

THE FACE OF GOD

Moses had been given the Ten Commandment Law and related judgments and delivered them by voice unto Israel (Exo. 20-23). He was then given by God the two tables of stone containing the Ten Commandments (Exo. 31). Upon seeing Israel's rejection of God regarding the molten calf (Exo. 32), he in anger broke the two tables of stone and afterward attended to the punishment of the rebellious (Exo. 32:19-35).

Moses continued to lead God's people (Exo. 33) and was told by God, *"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest...Thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name"* (Exo. 33:14, 17). With this assurance, Moses then requested of God, *"I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory"* (v. 18).

It was then that God explained the condition of Moses' request. God said, *"I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy"* (v. 19). Thus God proclaimed His supremacy, but at the same time declared His graciousness and mercy. *"And He said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live"* (v. 20).

UNDERSTANDING ABOUT GOD'S FACE

"God is a Spirit" (John 4:24). After His resurrection and while He yet retained His fleshly body, Jesus said to the disciples, *"Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have"* (Luke 24:39). But spirit beings could and did sometimes take human form. Consider the three "men" who visited Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18). They were not men, but simply appeared as men. One was referred to as "the Lord" (v. 13) and the other two who went to Sodom were angels (Gen. 19:1, 15). Thus, being Spirit, God does not have a physical body as do humans.

Because of our inability to properly comprehend things beyond this life, the Scriptures often describe them in word pictures; illustrating them in terms with which we can presently relate:

"New Jerusalem...as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2), *"Street of the city was pure gold, as...transparent glass"* (v. 21), a pearl the size of a city gate (v. 21).

Even so, the Scriptures speak of God as though He had human form; this is referred to as anthropomorphism.

Voice of God. "Behold, the Lord our God hath shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His VOICE out of the midst of the fire..." (Deut. 5:24)

Arm of God. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the ARM of the Lord revealed?" (Isa. 53:1)

Feet of God. "And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under His FEET as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone. . ." (Exo. 24:10)

Finger of God. "And He gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the FINGER of God." (Exo. 31:18)

Eyes of God. "For the ways of man are before the EYES of the Lord, and He pondereth all his goings." (Prov. 5:21)

Ears of God. "For the EYES of the Lord are over the righteous, and His EARS are open unto their prayers: but the FACE of the Lord is against them that do evil." (1 Pet. 3:12)

Face of God. "Their angels do always behold the FACE of My Father which in heaven." (Matt. 18:10)

The Scriptures use terms with which we are acquainted and which we humans often use in speaking with one another.

"Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full." (2 John 12)

"But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face." (3 John 14)

"And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." (Acts 20:25)

By this term we simply mean contact in person; directly rather than through an indirect arrangement. This is also true in numerous passages which refer to communication with God:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." (Exo. 33:11)

Regarding Moses, "With him I will speak mouth to mouth" (Num. 12:8).

"And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. . ." (Deut. 34:10)

Yet the Scriptures plainly state: "No man hath seen God at any time" (1 John 4:12).

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him." (John 1:18)

"Not that any man hath seen the Father, save He which is of God, He hath seen the Father." (John 6:46)

It appears, therefore, that what is under consideration is not God's physical face, for He does not have that human characteristic. But God does have a marvelous and spectacular GLORY upon which man cannot gaze!

"And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai...and the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel." (Exo. 24:16-17)

"And it came to pass, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while He talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him." (Exo. 34:29-30)

"The children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of His countenance; which glory was to be done away. . ." (2 Cor. 3:7)

This, in fact, is actually what was requested by Moses, "Show me Thy glory" (Exo. 33:18).

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S BACK PARTS

Moses was not permitted to see the brilliance of God as God passed by, for to have done so would have caused Moses' death (Exo. 33:20). God provided for Moses to be placed in a cleft of the rock and be covered by the hand of God (v. 21-22). Then after passing by, God was to take away His hand and allow Moses to see God's "back parts" (v. 23a). "But My face shall not be seen" (v. 23b).

God is not human and has no human characteristics, but He has such brilliance, splendor, and spectacular glory that to be seen in all His wonder would cause the death of a human. Moses could

not have endured such a marvelous occurrence. But the lesser measure of God's splendor, as symbolized by God's "back parts," was permitted Moses to see.

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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: How do we reconcile the doctrine of justification by faith with the unpardonable sin mentioned in Matthew chapter 12?

ANSWER: The passage under consideration reads,

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

The concept of a sin that is unforgivable certainly appears to be at odds with what we know that the Bible teaches about God's desire that all men come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. In order to properly understand the idea of unpardonable sin, it is necessary that we establish the background that prompted Jesus to make this statement.

