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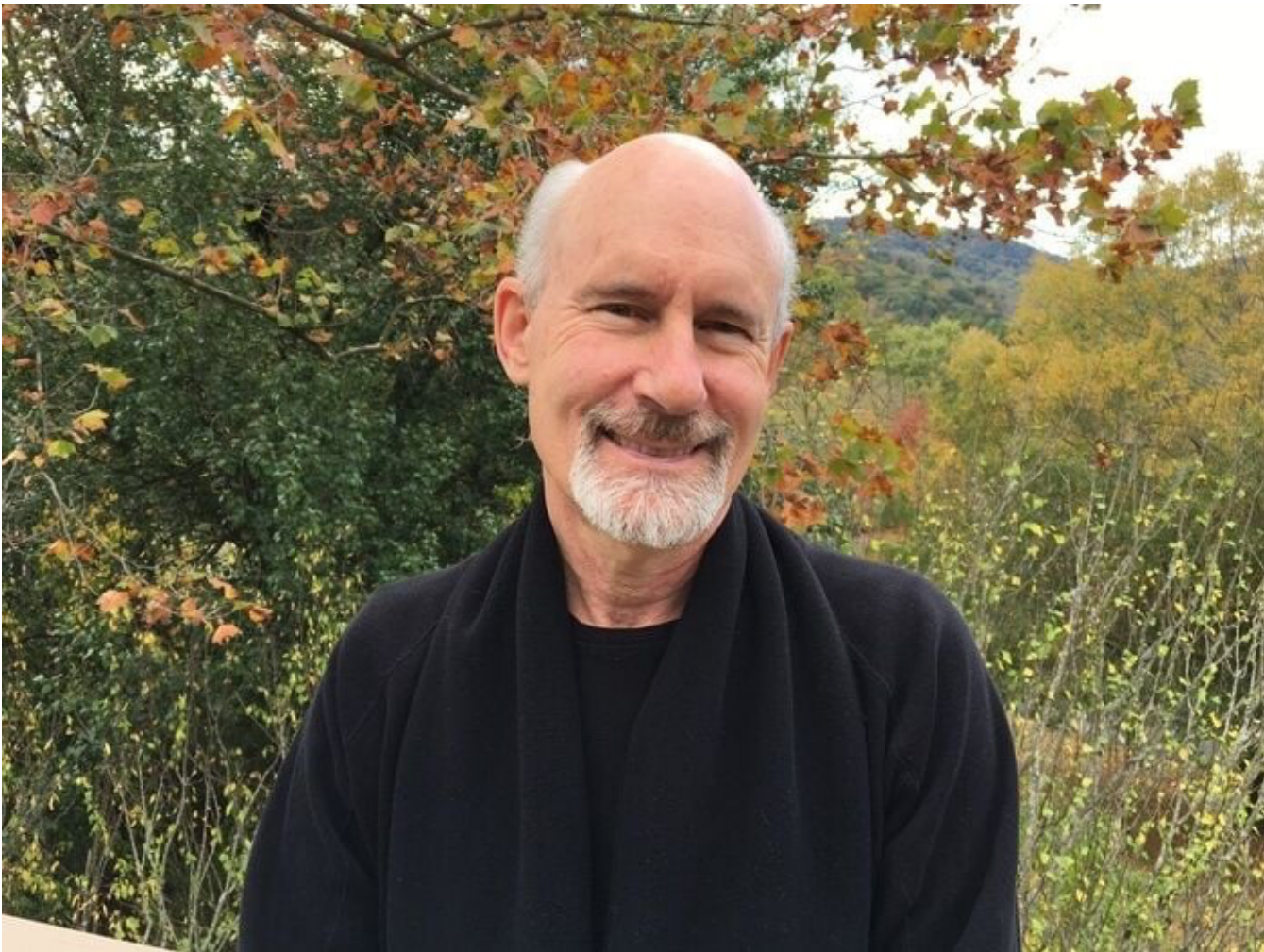
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## **Friendly Free Thinker: About this Thing Called Blasphemy**

By Chris Highland  
Mar 2, 2026



A reader implored me “to refrain from writing blasphemous ideas that can turn others away from the truth ...” Not unfamiliar with this complaint, I responded that “Blasphemy is in the eye of the believer.” I’ve thought and written about this thing called blasphemy for a long time. When I was in the Pentecostal movement, we believed in the scripture (Matthew 12): “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.” Sounds pretty serious, so believers have tried to understand what this means for 2000 years.

A posting from one Christian college claims that “blasphemy against the Spirit—the unforgivable sin—is ongoing hardening of your heart against the Holy Spirit who is trying to lead you to repent.” Another ministry site confidently states that “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit happens when the Holy Spirit reveals to a person that Jesus is the Christ, and then they accuse Him of being a devil.” In response to a believer, fearful they have committed this terrible sin, Focus on the Family (an influential Christian Nationalist organization), assures them: “The sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is essentially the sin of rejecting Christ. By continually rejecting God’s free gift of salvation in Jesus, a sinner ... gets to the place where genuine repentance is no longer possible.” In other words, all these teachings essentially say those of us who choose not to believe in a strict form of Christian religion are beyond saving and outside of God’s mercy and grace. We’ve heard the “true gospel” but we’re not convinced, therefore we’re doomed.

I find it interesting that the greater number of blasphemy cases in the world today appear in countries with no separation of Religion and State. We hear some people accuse Islam of being brutal and unforgiving, though nearly every chapter in the Qur’an begins with “In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.” The Bible presents a loving God, who is also a strict parent who punishes unbelief as much as blesses faith. If it’s true that there is at least one “unforgivable sin,” then it makes sense there is a Hot House for Heretics awaiting them.

I’m not trying to beckon people to break from belief. I simply raise troubling questions, and if this encourages someone to think deeper and harder about something—which might potentially lead them to change their mind or change their beliefs—that’s their decision. This is certainly not to say I want anyone to think or believe just as I do, yet anytime we share our honest thoughts, there is a risk for us, as well as for the listener. There’s the hint: listening. At times, someone reacts to a thought or question without seriously considering who is speaking or writing, and why they are expressing a personal viewpoint. Their defensiveness may expose a fearful feeling they are threatened by another opinion. We can be sensitive to that, but it can’t preclude speaking what we truly think, feel or believe.

On this subject I often think back to a disturbing incident in Afghanistan about ten years ago. A devout Muslim woman named Farkhunda was at a shrine in Kabul when someone accused her of desecrating a Qur’an. She was chased down by a mob and stoned to death. This tragic story has stayed with me. A “holy book” becomes more important than a human life, resulting in an irrational, even violent reaction to mere accusations without the decency of a hearing or trial. In this case, a mob of believers killed another believer, based on one person’s word. Could this happen in a democratic country, where many claim the nation and its laws are based on the Bible? It seems to me this happens in one way or another all the time. Some still speak of blasphemy, believing they are defenders of God’s “sensitive” feelings, so they demand enforcement of “biblical principles and values” for everyone. The message is: “You need to believe what we do, or you’re not one of us, you’re not a “real American,” and God rejects you when you reject Him.”



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Not often stated this clearly, those who used to be called infidels, heretics and apostates (and sometimes are still called those things) may be effectively barred from public office, voted off school boards or otherwise shunned by their communities. The terrible mob judgment and execution of Farkhunda was extreme, yet how many are treated unjustly simply because they don’t believe “correctly”?

No one commits “blasphemy” if they don’t believe in blasphemy. In Greek, blasphemy means “slander.” Isn’t it slanderous to call someone a blasphemmer?

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