There Is No Such Thing As An Unforgivable Sin

I once had a lengthy discussion with a Jewish man who had accepted Christianity. We explored the Jewish perspective of numerous bible passages he believed proved Jesus was the messiah and his “personal savior.”

He saw with his own eyes that his favorite passages were either mistranslated, read out of context, or had nothing to do with the messiah.

Eventually, he admitted that the passages he thought were proofs did not stand up to careful examination.

As we continued our conversation, I shared with him the spiritual beauty of Judaism and how it is a path to a meaningful life and a personal relationship with God. I also pointed out that the miracle of Jewish survival demonstrates that God had not rejected the Jewish people.

As I encouraged him to return to his Jewish heritage, he told me he was afraid. He had been taught that rejecting Jesus was an “unforgivable sin,” and he would never be given a second chance and would be “in danger of eternal damnation” (Mark 3:28).

I explained that the idea of an “unforgivable sin” is not a Jewish belief and is not found anywhere in the Jewish Bible. Furthermore, many Christian theologians agree with Judaism and reject the idea of an unforgivable sin. They brand it as a dogmatic misinterpretation of the New Testament.

We find validation for Judaism’s perspective in this week’s Torah portion Behaloscha (Numbers 8:1-12:16), which highlights individuals who are given a second chance to connect to God. If, for example, they are unable to present a Passover offering due to defilement by ritual impurity, God decreed [Numbers 9:6-11] that they could present their offering one month later on a holiday known as Pesach Sheni – the second Passover.

Although God desires that we pursue a life of goodness and holiness, we are not expected to be perfect. If perfection were the only option for mankind, God would not have provided us opportunities to repent and rectify our mistakes.

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Giving us a second chance is a beautiful demonstration of God’s compassion and mercy. We see this in the words of King David when he says, “God is full of mercy and forgives sin” (Psalm 78:38). We are also taught in the book of Daniel that God hears our prayers and forgives transgression “not because of our righteousness, but because of [His] great compassion” (Daniel 9:18).

No matter how severe the transgression God loves us and says, “return to Me and I will return to you” (Zechariah 1:3).

Why would some Christians take such a radical and literal position and promote the idea of an unforgivable sin?

Based on the research of Dr. William Sargant in his groundbreaking work “Battle for the Mind,” I believe the “unforgivable sin” is used to frighten and coerce individuals so they will not question their beliefs. Dr. Sargant considers this a form of brainwashing.

The opposite is true of Judaism which encourages asking questions. This is highlighted on Passover when children ask the four questions. Moreover, King Solomon promotes critical thinking when he says, “the first to state his case seems right until someone examines him” (Proverbs 18:17).

Additionally, those Christians who denounce the idea of an unforgivable sin point out that the New Testament says, “examine everything carefully” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1).

God gives us many gifts, including a mind to make thoughtful and meaningful decisions. Although faith plays an essential role in Judaism it does not exempt us from thinking things through, as it says, “A wise man will hear and increase in learning” (Proverbs 1:5), and “fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

May this Shabbat enhance our appreciation of God’s compassion, and may we take advantage of the multiple opportunities we are given to appreciate God’s wisdom and to strengthen our spiritual connection to Him.

Shabbat Shalom,

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