

Sermon for Sunday, November 16, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
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"THE SIN TOO BIG FOR GOD"

St. Mark 3:22-30

Text: "...but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." --St. Mark 3:29

Frequently I have people come to me and ask, "Pastor, what is the unforgivable sin?" As I talk with them, I discover that in their hearts they feel they have committed some sin that is so dark and dreadful that God will never forgive them. They are convinced that their sin is so big that God either can't or won't forgive them and they are deeply troubled in their souls. The very fact that they are grieving over some evil deed they have done, the very fact that they are troubled and deeply concerned about some wickedness in their lives, reveals to me an important fact. That fact is that they have not committed the unforgivable sin. Their very concern, their very agony over what they have done tells me that the Holy Spirit has cut them to their hearts. Their very grief tells me that the Spirit is moving on their conscience and therefore they have not committed a sin too big for God. You see, the Bible tells us that the sin too big for God is against the Holy Spirit. As long as He is working in our hearts and lives it means that we have not stepped over the brink.

Let's begin this morning by looking at the nature of the unforgivable sin and then we will look at some specific ways in which that sin can be committed. When you understand what the unforgivable sin is--and why it is unforgivable--and when you see how this can happen in your life, then you can make a judgment for yourself as to whether or not you are guilty of a sin too big for God.

In the beginning, when God created man, He made us to love Him. But God wanted man to love Him in return. However, in order for man to love God--in order for you and me to be able to respond to God in loving obedience--it was necessary for us to be truly free, to be truly able to say no to God, as well. You see, if I have no choice but to love God, if I have no choice but to respond in loving obedience to God, that is not true love. No, it would mean only that God had programmed me that way. It would mean that my automatic love was but a built-in response over which I had no control. In that sense, my love would be only instinctive. Therefore, God ran a great risk in His creation of man. He gave him real freedom. He gave him the ability to say "Yes" in loving obedience, but He also gave him the ability to say "No", to respond in unlove and disobedience. Well, you know how that turned out. That is what the story of Adam and Eve is all about. It is the story of how you and I said "No" to God--it is the story of man's rebellion and disobedience. As a consequence, there is a brokenness in your life and mine. There is a separation--an alienation--between us and God that we call sin. And this sin is total. It permeates every area of our lives. No matter how hard we try, no matter how good our outward deeds may seem to the eyes of the world, all we do is still contaminated by sin, for there is always some pride, some ego, some selfishness associated with it. Thus, even when we do our best, it is marked by failure. As St. Paul once put it, "But I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but do the very thing I hate." He goes on to add, "When I want to do right, evil lies close at hand...I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin..." (Romans 7) Well, that is certainly a description of me and my life. Isn't that your experience, too?

But the good news of the Bible is that God has done something about our sin. God has done something about our alienation and brokenness and separation. In Jesus, God has reached out to forgive us and to restore us. He has done something about our sin and on the cross of Jesus, on the cross of Calvary, our sins are paid for. If we will accept it, God offers us forgiveness. Now, it is precisely at this point that we need help. You see, because of sin in you and me, we are incapable of accepting God's gift of forgiveness. We are simply unable to receive Jesus as our Savior on our own. Now, please listen carefully! Because we are unable on our own to respond to Jesus, God puts His Spirit to work in our hearts. God put His Spirit within us to move on our hearts, to free us within to be able to say "Yes" to Him.

Let me give you an illustration of this. Remember in the second chapter of Acts when the Holy Spirit came on the disciples? That day Peter stood up and preached a sermon. He told the people how God had sent Jesus to die for their sins and that if they would accept this forgiveness, their relationship to God would be restored--they would know salvation, they would experience eternal life. As Peter preached about Jesus, the Holy Spirit was working in the hearts of those who heard him. The Bible says, "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37). And that was the work of the Holy Spirit--He was touching their hearts and drawing them to Jesus. The Bible tells us that because of this, three thousand people responded to Jesus that day.

