

# QUESTION NIGHT

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## INTRODUCTION:

- A. No one should be ashamed or afraid of having or asking questions, especially when it comes to the word of God and spiritual things. The problem comes when we quit having questions! Questions indicate that we are studying God's word and developing a faith that is a personal faith.
- B. Tonight we are going to look at three questions you have submitted...
- C. Note: There has been another question submitted concerning I Corinthians 7 and marriage and divorce. Due to the complexity of the question and other common questions concerning that text, I plan on covering it in the near future in a lesson by itself. I apologize for the delay in answering this one.

**First Question: From Luke 9:61-62, "But Jesus said to him, 'No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'" Hebrews 6:6 "...then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them against to repentance..." It is as if Christ is writing off anyone who has fallen. Are there any scripture verses that directly address the forgiveness of apostasy?**

- A. Before we look at other passages, let's consider these verses in their context to learn what they are teaching. Mainly asking, "Do they teach that apostasy in and of itself is an unforgiveable sin?"
  1. Before we look at these passages, let's make sure we understand what apostasy means:
    - a. The actual term "apostasy" only appears twice in the whole Bible... Both occurrences are in the OT (**Jer 2:19; Hos 4:14**). So for the most part, apostasy is a term we have chosen use to describe something for which the Bible most often uses other terms.
    - b. Apostasy – Webster says it means, "renunciation of a religious faith; abandonment of a previous loyalty" and Dictionary.com says, "A total desertion or departure from"
    - c. Some similar Biblical ideas: Fall away, backslide, turn back, depart, drift away... many more
    - d. When some speak of apostasy they use it in terms of a permanent falling away and some use it of a falling away whose permanence has yet to be determined, meaning, the person still has time to repent. So we see some apostasy is complete, some is not.
  2. Consider **Luke 9:57-62** where Jesus emphasizes the priority and cost of being His disciple:
    - a. These sound like legitimate reasons to delay the decision to come and follow Jesus:
      - 1) While these sound reasonable, it appears Jesus is showing they were just excuses
      - 2) In other places He dealt with excuses masked as "good reasons"
    - b. Jesus often used extreme language when talking about discipleship to emphasize the cost and priority of following Him – Forsake all, hate father & mother, etc. This passage would appear to fall in the category of both of these cases.
    - c. So Jesus says, "no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom"
      - 1) This is a kingdom characteristic – If we are going to be part of the kingdom of Heaven, we cannot be the type of people who look back.
      - 2) This would be a characteristic much like being poor in spirit, hunger and thirst for righteousness, etc. Do we have to maintain these with perfection to be part of the kingdom of Heaven? We work at it, but there's always room to grow!

- 3) So it would be true of this as well, just because a person “looks back” once doesn’t mean there’s no forgiveness anymore. If they don’t even return to the plow then they would be lost. But if they repent, then they’re plowing again!
3. **Hebrews 6:4-6** speaks about the impossibility of restoring one who has fallen away to repentance:
- Side Note:** This is an important passage to remember because it shows that the doctrine of “once saved always saved” that so many of our religious friends believe is wrong
  - It’s important to remember that the person this passage is describing is a Christian... It is a person who has tasted, shared, and experienced the innumerable joys and blessings of salvation. In spite of having these things, they still “fall away” from the Lord.
  - Note the way this is worded – The verse says, “It is impossible... to restore them again to repentance” – It doesn’t say, “It is impossible... for them to repent.” The emphasis seems to be on our ability to reach them. We can’t say anything more to them!
  - Why would our words fall upon deaf ears? It’s because of their view toward the sacrifice of Jesus (**vs 6**) → As long as this is their view, what can you say to persuade them?
4. What these passages and the question at hand raises in our minds is a similar question: “Is there an unpardonable sin and if there is, what is this sin?” (**Mark 3:28-29; Mt 12:31-32; Heb 10:26-31**)
- In the case of the sin against the Holy Spirit, what is this about?
    - They were fully rejecting Jesus. They were attributing the power of Jesus to the power of Satan. They refused to see the evidence that’d build their faith
    - Some people suggest that we aren’t even able to commit this sin any more since Jesus is not walking this earth and performing miracles.
    - “People who worry that they have committed the unpardonable sin have not done so. The very fact that they are concerned indicates that they are not guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” (Believers Bible Commentary)
  - In the case of Hebrews 10, this is not a one-time action a sincere Christian commits:
    - It’s about one who goes “on sinning” and continues in this sin “deliberately.”
    - The death of Jesus, the covenant, & Spirit of grace means nothing to him anymore
    - What more can be done for this person? He’s continually spurning the only sacrifice by which he can be saved and he’s refusing to leave sin behind
  - These are cases which hinge on one’s mindset and continuing in their sinful ways... If these things change, they’d no longer fit the description so forgiveness would be possible

**B. Now for the main part of the question: Are there any scriptures which directly address the forgiveness of apostasy? This list won’t be totally exhaustive, but here are a few for your consideration:**

- Hosea actually used the term apostasy but showed there was hope if they repented (**Hosea 4:14**)
- Often when God spoke to the Jews in the OT He would address their “falling away” but offered forgiveness if they repented (**Hosea 1:6; Jer 33:8; Jer 36:2-3; Neh 9:17; Mal 3:7; Joel 2:12-13**)
- Simon the Sorcerer was told, “You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.” Yet he was told to repent and pray for forgiveness (**Acts 8:21-22**)
- You could easily say that apostasy had crept into several of the seven churches of Asia, however Jesus offered them the chance for forgiveness if they’d repent and return to Him (**Rev 2-3**)

**Second Question: Luke 9:49-50 “But Jesus said to him, ‘Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you.’” How is this applicable, or not, to our “Christian” friends in denominations?**

**A. First of all, let’s examine this context and see how it applied to the people Jesus spoke to:**

1. We get a few more details about what was going on when we read Mark's account (**Mark 9:33-40**)
  - a. The disciples, including John, had been arguing amongst themselves as they walked with Jesus about who would be greatest in the kingdom. Jesus corrects their attitude by putting a child in the middle of them and teaching them about humility
  - b. Jesus' statement in verse 37 seems to be what sparks this circumstance that had been puzzling John. That "whoever" is pretty encompassing isn't it? This could include someone who was not part of their group of disciples... it could be anybody!
  - c. "Do not hinder him..." is said in light of John's concern about this person who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus, but was not part of their group of disciples.
2. This man was most certainly casting out demons, but how? God must have given him the power!
  - a. What this means is that this is a person who was being used by God to accomplish His will
  - b. It's mysterious to us and probably was to John as well – Why would he not be a disciple of Jesus? Were there others like this man? Why did God give him this ability?
  - c. The point though is that this man could not have done this great work unless God enabled him to do. Satan doesn't cast out his own demons, only God does! (**Matt 12:25-28**)

**B. Now, what are or are not the implications of this principle for our friends in denominations?**

1. I really don't think you can make direct application to our friends in the denominational circles:
  - a. Remember, Jesus was speaking about people who WERE casting out demons... If Jesus approves of their casting out of demons we can know for sure that power was given to them by the Father. Whoever this person was, He was doing the Father's will!
  - b. Can this be said of the person who is caught up in denominational error? They may do some things right and say some truth, but are they really doing the Father's will? Doing great religious works doesn't mean we're in God's will! (**Matthew 7:21-23**)
2. Jesus said: "Whoever does not sow with Me scatters" (**Lk 11:23**). If people are not teaching the truth, are they sowing with Jesus? Can you sow with Jesus if you teach a different gospel? If you teach a different mode of salvation? If you don't follow His pattern? (**2 John 9**)
3. Perhaps we could make some more indirect application, especially when it comes to our attitudes toward those in denominational and other religious circles:
  - a. I'm reminded of Paul's attitude when people added affliction to his chains by the way they preached the gospel (**Phil 1:17-18**) – At least Christ is preached, in that I will rejoice
  - b. There is certainly some good in almost all of the denominational groups – We should be thankful for what they get right and the fact that at least in some way people's attention is getting pointed toward the Bible and toward Jesus Christ
  - c. One hesitation I have in this is that when people change the message of the gospel they are preaching another gospel and its not possible to find any good in that (**Gal 1:6-9**)

**Third Question: I have heard most of my life that miracles have ceased with the closing of the First Century. Yet sometimes we use the term "miracle" to refer to God's answer to our prayers and other manifestations of His providence. So what is a miracle? And is it a miracle when God answers our prayers today?**

