

Grieving *and* Resisting the Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 7:51; Heb. 10:24, 25; Eph. 4:25–5:2; 1 Thess. 5:19–21; Mark 3:28, 29.*

Memory Text: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (*Ephesians 4:30, NKJV*).

The Holy Spirit has the unique ability to lead sinners to an awareness of their true sinful state. He also awakens in us a desire to accept Jesus and His forgiveness of our sins. The Holy Spirit possesses a matchless power to make us overcomers and to enable us to reflect the beautiful character of Jesus.

At the same time, this powerful and mighty Holy Spirit can be resisted by feeble sinners. He does not force Himself upon us.

Sin is very alluring, very appealing. Yet, it is highly deceptive and leads to death. It is diametrically opposed to God and His pure holiness and goodness. Reflecting this divine holiness, the Holy Spirit is opposed to sin in every form, and He is grieved when we sin and are unwilling to give it up. As powerful as the Holy Spirit is, His positive impact can be quenched, and we can resist Him when we continue in our sinful life. The Gospels even tell us that there is one sin that cannot be forgiven: blasphemy against the Spirit (*Matt. 12:31, 32*).

This week we will study biblical aspects that deal with grieving, quenching, and resisting the Holy Spirit, and with the sin that will not be forgiven.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 18.

Resisting the Holy Spirit

Read Acts 7:51. What warning was given here, and how does it apply to us today?

There are a number of sins specifically mentioned in Scripture as sins against the Holy Spirit. Many of those sins are on the individual level. However, there is also a corporate dimension involved, as we can conclude from Acts 7:51. Stephen points out that his accusers are stiff-necked, as were the rebellious Israelites when they worshiped the golden calf (*Exod. 33:3*). They resisted the Holy Spirit because they refused to listen to what the Holy Spirit would impress through God's prophets upon their hearts. This pattern of opposition to God and His plan ultimately led some to reject the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of following Jesus, they made external worship a substitute for obedience to the living Word of God.

It is an amazing thought that frail human beings, created by God and dependent on Him, are able to resist the work of the Holy Spirit and ultimately the grace of God. As powerful as God is, He does not force Himself upon our free will. He respects our choices.

After all, if God wanted to force us to obey Him, why didn't He do it in Eden with Adam and Eve and thus spare the whole world the crisis of sin? God has made us free beings, with the power to make moral choices, either for life or for death, either for good or for evil. What a sacred—and costly—gift we have each been given!

While everyone is responsible for his or her own decisions, we also have a corporate responsibility: we should encourage one another to be faithful, to obey God's Word, and to stay close to Jesus (*Heb. 10:24, 25*). We resist the Holy Spirit today when we resist the Word of God and when we do not heed the message of His prophets.

It's so easy to look back at ancient Israel and judge and criticize them for all their mistakes. But what about our own poor choices? How would you feel if they were made as public as were the mistakes of ancient Israel?

What are ways we can help others toward “love and good works”?
How are you responsible for fostering “love and good works” in others?

Grieving the Holy Spirit: Part 1

Read Ephesians 4:30. Here Paul uses an imperative and admonishes us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is a personal being, not just a divine force. That is why He can be grieved. But how do we grieve the Holy Spirit? Perhaps we should remember that one of the tasks of the Holy Spirit is to open our eyes to sin (*John 16:8*). He leads us to Jesus, who forgives our sins and sanctifies us. After all, God's Spirit is called "holy." This means that He hates sin. But He rejoices when we are obedient to God in all things and think and speak what is pure and holy. On the other hand, this also means that He is grieved when we cherish anything that is unworthy of our divine calling. Any determination on our part to hold on to sin or to downplay the seriousness of sin grieves Him. Grieving the Holy Spirit is a serious thing.

The context of Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:30 about the grieving of the Holy Spirit deals with the lifestyle one lived before being converted by Christ, and what came after that conversion. As new creatures in Christ, we should be patient and gentle with each other, forbearing one another in love, and being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (*Eph. 4:2, 3*). Being renewed by the Spirit (*Eph. 4:23*), we are now following Christ, our new head (*Eph. 4:15*), and so we do not walk in the vanity of our minds, as the Gentiles do (*Eph. 4:17*). Instead, we live a life that is pleasing to God (*Eph. 4:24–31*).

Whenever we allow any of the negative things mentioned in these verses in chapter 4 to find room in our hearts, and when they manifest themselves in our words and deeds, then the Spirit is sad and grieved. Grieving the Holy Spirit means to spurn His sanctifying presence and His life-transforming power because we continue to willfully sin.

The Holy Spirit is not indifferent to how we live. Read Ephesians 4:25–31, and list the specific moral behaviors that grieve the Holy Spirit. Why is the Holy Spirit grieved by these things?