So, God does two things about your sin and mine. First, He pays the price of our sin. Through Jesus, our sins are paid for, our sin is covered. Second, He puts the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and lives to enable us to respond. The Spirit moves on our wicked, sinful hearts to draw us to Jesus and to help us so that we can say "Yes" to Jesus. And the sin against the Holy Spirit is to keep on saying "No" to God.

God can't forgive that. It isn't because He doesn't want to forgive us--He does. But God can't forgive simply because we won't let Him. As long as we keep saying "No", God won't force us to say "Yes". God will never override your freedom to respond to Him negatively. And as long as we say "No", as long as we resist the moving of the Spirit in our hearts and lives--that "No" is a sin too big for God. That is what Jesus means when He says "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."

Are you guilty of the sin against the Holy Spirit? I can't answer that question. It is something you will have to answer for yourself. However, let me suggest some ways a person can resist the Holy Spirit and then you can decide for yourself if you are doing that in your life.

First, we sin against the Holy Spirit when we refuse to accept Jesus as our Savior and make Him the Lord of our lives. Now, I am not talking about simply believing in Jesus. Most people believe that a man named Jesus was a real figure in human history. No, I mean believing in Jesus in the sense that you surrender your heart and life to Him. Many of us are refusing to do that. There may be some of you here this morning who have felt God's Spirit moving on your heart. You have felt the tug of the Spirit, urging you, moving you, to truly surrender your life to Jesus and to acknowledge Him as your Lord and Savior. But you have not done so. You keep putting it off. You keep delaying, planning to do it later. But when you say "No" to that inner urging of the Spirit as He gently tugs at the strings of your heart, you are resisting the Spirit; you are guilty of a sin that is too big for God. As long as you say "No", there is nothing God can do. And there is a serious

danger, there is a dreadful consequence for you if you continue to resist the Spirit. You see, your heart may become so calloused, so hardened, that you become insensitive to that tugging. Your spiritual ears may become so deafened to Him that you cease to hear His gentle call. When that happens, God is helpless to save you. If you continue to resist the Spirit, God's call to you will get fainter and fainter until it fades from your heart and you will hear it no more. Then your "No" to God will be an eternal "No" and you are guilty of an eternal sin--a sin too big for God.

A second way we can sin against the Holy Spirit is to call something that is good evil. If you will remember the context of our scripture this morning, this is what happened to Jesus. The Bible says his friends thought he had lost his mind. It says that the scribes from Jerusalem said he was possessed by demons. Even his own family came to get Him because they were concerned about Him. Jesus knew they were concerned about Him. Jesus said they were all denying that His ministry was the work of the Holy Spirit. Are you guilty of that? Some of us conservative Christians are sometimes guilty of saying that the social action ministry in the church is not Christian and that is to deny the work of the Holy Spirit. Some who are liberal Christians say that the ministry of conservatives who are trying to get people to accept Jesus are not relevant to the world today--and that is to deny the work of the Spirit. And surely all of us know someone--maybe a good friend--who has come into a new religious experience. We say that they have become fanatics or that they have lost their emotional balance. When we say that we may very well be denying the work of the Spirit and are in effect saying that something good is really evil. That is to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit and that is a sin too big for God.

So, a second way we sin against the Holy Spirit is to say that something that may be good in the lives of others, something that may be the work of the Spirit in the lives of others, is evil or bad. A third way we can sin against the Holy Spirit is to fail to see God at work in our own lives. Do you remember Job in the Old Testament? He had everything bad happen to him that could happen to a person. His wife didn't believe that anything good could ever come out of all that trouble and she urged Job, "Curse God and die." But the Bible tells us that even in the worst that can happen, God is at work to bring good out of it. Do you ever feel like cursing God? Do you ever feel angry and resentful towards God? Do you ever feel that God is uncaring and unloving in your life? If you do, you may be sinning against the Holy Spirit. In effect you are saying that God doesn't know what He is doing and you don't trust Him--and that is to sin against the Holy Spirit.

