

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

### *Sins Against the Spirit*

The Spirit of God is like wind, giving life; like a dove, bringing peace and rest; like a deposit, giving security; like oil, giving understanding; like fire, bringing purity; like a friend, giving aid; and like water, quenching thirst. And all of that you and I receive when we are baptized by the Holy Spirit. And that takes place when we declare ourselves followers of our captain and chief, Jesus Christ.

But remember, in spite of the images that are used – the Spirit of God is a person, not a thing, not an “it,” or not even a dusty creed or doctrine. You sin against people, not things or inanimate objects. And the Bible speaks of at least four sins that we can commit against the Holy Spirit.

### **Resist the Spirit**

The first way we can sin against the Spirit is by *resisting* the Spirit. Notice the words of Stephen in Acts 7:51:

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always *resist* the Holy Spirit! Acts 7:51

Stephen knows his hearers are resisting the Spirit because they not only put Jesus, their Messiah, on the cross, but they are also about to stone Stephen to death! Personally, I can't begin to imagine how Stephen felt. I've sensed at times resistance to my messages, but I've never been stoned for my messages...at least not yet!

In rejecting Stephen, they were rejecting the Holy Spirit's work in their hearts. Notice how Luke describes the response to Stephen's message in verse 54: “They were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.” Why? Notice verse 55 – “Stephen, *full of the Holy Spirit...*” In resisting Stephen and his message, they were resisting the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

You can only resist something that is active. To resist the Holy Spirit implies that the Holy Spirit is active, drawing people to God. What is taking place here with Stephen is simply a fulfillment of Jesus' promise to his disciples:

And when he comes, he will [convict] convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. John 16:8 NLT

What does it mean to “convict?” It *doesn't* mean to place behind bars or to condemn. It *does* mean to place the truth in front of someone in such a clear light that it must be seen for what it is...truth.

When we moved to Portland and purchased our house, we discovered that the previous owner had two dogs that apparently had decided that *they* owned the house. In any case, they had left their proverbial canine mark just about everywhere there was a carpet. You often don't detect the extent of the problem with the naked eye. That's why a carpet cleaning business will often shine a black light on the floor, revealing urine crystals everywhere.

The offense is there all the time, but you often don't detect it until the right light exposes it. And that is the role of the Holy Spirit in the world today...as well as in *your* life. He convicts of sin. He exposes our sin – like that powerful black light – and in doing so, shows us our need.<sup>ii</sup>

Stephen is saying that their ancestors had repeatedly resisted the Holy Spirit by rejecting the prophets, the Messiah, and Stephen's message. The same is true today. In opposing, persecuting, and rejecting the Bible, Christians, the Church of Jesus Christ, people are resisting the Holy Spirit.

Are you resisting the message of the Gospel that you have heard time and again? Are you resisting the Spirit's convicting work in your life? Then I tell you on the authority of God's Word, that you are in an extremely dangerous position.

### **Blaspheme the Spirit**

Not only is it possible to *resist* the Spirit, but one can also *blaspheme* the Spirit. And this is what the Bible calls the "unforgivable sin."

There is probably no sin that has disturbed the minds and souls of more people than this one. A Christian can cite for memory 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But then there is the nagging question: "But I think I may have committed the unpardonable sin. Will God forgive that?" Have you ever wondered that? Let's look at what the Bible says about this "unpardonable sin." The key passage is found in Mark chapter 3.

And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." He said this because they were saying, "*He has an evil spirit.*" Mark 3:22-30<sup>iii</sup>

What is the sin of "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?" It is resistance taken to the extreme. The context tells us that experts in the Jewish law had come down from Jerusalem to Galilee because they had heard about this extraordinary, miraculous work that Jesus was doing of exorcising demons. I believe that these religious leaders were under the conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11), working through Jesus' life and ministry.

The question is, "How did they respond to the light they were receiving?" Mark tells us that they attributed the miracles Jesus was performing, not to the power of the Spirit<sup>iv</sup>, but to the power of Satan. At the point, Jesus responds: "I tell you the truth, *all* the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."

Let me first make clear what the “unpardonable sin” of blasphemy against the Spirit *is not*. First, it is not a sin committed ignorantly, without your knowledge. Some Christians are obsessed over this question, wondering if *just maybe* they have somehow committed this sin. But here, these religious leaders were plotting to kill Jesus (3:6). Their rejection of the Messiah was very intentional.

Take the Apostle Paul, for example. Before his conversion, when he was still called Saul, he was a persecutor of Christians. In Acts 26:11 he even says that he tried to get Christians to blaspheme! But in doing this, did Paul commit the unpardonable sin? Evidently he didn't. Here's what he says in writing to Timothy:

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 1:13, 14

Paul writes that he “acted ignorantly in unbelief” and as a result received mercy. Paul was a murderer. He had the blood of Christians on his hands. But he received mercy. And you can too. Remember, there is always more grace in God's heart than sin in your past. It is there for the taking.

Second, the unpardonable sin is not a sin of the tongue, but a sin of the heart. It's true that Mark adds in verse 30, “He said this *because* they were saying, ‘He has an evil spirit.’” But the words of these unbelieving religious leaders were simply a reflection of their heart – a heart of unbelief. The sin of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit *is not* merely certain words that you might say. It is an attitude. The words are merely an expression of the attitude of the heart.

Let's consider Saul again, the one who tried to get Christians to blaspheme. Let's suppose that while Saul was on that road to Damascus and heard the risen Christ speaking to him, that he simply said, “No, I don't believe. I refuse to believe.” That would have been the unpardonable sin. Why? Such unbelief is unpardonable precisely because it refuses to accept God's pardon. Such unbelief is unforgivable because it refuses to accept God's forgiveness.

Who can commit this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? The answer is: *only an unbeliever*.

On the other hand, if the Holy Spirit is still convicting you and striving with you, then you have not come to the point in your life of “blaspheming the Holy Spirit.” And if you are concerned that you have committed this sin, then that very fact indicates that you haven't committed this sin!

There is more grace in God's heart than sin in your past. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven accept the sin of rejecting God's forgiveness. “I tell you the truth, *all* the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them.”

What is that sin that you are so concerned about, thinking that maybe you have “blasphemed” the Holy Spirit? Bring it to God right now. He will freely forgive.

## Grieve the Spirit

While blasphemy against the Spirit can be committed only by unbelievers, the next two sins are committed by Christians. In Ephesians 4 Paul tells us not to “grieve” the Holy Spirit.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

As we saw last week, the sealing of the Spirit is given to *all* believers.<sup>v</sup> But the seal of the Spirit – speaking of authenticity, ownership and protection – is in no way *permission to sin*, but *motivation not to sin!*<sup>vi</sup>

The biblical doctrine of security should never breed permission to sin in the Christian life. “Oh, I am safe and secure, sealed by the Spirit; now I can sin as I wish!” Paul says just the opposite. Yes, we have been “sealed for the day of redemption.” And this very fact should lead you and me to never, never grieve that same Holy Spirit.

It’s sort of like a marriage relationship. My marriage is “sealed,” and I have a ring on my finger to show that. But that ring – that “seal” – is a constant reminder and motivation *not* to sin against my wife. In the same way, we as the church are the bride of Christ. The Holy Spirit is our seal, promising the future heavenly wedding. And that seal in our hearts should motivate us to purity.

To grieve the Holy Spirit is to wound or cause pain to the Holy Spirit. And to wound or pain the Holy Spirit diminishes his activity in our lives. In a sense, it paralyzes his work within us. Grieving the Holy Spirit can diminish His activity within us as much as emotional grief can paralyze a person. Have you ever experienced grief like that? It so pervades your very being that you are literally paralyzed? When we sin, we – in a certain sense – paralyze the work of God’s Spirit within us.

Notice too that *grieve* is a love word.<sup>vii</sup> Only one who loves can be genuinely grieved. Somebody I don’t really know or care about can hurt me, physically or emotionally. But only someone I deeply love can grieve me. By the way, this also tells us that God’s Spirit is not an impersonal force, but a person, the third person of the Trinity. Only a person can be grieved.

How can we grieve the Spirit? While all of the sins mentioned in this chapter (Ephesians 4:17-32) can grieve the Holy Spirit<sup>viii</sup>, let me focus on just one which is found in verse 29 –

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Our capacity to speak and to formulate thoughts in words is both powerful and unique. Cows moo, dogs bark, pigs grunt, donkeys bray, lambs bleat, lions roar, monkeys squeal, and birds sing. But only people can speak. And what we say has great potential for good, as well as for harm.

The word here translated “unwholesome” is also used in the Bible to refer to rotten trees or rotten fruit (Matt 7:17-18; 12:33). I have in my back yard four large apple trees. One summer, because the trees had not been appropriately trimmed, they produced a plenteous harvest of rotten apples. My boy and I even got in a rotten apple fight, which Mary Alice thought was rather disgusting. Yes, abusive words are like throwing rotten apples at each other...it is messy, smelly and good for nothing.

The Bible says, “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Proverbs 12:18). Not only do they pierce others, but they pierce the heart of the Holy Spirit.

### **Quench the Spirit**

As an unbeliever, you can resist the Holy Spirit as the “incomer.” He desires to come and be God’s presence in *your* life. But as a believer, you can grieve him as the indweller, or “put out his fire” as the “out-flower.” This is what Paul speaks of in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20.

Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt.  
1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

Remember that the Holy Spirit is frequently represented in the Bible by the image of fire. And fire speaks of passion, purity and holiness...the vary passion, purity and holiness that the Spirit of God wants to build into your life.

How can we “put out the Spirit’s fire?” Well, as for any fire, you can (1) cut off the fuel supply; or (2) dowse it with water. And the same is true with the Holy Spirit.