Grieving the Holy Spirit: Part 2

That the Holy Spirit can be grieved tells us that God is not indifferent to us and what we do. God is affected by what we decide and how we live.

Read Ephesians 4:25–5:2. What are we told to do here, and how different would our lives be were we to follow these biblical commands?

In positive terms: we delight the Holy Spirit when we speak the truth in love; when we are angry about sin, but do not sin in our anger; when we work with our own hands and use the product of our labor to do good for the needy; when we speak in an edifying manner and impart grace to our hearers; and when we are kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

If we claim to be Christians, yet live as though Christ had never come and our lives are not affected by His leading and His love, then we grieve the Holy Spirit. When we confess that we believe in the Truth, but how we act and behave contradicts that confession, we grieve the Holy Spirit. Lack of moral integrity also grieves the Spirit. Our outreach efforts must not be divorced from our ethical behavior. If we live in such a way that others realize that we truly are His children and reflect Jesus, we bring joy to the heart of God.

Read Ephesians 4:3, 4, 15, 16, 32. What do these texts reveal about the communal aspects of living in the Spirit? How does a spirit-filled life reveal itself in the community with other believers?

It is interesting that in Ephesians 4 there is also a distinct communal aspect. The idea of unity is mentioned several times. Paul is concerned that we maintain the unity of the Spirit because we live the life of God in the context of “one another” (*Eph. 4:32*). How we relate to one another in the church, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (*Eph. 4:3, NKJV*) is a crucial part of not grieving the Spirit. How we treat one another in the church, which is a temple of the Holy Spirit (*1 Cor. 3:16, 17*), really does matter to God. How we consider one another in the body of Christ is of prime importance to God’s Spirit.

It’s fine to know the truth, the three angels’ messages (*Rev. 14:6–12*), but ask yourself this question: How do you treat others, especially those who are under you or those who can do nothing for you; that is, those that have nothing to offer you in return?

Quenching the Holy Spirit

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21. How can the Holy Spirit be quenched?

The word “quenching” suggests the idea of a fire. The same Greek root word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 and in Ephesians 6:16. This suggests that something about the Holy Spirit is like a fire that we can extinguish. We should remember that the Holy Spirit does two significant things for us: He gives us knowledge of sin, and He gives us power to overcome sin. Both are related to sanctification.

Through the Word of God, the Spirit tells us what we need to know in order to live a holy life, and through His indwelling power He enables us to change our lives according to this knowledge. One way we can avoid quenching the Spirit is to “not despise prophetic utterances” (1 Thess. 5:20, *NASB*). Paul instructed the Thessalonian believers not to despise prophetic utterances, and yet he called for their discernment (1 Thess. 5:21). While we are to be open to the Spirit in our congregational life and should not quench the work of the Holy Spirit, we also need discernment, because false teachings and false prophets will continue to plague the church.

Not all spirits are benign. The Spirit-inspired Word of God, however, is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (*Ps. 119:105*). By it we have a standard to measure even new prophetic utterances. In biblical times such a lamp involved a burning wick that shed light before the feet of those who walked in the night. The Bible tells us how to “walk in the Spirit” (*Gal. 5:25*). We do that by surrendering ourselves to the teachings of the Word of God and by obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit as He points us in the way that we should live.

Many who profess to believe that the Bible is the Word of God interpret it in ways that all but denude the Scriptures of any real authority, robbing them of any real power in their lives. Also, when we despise the Word of God and treat it with disrespect or neglect to apply it to ourselves, we are snuffing out this lamp that is given to lead us on our way and to stir our consciences toward good works.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:7, 8. What does it mean to be called “in holiness” (*NKJV*)? In what areas of your life might you need to ask yourself if, indeed, you are acting “in holiness”?

Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

Read Mark 3:28, 29; Luke 12:10; and Matthew 12:31, 32. If all sins and blasphemies can be forgiven, what is it that cannot be forgiven?

Perhaps no other sin has caused greater uncertainty and anguish among Christians, and has been more misunderstood, than has the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Some think that Jesus has in mind some specific sins that are particularly grievous. We do well to remind ourselves, however, that *all* sins are heinous to God, even though some sins might have more drastic consequences than do others. But what did Jesus mean when He spoke about the unforgivable sin?

Actually none of these texts say that this sin *cannot* be forgiven; just that it *will not* be forgiven. Let's remember: the work of the Holy Spirit is to lead sinners to an awareness of their sin and to awaken in them the desire to accept Jesus, who alone forgives sin. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, therefore, must be understood as the deliberate and persistent repudiation of Jesus' saving work. It occurs when an individual willfully and obstinately resists the Spirit's testimony to Christ and His salvation and grace.

