

What then happens, is that emotional derailments take place, like for example the internal cursing, for which a totally wrong explanation is given.

We have dealt with this mechanism in two extensive articles in the Promise magazine, as an error in the ‘Verbal Logical Explainer’ (see website of Promise)



*Picture. The controlling center of our brains. Copyright: Jim Wilder*

The picture shows us the brain structures which often are related with the four levels of the controlling center.

There is still some uncertainty about the question where some functions do begin and end, but there are many indications that they are concentrated on places which are indicated in the picture.

Level 1 uses the thalamus which is known as the deep limbic structures, like the basal ganglia.

Level 2 predominantly takes place in the amygdala. The  cingulate cortex  contains the mother core of Level 3. Most attention in science is focused on the orbital pre-fontal cortex of Level 4. These structures are altogether referred to as the limbic system.

Due to emotional derailment, strong emotions can be released which then are totally wrongly interpreted by the brain: uncontrollable emotions like internal cursing, compulsive thoughts, predominantly reinforced by the sensitized amygdale. Strong fears which are wrongly translated by the pre frontal cortex. Fears that are continually seeking ‘the peak end’ of people, which means: they are continually sensitized and they get an increasing substance in the system of meaning. With Christians it relates to their faith relationship with Jesus. That causes on the contrary, that the compulsive thoughts will develop in this area. Through the internal cursing the Verbal Logical Explainer (VLE) looks for an explanation from the past in the memories which are saved in the hippocampus. In this memory we find the most ‘logical explanation’ that a person who has such thoughts and also possibly expresses them, is a blasphemer against God and therefore against the Holy Spirit. This mechanism can be reinforced when a person had doubts in the past about the salvation in Christ or that this had often been emphasized in the church ceremonies. Then the VLE will draw the wrong conclusion, based on implicitly emotional memories (memories which are not experienced consciously) that one has committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, which then further rouses the fears.

This explanation model of the brains is then based on implicit feelings from the past which are triggered in the present and which are therefore wrongly interpreted by the VLE.

Due to extreme fears, which are also developing in the faith territory, people may also think that they have experienced all kinds of events in the past of satanic ritual abuse and have all kinds of thoughts and imaginations of them.

These are not real memories but fear imaginations.

**A practical example of internal cursing**

A young man of twenty years old has coped with internal cursing for months already and therefore has fears of having committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. In the year that I counseled him, he graduated from a technical study at the university, despite the extreme stress.

He came from a Christian environment and although his parents have not raised him very affectionately, he had a good family relationship with them. In his contacts with girls there was some fear of commitment when the relationship grew deeper and then the fears and the internal cursing were reinforced. In his contact with his fellow students he avoided, due to his weak conscience, the student’s life in a fearful way, like for example going to the pub or joining the students’ club.

He had also suffered from traumas, among others: the sudden death of his grandmother with whom he has had a very close relationship.

His approach of complaint was internally compulsive thoughts and fear of the ‘sin against the Holy Spirit’.

This extremely rationally intelligent young man was able, in a manner of speaking, to give a Bible study on blasphemy against the Spirit and knew rationally that he was not living in sin. It has been explained often to him rationally and people have often prayed regarding the fear and for protection against the evil one, that probably caused or improved this fear. And yet, he could not be freed from these fears, which in fact was even so bad that he also suffered from compulsive actions, in order ‘to restrain his fears’. This university graduate with high grades told me that every morning he first had to shave three times on the left side of his face and then twice on the right side. If he did not do that, it was the very proof that he had committed the unpardonable sin! It was clear that due to the triggered peak emotions, his rational control of the left part of the brain and the pre- frontal cortex were completely overruled by the emotions in the right part of the brain, which in its turn led to the wrong VLE interpretations. (There are also emotions in the left part of the brain, which are controlled by the ratio, the thinking, which disappear by a right information about, for example, a right exegesis on the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.) These emotions are especially peak emotions in the right part of the brain by amongst others: A- and B-traumas, instability and capacity problems. Once more, intellectually and rationally the young man was above average, but due to his immature and damaged emotional processing, the intellectual explanation about internal cursing did not mean anything to him.

Only when attention was paid to his A and B-traumas and also to the reinforcement of his Christian identity, he was able to restrain his strong emotions through the pre-frontal cortex, which is his identity center.

Through this way of processing also his sensitive amygdala could be sensitized, which made him less prone to be triggered by his implicit thoughts that influence him in the present.

Only then he was liberated from the internal cursing and compulsive thoughts and compulsive actions.

Needless to say that the whole process was led by prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is thus an example whereby the intervention is not adequate when it only consists of the explanation on the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

**Peak emotions which cannot be processed.**

With a request for help, due to fear of sinning against the Holy Spirit, the **first** priority on the schedule should be:

The evaluation of the behavior. Is there mention of really and publicly blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, against better judgment? **Secondly**: to find out and pray whether there are still contacts with the occult, which have not been confessed yet and which may have led to demonization and therefore a cursing behavior. The **third** and most common complaint with Christians that suffer from internal cursing, is the inability to process the peak emotions with the results that are described for it. As it is said, the unrealistic fears often seek ‘the highest peak’. That means that fears often affect what is most important to you. In that sense, how strange it may sound, it is rather a good sign.

In the sense that a person finds his relationship with God incredibly important and that an disruption in that relationship is his greatest fear. I have seen this in many areas with people who have fears. For example with a foreign engineer who was educated and grown up in a very conservative and protected Christian family, though not very affectionate. His parents were quite distant. His highest ideal was to start a family and raise a child. He was not that young anymore when he started dating and some years later got married. His desire to have a child seemed not to be satisfied in the first years of his marriage. Still he finally became the father of a baby girl whom he loved very dearly. He told me that when he picked her up from the kindergarten and she ran to him crying “daddy, daddy” , he had the tendency to kick her. That was the last thing he wanted.