When I turn off the fuel supply on by barbeque, the fire goes out. The same is true in our lives. When we turn off the means of grace – prayer, the Word of God, fellowship with other believers, witness – the fire will eventually be extinguished. Why? Because these are the channels through which spiritual fuel is supplied, nurturing and releasing the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Dads, this is true for you as the head of your family. If you are not getting the time you need to be “refueled” spiritually, your family will suffer. If your job, if your priorities of leisure, if your aspirations keep you from intentional growth in Christ-likeness, you will fail in providing the spiritual leadership for your family that God has called you to.

But there’s another way to put out a fire. You can dowse it with water. The Thessalonians were doing this by “despising prophecies” in the church. God was speaking through certain ones in the fellowship, but others didn’t want to listen, much less obey.<sup>ix</sup> In the same way, you and I can “dowse the fire” of the Holy Spirit by not listening to and obeying God’s Word. We can “dowse the fire” of the Spirit by our preconceptions of how God works. Sometimes God works in surprising ways. Jonathan Edwards used to call God’s work a “surprising work” that cannot be so confidently calculated. The Holy Spirit always works according to the Bible, but “out of the box.” Let us never, never extinguish what He wants to do!

This morning, will you open your life to the Holy Spirit. Don’t resist his incoming, don’t grieve his indwelling, and don’t hinder his outflowing.<sup>x</sup>

<sup>i</sup> In the previous chapter Luke writes that the crowds could not “stand up against his wisdom or *the Spirit by whom he spoke*” (Acts 6:10).

<sup>ii</sup> And so Jesus goes on to say in John 16: 9-11 – “The world's sin is unbelief in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the prince of this world has already been judged.” *NLT* The order is logical. First, we have to see our sin for what it is. And the sin the Spirit convicts of is the sin of unbelief. In fact, at the heart of sin is unbelief. This is the most serious sin any person can commit. This sin is unforgivable. Why? Because it refuses to accept forgiveness! Jesus said: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” (John 3:18). Second, we need to be convinced of the only righteousness that can save us, that of Jesus Christ. And finally, we need to know that if we reject that righteousness, we face certain judgment. If anyone rejects the first two convictions that the Spirit brings, then there is only one alternative, the conviction of judgment. Just as the Devil and his angels face the inevitable judgment of hell fire (Matthew 25:41), so do any who reject the free offer of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. This “convicting” work of the Holy Spirit parallels the contending work of the Spirit in Genesis 6:1-3: When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not *contend* with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

<sup>iii</sup> See also Matthew 12:31-32; Luke 12:10. Mark gives a narrative context what Luke only records as a series of sayings dealing with the Son of Man or the Holy Spirit. Matthew seems to combine the accounts in Mark and Luke, but omits the helpful explanation found in Mark 3:30.

<sup>iv</sup> Matthew 12:28 says that Jesus had been casting out demons *by the power of the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>v</sup> We need to underscore that *all* genuine believers have the seal of the Holy Spirit. This “seal” of the Holy Spirit is not compromised by sin in our lives. How do we know this? We are never exhorted as believers to be sealed with the Spirit. It is something that is done to us as the point of conversion, and not something that we are to seek after following conversion. The Bible tells us to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), but never to be sealed with the Spirit. This strongly implies that the sealing of the Holy Spirit is given to all believers, irrespective of their spiritual maturity or responsiveness.

<sup>vi</sup> It is not a special privilege reserved for those who have reached a certain level of maturity in the Christian life. In fact, Paul writes to the Corinthians that they had received the seal of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). Given the state of the Corinthian church, this is an amazing statement. This church was characterized by division, immorality, gluttony and prideful attitudes. And yet Paul says that they all had this “seal of ownership” in their hearts. And this “seal” is one of the primary motivations for growth in Christ: since we have been sealed, don't grieve the very Spirit who has sealed you!

<sup>vii</sup> Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, 126.

<sup>viii</sup> Anything that is contrary to the nature of the Spirit can grieve the Spirit: (1) He's the Spirit of holiness (Rom 1:4); (2) He is the Spirit of wisdom (Is 11:2); (3) He is the Spirit of life and power (Rom 8:2; 2 Tim 1:7); (4) He is the Spirit of truth (John 14:7); (5) He is the Spirit of faith (2 Cor. 4:13); and (6) He is the Spirit of love and grace (2 Tim 1:7; Heb 10:29). Paul writes this passage with the backdrop of Isaiah 63:10 in view: “Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.” The difference is that under the Old Covenant, when grieved, the Spirit could withdraw from the believer (Judges 16:20; 1 Sam 10:10; 16:14; Ps 51:11).

<sup>ix</sup> This is the earliest record of New Testament teaching on the more “charismatic” gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul already has some reason to believe that some false teaching has entered this church (cf. 2 Thess. 2:1-4). This may have taken place when various prophecies were being given in the assembly. Notice that, in response, Paul *does not* say, “earnestly seek” these kinds of manifestations of the Spirit. Rather he says, “Do not despise them.”

<sup>x</sup> Cited by Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, 130 (source unknown).