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus had as his opponents the Pharisees. Rather than embracing Him as the Son of David, of which the Old Testament had prophesied was coming, they were opposed to His message. Their rejection was motivated by improper theological understanding of the Law as well as for political reasons.

Theologically, they misunderstood God's purpose in giving the Law. The Law was not given to justify man before God but rather given that man might see his true condition. The Law was to manifest the sinfulness of man, not provide a means of salvation. The Apostle Paul in Romans chapter three brought to a conclusion his argument that all men were sinners by stating,

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:19-20, NKJV)

When properly applied to one's life, the Law shows that we are sinners, for all of us have broken the Law. In this sense the Law certainly is a tutor that brings us to the idea that we cannot save ourselves and therefore must be saved by another (Jesus and His death). However, the Pharisees through theological sophistry had so twisted the Law that it became their justification. They actually believed that they kept the commandments and therefore did not need a savior. Consider for example the conversation that Jesus had with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19. When he asked Jesus what he needed to do to be saved, Jesus told him to keep the commandments. To this he responded he had done that since a child! Of course such was not the case as was demonstrated when Jesus pointed out the sin in this man's life. So the Pharisees did not see themselves as people who needed to be saved. They were deceived into thinking that their own goodness merited favor with God. They accepted the message that Jesus came to seek and save that which is lost until it became obvious that this also included them!

They also perceived Jesus as a threat to their popularity and place in the Roman political system. As is shown in many of the statements Jesus made about them, they enjoyed a position in the limelight. They liked their titles and chief seats in the synagogues. As Jesus gained popularity among the people, they saw their position diminishing. This led to the plot to kill Jesus.

"Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (John 11:47-48, NKJV)

Now we are ready to examine the text referred to in our original question. Prior to the statement Jesus made concerning the unpardonable sin, a couple of events had transpired. Matthew chapter 12 describes the healing of the man with the withered hand. This was a miracle so marvelous that the people marveled at what had been done. The next was the deliverance of a man possessed with an unclean spirit. The multitudes that witnessed this miracle were amazed and began to see that this was truly the Son of David. It was the latter that prompted the statement to which Jesus responded.

As the religious leaders saw the reaction of the crowd to the miracle, they said that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of the devil. Note that they did not contest the authenticity of the miracle, only the source by which He

performed it. Jesus points out two things. First was the absurdity of the statement. If Satan was seeking to establish his kingdom, why would he then cast out those in it? This, as Jesus pointed out, would produce a divided kingdom which then would not stand. The second was the question He asked them. By whose power did they cast out demons? Of course this was rhetorical, for they did not have the power to cast out demons. By putting the two points together, we reach the conclusion that it was the Pharisees that were of the devil, not Jesus. If Satan will not cast out himself and the Pharisees could not cast him out then they were part of his kingdom. Then Jesus told them that they were guilty of the unpardonable sin.

The question we need to ask is "why is this blasphemy unpardonable?" Please note that they had written Jesus and His work off as that of the devil not out of ignorance or by accident, but willfully. Their rejection of Him, as was later demonstrated, was full and final. This was not a denial like that of Peter which was out of fear. Rather they were not going to accept Christ no matter what He did. The issue here is the heart. Their hearts were filled with hatred for Him and therefore it was fixed and immovable. The sin is unpardonable due to the fact that those whose hearts are such will not repent. God has conditioned forgiveness upon man's faith. As Hebrews tells us, "*without faith it is impossible to please God*" (11:6, NKJV). What is impossible in this situation is the fact they would not accept the truth even when they knew it was the truth! It is unpardonable due to its finality. The Holy Spirit had opened their eyes and convicted them of the truth yet they persisted in unbelief. They could not be forgiven for they did not have faith.

This sin is much like the sin mentioned in Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26. These passages denote the impossibility of repentance due to the condition of the heart. We must beware unless we allow the evil heart of unbelief to develop in our hearts as well. As long as one persists in unbelief there is no hope and no forgiveness.

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DO NOT PRAY FOR A LIGHTER LOAD
BUT FOR A STRONGER BACK

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What was Moses' father-in-law's name and occupation?
2. David extended grace toward Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. What was Mephibosheth's handicap?
3. What had Job lost as the end of Satan's first attack?
4. When Paul and Barnabas came to Lystra, Paul healed a lame man. Because of this, by what names did the people of the city call the two men?
5. According to the book of James, someone who turns a sinner from the error of his ways does what two things?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .