

The Blasphemy Pandemic

By Bruce W. Davidson

Not long ago I attended a Christian meeting in Sapporo, Japan, where I live. The guest speaker that day introduced an evangelistic technique called “Gospel *rakugo*.” *Rakugo* is a popular kind of Japanese comedy in which a seated comedian (wearing traditional garb) tells humorous stories to an audience. I immediately thought this was a very inappropriate way to try to spread the message of salvation. This is because the message of salvation is a weighty, serious matter on which a person’s eternal destiny hangs. It also concerns the holiness and mercy of God, so it is not a matter to treat lightly in comedy. In my view, treating the Gospel in this manner amounts to a kind of blasphemy. As a result, I decided to leave that meeting early.

Unfortunately, this type of disrespectful treatment of Christian content is typical of the time in which we live. In this article I will examine what blasphemy is according to Scripture and give some examples of blasphemy in the current religious (putatively Christian) world. These days not many seem to treat blasphemy as a very serious matter. Probably one cause of this is the violence sometimes committed by Islamists in reaction to perceived insults to Islam, which they usually call “blasphemy.” The author of *Blasphemy: A Very Short Introduction* points out that this phenomenon has given the blasphemy charge a bad name nowadays.¹

Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias generally concur about the nature of blasphemy. *The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* explains it as “profane or contemptuous speech or writing about (or action toward) God.” In a broader sense, it can be any speech that belittles anybody, but in the Old Testament, the sin always concerns insulting God in some way –by direct calumny or indirect ridicule. In other words, it means violating God’s stature and honor. As in the case of idolatry, the punishment for it was death in Old Testament Israel.²

The most relevant Old Testament passage about blasphemy is Lev 24:10–23, where the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man uses the name of God in cursing blasphemously. The people of Israel ask for God’s verdict, and God decrees that anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord must be executed. 1 Sam 3:13 states

¹ Yvonne Sherwood, *Blasphemy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

² Peter H. Davids, “Blasphemy,” in *The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 363.

that Eli's sons were "blaspheming God" in their contemptuous treatment of sacrifices during their priestly duties and hence were doomed to die as a divine judgment. As *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* explains, "in the Bible, blasphemy can include flagrant actions and disdain for God's Word, His promises, and His people. Scripture bears consistent witness to the severity of the offense."³

In the New Testament, we find the apostle Paul mentioning "Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme" (1 Tim 1:10). There is some debate about the type of blasphemy they were engaged in. One possibility is false teaching about the resurrection. In any case, the text shows that blasphemy was taken seriously among Christians in Paul's time and was a matter for church discipline.

Some New Testament passages state that the last days in particular will produce "blasphemers" (2 Tim 3:2) and false teachers who commit blasphemy (2 Pet 2:10–12; Jude 8, 10). Whether or not we are nearing the end of human history, the time we live in certainly fits this description.

Biblically speaking, the opposite of blasphemy is giving glory to God. The Hebrew word for glory –*kavod*-- literally means "heavy" or "weighty." That is, it denotes the importance or seriousness of something or someone in a moral, social, or spiritual context. Therefore, blasphemy by word or deed makes light of God's dignity and importance in some way. Blasphemy openly insults, mocks, or trivializes the greatness and splendor of God and His works.

Certainly unbelievers are often guilty of belittling God, the Bible, and other things related to God, but Christian people are mainly responsible for calling out blasphemy among those who profess faith in Christ. Among those guilty of conspicuous blasphemy in church history, perhaps no institution equals the Roman Catholic religion. Yet few seem to point this out these days.

When Roman Catholics call the Pope "holy father," they commit blasphemy against God, the only Holy Father. Furthermore, calling the virgin Mary a sinless being and elevating her to the role of a mediator between God and human beings is blasphemy against God the Son, who is the only true mediator (1 Tim 2:5). Moreover, the adoration of the mass and maintaining that in it God the Son comes down from heaven to be sacrificed again is certainly blasphemy.

³ Donald W. Mills, "Blasphemy," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

However, Protestants have also often been guilty of blasphemy, and even many evangelicals have joined in. Those who contend for Open Theism –the idea that God’s control over His creation is limited— commit blasphemy against God’s omnipotence and sovereignty. In a different way Dominionism blasphemes by teaching that God cannot implement his plans in the world because he has been hamstrung by human unbelief, a failure to “claim” human dominion over creation.

In general, modern megachurches are often guilty of blasphemy by treating divine things in a light-hearted, disrespectful manner. For example, megachurch pastor John Piper commits the sin of blasphemy when he declares publicly that Christian love is “erotic to the core,” since it equates the love generated among saints by the Holy Spirit to sexual passion.⁴ However, he does not quite sink to the depths reached by Mark Driscoll, who claimed the Holy Spirit gave him visions of people in his church having illicit sex.⁵

Though he is revered by many evangelicals as an icon of Christian conviction, C. S. Lewis was guilty of making many blasphemous statements. He considered the doctrine of the atoning death of Christ for sins “a very silly theory” and also declared that the story of Christ’s death and resurrection moved him less than pagan myths. In *The Abolition of Man*, he put forth the idea that Nature is older and greater than God the Creator.⁶

Like many, I enjoy a lot of the satire and parody of *The Babylon Bee* web site, but sometimes their humor strays into blasphemy. It may be OK to make fun of corrupt, foolish politicians, journalists, and religious leaders, but involving God himself or the Bible in parody is another matter. Of course, we know this is intended as humor, which may mitigate the sin. Far worse are those who in all seriousness put words in the mouth of Jesus that he never said, such as the author of the bestseller *Jesus Calling* and the writers of *The Chosen* TV series.

We live in a time in which professing believers often treat divine matters in an offhand, disrespectful way. If they treated blasphemy more seriously, this would promote more glorification of God and might even lead unbelievers to treat the Gospel with more respect.

⁴ John Piper Tells Shepherd Conference Pastors: “Our Love for Jesus is ‘Erotic to the Core,’” Protestia News 12 March 2024, <https://protestia.com/2024/03/12/john-piper-tells-shepherd-conference-pastors-our-love-for-jesus-is-erotic-to-the-core/>

⁵ Protestia 13 October 2025, <https://x.com/Protestia/status/1977667671249256487>

⁶ Bruce W. Davidson, “C. S. Lewis: Semi-Pagan Romantic,” *Hokusei Gakuen University School of Humanities Review* 60.1 (2022): 13-22.

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