

## WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS BUT GOD ALONE?

In Matthew 9:2, when Jesus saw the faith of the men who brought their paralytic friend to Him, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.” However, the scholarly scribes had a problem with this!

### **Matthew 9:3 (NKJV)**

**3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, “This Man blasphemes!”**

When Jesus declared the paralytic’s sins forgiven, the scribes immediately drew some theological conclusions – namely that this was blasphemy. And notice they said, “This MAN (emphasis mine) blasphemes!” They saw Jesus merely as a MAN! They were all over this as they were there with a critical spirit, just looking for any “dirt” they could find on Jesus.

Clearly, they did not understand this as merely expressing forgiveness in the sense of personal forgiveness in which one person forgives another for some wrongdoing (cf. Eph. 4:32). Rather, they understood this as Jesus making a blanket statement forgiving this man of all his sins (plural), such as God forgives a believer in salvation. This was a blanket release from all his sins! Only God can do this! This is God’s territory. This is His prerogative – which is why they considered this to be blasphemy.

Blasphemy denotes irreverent speech that is offensive to God – in this case, that which defames or demeans God. In the OT, the penalty for blasphemy was the death penalty (cf. Lev. 24:10-16; Num. 15:30-31).

### **Leviticus 24:16 (NKJV)**

16 And whoever **blasphemes** the name of the LORD shall surely be **put to death**. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he **blasphemes** the name of the LORD, he shall be **put to death**.

So this was a deadly serious charge. And we don’t have to wonder why they considered this to be blasphemy, because in the cross-reference in Mark 2, it is plainly stated:

### **Mark 2:6–7 (NKJV)**

**6** And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,  
**7** “Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? **Who can forgive sins but God alone?**”

Understand that the scribes were the theological experts of the day. They knew the Bible better than anyone. They copied and interpreted the Scriptures. They were scholars who viewed themselves as the guardians of the Jewish faith.

They knew that the OT Scriptures taught that ultimately people are accountable to God alone and that ultimately He alone can forgive sins. And give them credit – in this premise, they were right (cf. Micah 7:19; Ps. 32:1-2; Isa. 44:22; 55:6-7).

**Isaiah 43:25 (NKJV)**

**25 “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.”**

**Jeremiah 31:34 (NKJV)**

**34** No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For **I will forgive** their iniquity, and **their sin I will remember no more.**”

So these scribes had it right. Only God can, in the ultimate sense, forgive sins. This makes it very clear that they understood Jesus was presuming to act as God in declaring the sins of the paralytic forgiven.

You see, the problem was that they did not recognize Jesus as God come in the flesh. They did not recognize Him as “Immanuel,” which means **“God with us”** (Mt. 1:23). Thus, when Jesus made this statement declaring sins forgiven, they considered it to be sacrilegious blasphemy! In their minds, Jesus was a mere man acting like He was God. He was claiming to do what only God can ultimately do!

And this would indeed have been blasphemy except for one thing – Jesus is indeed God. And as God, He does have the authority to forgive sins. Indeed, this is God’s prerogative, but what they failed to see is that Jesus, as the divine-human Messiah, was indeed God doing what only God can do.

**Matthew 9:4 (NKJV)**

**4** But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, **“Why do you think evil in your hearts?”**

Once again, we see an emphasis on the deity of Christ. Only God knows the thoughts and motives of what is going on in the hearts of other people.

Ultimately, we don't even fully know our own hearts. Again, this is God's territory!

### **Jeremiah 17:9–10 (NKJV)**

**9** “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

**10** I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

### **1 Corinthians 2:11 (NKJV)**

**11** For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

### **John 2:24–25 (NKJV)**

**24** But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, **25** and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

### **Hebrews 4:13 (NKJV)**

**13** And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Jesus, as the divine-human Messiah, knew exactly what they were thinking, and He knew their thoughts were evil. When it says Christ called them out for thinking evil in their hearts, the word evil (Gk. *ponera*) means worthless, bad, malignant, or wicked. They weren't simply ignorant or confused. Christ accused them of evil reasoning for which they were accountable.

It is evil to accuse Jesus of sin – yea, the sin of blasphemy. It was evil to reject all the sign-miracle evidence that Jesus had done, pointing to the fact that He is the Messiah-God.

By the way, it was very clear in the Old Testament that the coming Messiah would indeed be both God and Man in one person.

### **Jeremiah 23:5–6 (NKJV)**

**5** “Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

**6** In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD [YHWH] OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Note the overtones in the text here in Matthew that point to Jesus being God.

***CHRIST'S DEITY ON DISPLAY...***

“Jesus saw their faith” – Mt. 9:2

“your sins are forgiven” – Mt. 9:2

“knowing their thoughts” – Mt. 9:4

Jesus did what only God can do because He was in fact God come in the flesh. He is fully God and fully man in ONE person! He is the God-Man!