Jesus isn't talking about someone uttering a few slanderous words. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is committed only in the context of an attitude of persistent unbelief and open hostility toward Jesus. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is not a single episode; it is a determined way of life.

"In the place of receiving the evidence offered them, in the place of recognizing in Christ's works the endowment of heaven, they held right on to their wicked purposes, and said, He performed this wonderful work through the devil. This was the sin against the Holy Ghost." —Ellen G. White, *Loma Linda Messages*, p. 156.

When the human heart is settled in stubborn opposition to God and, thus, consciously refuses to give Jesus His due—the heart is hardened and fails to acknowledge the truth of the Holy Spirit's testimony to God's saving sacrifice in Jesus Christ. This sin is beyond the possibility of forgiveness, not because God is powerless or unwilling to forgive, but because the person is not able to recognize his or her sin. Therefore, he or she does not accept forgiveness through Jesus. This attitude, of course, has eternal consequences.

How can we be sure that, regardless of whatever we profess about ourselves, we are not living in opposition to God and resisting the Holy Spirit? (See, for instance, 1 John 5:3 and Rom. 8:14.)

Further Thought: The mere fact that people anxiously ask whether they have sinned the unforgivable sin reveals that they most surely haven't. If they had committed it, they certainly wouldn't be worrying about it. Their worry is all the evidence they need that, indeed, they are still open to the Spirit's leading. What the person should do is claim the righteousness of Jesus and, clinging to Jesus' merits, press on ahead in faith and obedience. Only under the covering of Christ's righteousness, which is the "righteousness of God" Himself (*Rom. 10:3*), can they have the peace and assurance that they so sorely lack now.

There is, really, only one person God cannot forgive, and that is the person who persistently refuses to come to Jesus for forgiveness. "The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not lie in any sudden word or deed; it is the firm, determined resistance of truth and evidence."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1093. "No one need look upon the sin against the Holy Ghost as something mysterious and indefinable. The sin against the Holy Ghost is the sin of persistent refusal to respond to the invitation to repent."—Page 1093.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If someone were to come to you, afraid that they had committed the unpardonable sin, what would you say and what texts would you use to help? Why is an understanding of salvation by faith alone so crucial for helping someone who feels he or she is hopelessly lost?
- 2 We quench the Holy Spirit when we refuse to act or speak as He leads. Where are we in danger of quenching the Holy Spirit? That is, in what aspects of our lives (if any) do we find ourselves resisting God's leading, and how can we learn to make the needed surrender?
- 3 Sometimes God allows certain circumstances to come into our lives that we resent or that we don't understand. Such was the case, for instance, with Job. Why can a resentful mind-set dampen the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? How can we trust God more fully and submit our lives completely to Him, even during the most difficult times?
- 4 Fearful of being "tainted" by what they feel are corrupt influences in the church, some pull away completely from the body and strike out on their own. What's wrong with that idea, and why is it not the biblical model for a Christian to follow?

Something Beautiful: Part 2

“I understand your concern,” the doctor said. “But these are good drugs. They will help you, and they are not addicting. Tell me: What have you done in your lifetime that you really, really enjoyed?”

I thought hard. “Well, once my uncle and I went on a long hike for more than 100 miles in northern Sweden. It was wonderful.” The doctor promised me that if I took the medicine I would one day be able to take that hike again. I went home willing to try. Three months later, I could walk my uncle’s dog in the forest and enjoy it.

One day when I was out walking, I found a little cabin on a lake. I inquired and found that while it had no electricity or running water, I could rent it for less than what I had spent each day when I was on drugs. I moved into the two-room cabin and soon was busy carrying water and other supplies. Somehow I found this simple lifestyle attractive and comforting.

When I returned to the doctor, he was pleased with my progress. He told me that he and his wife had been praying for me. Then I learned that he was a Seventh-day Adventist. I borrowed a Bible from a friend and started reading it. If it was God who had helped me get over drugs, then I needed to know Him better. I started in Genesis and read about 100 pages, until I bogged down in Numbers and put it aside.

The doctor told me about a health rehabilitation center run by Adventists and suggested I go there to regain my strength and energy. I fell in love with the place and the people. Many of the patients were Adventists, and they talked about what Jesus was doing in their lives. This rekindled my desire to know God better.

I had never gone to church, except to attend an occasional wedding or funeral, but I started attending the Adventist church at the rehabilitation center. I was impressed by the Bible study. I wanted what these people had; I wanted to be a Christian, too. But I did not understand that I could just be a Christian. I thought there were some things I had to do before I could become a Christian.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.