**A. First, the word "miracle" can be used in many different ways and refer to many different things:**

1. Sometimes people use the term "miracle" to refer to things that are not really miracles but are just events that are very spectacular:

- a. In sports: In the 1980 Olympics the U.S. team beat the heavily favored Russia team and people started referring to it as “The Miracle On Ice.” More recently, when the U.S. Soccer team beat the Spain soccer team people called it “The Miracle On Grass”
  - b. People refer to the birth of a child as “the miracle of birth” – Amazing, but miraculous?
  - c. It is very common for people to say, “It’s a miracle” when something incredible takes place in their life like getting a promotion, winning the lottery,
  - d. I have heard some use the word miracle to refer to people surprising them – Like an person who constantly forgets to do something actually remembering to do it.
2. Even Christians when they speak of miracles will use the term in very different ways:
    - a. When some speak of miracles they’re talking about miraculous gifts (like in I Cor 14). These “miracles” have ceased with the completed revelation of God’s will (**I Cor 13:8-12**)
    - b. Some may use the term miracle to refer to God’s answering our prayers – If we pray for someone to be healed, and God answers that prayer, some would call that a miracle
    - c. Others say that a miracle is when God acts above and beyond the natural realm...
  3. It depends on the version you use, but “miracle” isn’t used all that often in the Bible. It, or a form of it, appears 14 times in the ESV and 37 times in the KJV – Consider some of the cases:
    - a. Often in the NT, it refers to spiritual gifts. These are miraculous powers or abilities given to man by the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor 12:28-29; Acts 8:13; Acts 19:11; Heb 2:4**)
    - b. The word is used of the wonders Moses was able to work before Pharaoh (**Ex 4:21; 7:9**)
    - c. When David brought the ark of God into the tent which he set up for it, he praised God for God’s wondrous works, His miracles, and His judgments (**1 Chron 16:12**)
    - d. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Pharisees and the chief priests conferred together about what to do with Jesus since He worked many miracles (**John 11:47**)
  4. The words translated “miracle” are defined as “miracle, sign, token wonder” – There’s nothing inherently special about the word, just how it is used. In fact, in Revelation the Greek term sometimes translated “miracle” is used for the works done by the forces of evil! (**Rev 19:20**)

**B. So have miracles ceased? When God answers our prayers, is that considered a miracle? – The answer to both questions depend on how you are using the term miracle!**

1. If by miracle, you are referring to the miraculous signs, wonders, and gifts worked through the Holy Spirit during the days of the First Century for the purpose of confirming and revealing the word, then they have ceased and would no longer be seen today (**1 Cor 13**)
2. If by miracle, you are referring to a prayer being answered, then it may or may not be correct:
  - a. Consider two examples where a prayer may be answered in two very different avenues:
    - 1) Person A is dying of cancer. The doctors give no chance of survival. People pray to God and God answers by healing them directly and completely of cancer
    - 2) Person B has cancer. Diligent prayers are offered to God and the Lord answers the prayers by using the doctors and medicines available to bring healing.
  - b. Both people have been healed, but in different ways. I would not argue with a person who insists both are miracles worked by God; but the first person’s case fits better with Bible examples and uses of “miracle” and the second is more in line with providence
  - c. While miraculous acts of God can be described as providential, the concept of providence is generally used to describe His care through **natural** means (Mark Copeland)
3. The words of James concerning the power of prayer are important for this study (**James 5:17-18**)
  - a. **Question:** Would you consider God answering Elijah’s first prayer for it not to rain with a 3.5 year drought, then answering his second prayer with sudden rain a miracle?

- b. Some say it's not. But, if your answer to this question is yes, then consistency demands that you say that God CAN answer our prayers in a miraculous way today!
  - c. James' point: Elijah prayed and God answered it in this powerful way. Elijah was man with a nature just like ours. So if we pray, God can answer us in this powerful way
4. Before we call something "miraculous" there are some things we should consider:
- a. How do we really know when something is a miracle or providence? Sometimes it may be completely clear, but sometimes it is not so easy to distinguish.
  - b. When something good or bad happens, is it God's direct operation in our lives or could it be that time and chance have happened to us? (**Esther 4:14; Ecclesiastes 9:11**)
  - c. Perhaps we shouldn't stress over figuring out what it is. Whether you believe it is providence or whether you believe it is a miracle, give praise and glory to God!