Finally, there is a fourth way we sin against the Spirit. See how it works! Suppose there is something in my life that I am doing that I know is wrong. Yet I am not willing to stop doing this thing. I enjoy my sin and am unwilling to give it up. At first my conscience is deeply troubled. But as I continue in my sin, my heart is bothered less and less. Finally, to do what I am doing no longer bothers me. I have become insensitive to the Spirit. I have hardened my heart. My soul has become calloused to the urging of the Spirit and my sin no longer troubles me. The problem is this: I must be sorry for my sin and repent (that is, turn from) my sin and ask God's forgiveness. Until I do that, God can't forgive my sin. It is too big for Him. Is anything like that going on in your life? Is there something you are doing that you know is wrong? Is the Spirit moving on your heart and you are refusing to heed Him? The day may come when you are insensitive to the Spirit and you no longer have grief over your sin. The day may come when you are simply incapable of repenting, of turning from your sin and asking God to forgive you. When that happens, your sin will be too big for God.

As I have been talking this morning about the sin against the Holy Spirit and have been suggesting ways in which a person may commit that sin, I know fairly well what has been happening. At some point--or perhaps at several points--what I have said has touched your life. You have said to yourself, "I am guilty of that." If that is so, it means that the Spirit is still at work in your life, convincing and convicting you. It means that the Spirit is still tugging at your heart, still gently urging you. Do not resist Him. Do not shut Him out. If the Spirit had touched you this morning, respond to Him. If you fail to do so, it will be a sin against the Holy Spirit--and that is a sin too big for God.

A second way we can sin against the Holy Spirit is by denying His work in our lives. If you will remember the content of our discourse this morning, this is what happened to Jesus. The Bible says his friends thought he had lost his mind. It says that the scribes from Jerusalem said he was possessed by demons. Even his own family came to get him because they were concerned about him. Jesus knew they were concerned about him. Jesus said they were all denying his ministry and the work of the Holy Spirit. Are you guilty of that? Some of us conservative Christians are sometimes guilty of saying that the secular action ministry in the church is not Christian and that is to deny the work of the Holy Spirit. Some who are liberal Christians say that the ministry of conservatives who are trying to get people to accept Jesus are not relevant to the world today--and that is to deny the work of the Spirit. And surely all of us know someone--maybe a good friend--who has come into a new religious experience. We say that they have become "fundamental" or that they have lost their emotional balance. When we say that we may very well be denying the work of the Spirit and are in effect saying that something good is really evil. That is to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit and that is a sin too big for God.

So, a second way we sin against the Holy Spirit is to deny that something that may be good in the lives of others, something that may be the work of the Spirit in the lives of others, is evil or bad. A third way we sin against the Holy Spirit is to fail to see God at work in our own lives. Do you remember Job in the Old Testament? He had everything bad happen to him that could happen to a person. His wife said, "Believe that anything good could ever come out of all that trouble and the man Job." "Curse God and die." But the Bible tells us that even in the worst that can happen, God is at work to bring good out of it. Do you ever feel like that? Do you ever feel angry and resentful towards God? Do you ever feel that God is unloving and unloving in your life? If you do, you may be sinning against the Holy Spirit. In effect you are saying that God doesn't know what He is doing and you don't trust Him--and that is to sin against the Holy Spirit.

Finally, there is a fourth way we sin against the Spirit. See how he worked? Suppose there is something in my life that I know is wrong. For instance, I am not willing to stop doing this thing. I enjoy my sin and am unwilling to give it up. At first my conscience is deeply troubled. But as I continue in my sin, my heart is hardened and I am doing no longer bother me. I have hardened my heart. My soul has become insensitive to the Spirit. I have become calloused to the urging of the Spirit and my sin no longer troubles me. The problem is that I won't be sorry for my sin and repent (that is, turn from my sin and ask God's forgiveness). Until I do that, God can't forgive my sin. It is too big for Him. Is anything like that going on in your life? Is there something you are doing that you know is wrong? Is the Spirit moving on your heart and you are refusing to heed him? The day may come when you are insensitive to the Spirit and you no longer have grief over your sin. The day may come when you are incapable of repenting, of turning from your sin and asking God to forgive you. When that happens, your sin will be too big for God.