There was no mention of an occult oppression but of a peak emotion which he could not cope with and that caused unrealistic thoughts of fears. Only after he learnt to develop affectionate skills, these fears disappeared. I could give a lot more examples. For example a man who loved his wife very much and who, when they were on their way to the bedroom, walking up the stairway, had the thought of pushing her from the stairs. These are examples of unrealistic fears to damage what you love the most.

**Medications yes or no**

With chronic fears it is often the question whether the complaints are to be combated by medication. Many Christians consider the use of medication as a proof of unbelief in healing by prayer. Especially when the mentioned complaint is the thought that the person involved, has sinned against the Holy Spirit. There is also often a fear for a possible addictiveness of medication, which could help to reduce the fears, or a fear for possibly harmful side-effects.

I think that in general we should not play faith and the use of medication off against one another.

Most importantly, Christians should realize that every method, pastor, therapist, physician or medication, is a means given by God which can be used with thanksgiving, in order to get healed.

Needless to say that each means is to be tested whether it is given by God.

Medications are in my view certainly not to be excluded in advance as a means.

Especially with fears, medication can often be a necessary means.

Neurotransmitters often have a sedative effect on the amygdale (Level 2).

But also other medications can have a fear reducing effect on the complicated bio chemistry of the brains.

Benzodiazepines such as diazepam, oxazepam, etc. may be of help on a short term. However, only for short-term use, otherwise it can have an addictive effect.

Now we are using more antidepressants of the SSRI and SNRI types such as paroxetine (Seroxat), citalopram, Fevarin or Prozac (fluoxetine).

The effect of these means often occur after some weeks.

Also beta blockers are used. Some anti-epileptic drugs such as gabapentin also have a fear reducing effect.

Of course this should be used on prescription from a physician, who is able to analyze the benefits and disadvantages of a medicine.

This must also be evolved and checked again and again.

In summary, it can be said that not everyone with a fear for the sin against the Holy Spirit, should use medication.

With extreme fears these medications can certainly be used with thanksgiving, often as a supporting role for other forms of help.

Mostly in combination with prayer, pastoral conversations or some forms of psychotherapy.

**Complementary methods**

With many fear disorders we apply in psychotherapy, amongst others with fears, a gradual exposure to the factors that cause fear as an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

This seems not to be the right method for this particular fear problem, because you cannot reduce the fear by cursing consciously!

We often also indicate cognitive behavioral therapy to deal with the thoughts of the fears.

But as in the above mentioned examples, it is not always adequate.

We still have to look much more at the usually underlying traumatic factors and we are to influence them by pastoral conversations and prayer and if necessary, also medication. Also relaxation exercises such as Jacobson’s progressive relaxation exercises and to learn the diaphragmatic breathing, which is a relaxing breathing through the means of the diaphragmatic muscle, can be very useful to come to rest physically.

Hyperventilation complaints and all additional physical complaints can provoke and or reinforce the fears. These fears can often be combated by responsible exercises. Many fears are also caused by the lack of healthy boundaries.

Sometimes an oversensitive or weak conscience play a role in the fears.

A Christian assertiveness training in which is taught how to deal with boundaries and conflicts from a Christian identity, can be very helpful.

In many cases assistance and information should also be given to those who are closely involved.

Try to prevent that you consider a person with strong fears as a problem. Even when many fears are taking place in the internal world and are not always logical or imaginable to others, it does not mean that a person is crazy.

Try to show understanding and pray for and together with the person for internal rest and peace.

**The joy of the Lord**

The joy of the Lord is my strength. One of the possible causes of fears beside the mentioned emotional instability of the brains and influences of the A and B-Traumas and wrong interpretations, such as by the Verbal Logical Explainer, is the lack of the joy with and of God. Sometimes people forget the blessings of God and the experiences that they have with God. It is a good thing to remind yourself of these blessings and experiences and to bind them as adornments around your neck (**Proverbs 3:22**). These remembrances are often an encouragement that God had helped in the past and He has not changed. To make a list of blessings can be helpful to get into connection with the joy. Also to learn to come into the presence of Jesus by meditation from God’s Word and Spirit. To learn how to get encouraged by His promises and also to learn to mention and confess them.

Spiritual songs that verbalize God’s love and care and protection for us, help us to be focused on Him instead of our fears.

To come into contact with the joy and love of God combats and casts out many unrealistic fears.

In the book ‘Vreugde begint’ (see later in this magazine) it is described how we could receive and pass on the joy and peace of God.

It is also important to learn to come to rest from the strong emotions, by learning and exercising to come before God.

Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us, You have put gladness in my heart (**Psa 4: 7**). For You make him most blessed forever. You make him joyful with gladness in Your presence (**Psa 21:6).**

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you,
And be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace (**Num. 6: 24-26**).

Gerard Feller, May 2016

It is certainly a problem that people have that particular fear to have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. Though in counseling services people often differentiate a problem of approach and an underlying problem. For example alcoholism with an underlying trauma, which has caused someone to become an alcoholic. Both are problems and both are to be taken seriously. Similarly, the context, in which people see their problem, is often also very important, for example, if you have a hyperventilation attack and you erroneously think that you are dying or that the devil is attacking you, you put your complaints in the wrong context, which is of no help for a real healing. As it is mentioned in the article, the most (or maybe all) people, who have thoughts of having committed the sin against the Holy Spirit and come to a Christian counselor, are not really blasphemers of the Spirit against their better judgment. In the article it is explained, beside the exegesis, that a counselor is to see whether there is an underlying problem, which also need to be dealt with.

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