

Offenses Against the Holy Spirit

The least understood Person of the Godhead is the Holy Spirit, and yet a proper understanding of the Holy Spirit and His ministry is basic to many facets of the Christian life.

The early Brethren wrote a summary statement of basic beliefs, and one of the cardinal truths was the fact that we believe in “the personality of the Holy Spirit.” Yet many times we fail to recognize the Holy Spirit as a Person. For one thing, when we use the word “person” we usually think of human beings. We have a tendency to expect a “person” to be like a human being—with a material body and an immaterial soul. Another reason why we tend to forget that the Holy Spirit is a person, is that we don’t associate personality with the word “spirit.” We speak of “the spirit of the times,” or say that “a spirit of expectancy swept over the crowd as they awaited the arrival of the president”—and thus we use the word “spirit” in a neutral sense.

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is designated as a Person. Twelve times in John 16 the masculine pronoun is used. For example, Jesus says, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is not only a person, however, He is a **divine** person. He has characteristics possessed only by God. He is eternal in His nature. He does things that only God can do. The Holy Spirit had part in creation (Job 33:4), and in the resurrection (Romans 8:11), and He plays a major part in our regeneration (Titus 3:5). Only God can put a new nature in a corrupt individual.

When one is regenerated (born again), the Holy Spirit (this divine Person) actually then comes into the heart of the newborn child of God to abide there. And thus our bodies become head-quarters for God here on the earth, and our hearts become God’s sanctuary. It’s hard to believe, but it’s true. And since God lives in my body, I must be careful not to allow anything that would make Him uncomfortable or ill at ease. This is the meaning of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s.”

The fact that the Holy Spirit is a Person means that He possesses the three essentials of personality—intellect, emotion, and a will. Note that personality does not require a body. The Scripture says that the Holy Spirit knows the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). He has intellect. Also, it is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).. He has emotions. Also, the Bible says that the Spirit distributes spiritual gifts “as he wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11). He has a will, the power to choose and to decide.

Today we want to look at those sins (or offenses) which may be committed against the Holy Spirit. He can be resisted, insulted, grieved, lied to, quenched, and blasphemed.

1. Resisting the Holy Spirit

In Acts 7, we have recorded the speech that Stephen made before the Jewish Council. He said, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). The sin of resisting the Holy Spirit is often committed by unbelievers or by those who have fallen away from the faith.

The meaning of the word “resist” is “to oppose.” Here is a person who knows he is a sinner by nature and by deed. Yet he is an unbeliever. He knows that Jesus died on the Cross as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the human family. He hears the Gospel and is under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit shows him his sin and pleads with him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and he feels that this is just what he ought to do—but he refuses to do it. He has resisted the Holy Spirit.

The tragedy is this: The oftener he resists, the weaker the call becomes. And if any reader has put off the matter of salvation, let it be made clear that if you delay until the Spirit ceases to strive with you (and that can happen)—you’ll go out into the great beyond a lost soul forever. So many people have the idea they can get saved whenever they get ready. But the fact is you’ll get saved when the Spirit of God draws, and if He has called you for the last time, you will never get saved. God says in Genesis 6:3, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man.”

There is another phase to the matter of resisting the Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit spoke to the Jewish people through the prophets, so the Holy Spirit speaks to us today through His written Word. The Bible was written under the direction of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 7, Stephen clearly stated that the Jews resisted the Holy Spirit by opposing the message of the prophets; and so today, we resist the Holy Spirit every time we refuse to heed the message of the Bible.

If we disbelieve the Bible, we resist the testimony of the Holy Spirit—for it was the Holy Spirit who guided and guarded the writing of the Scriptures. The professor in college who substitutes the theory of evolution for the Genesis account of creation is resisting the Holy Spirit. The husband who divorces his wife because he finds her difficult to live with, is resisting the Holy Spirit. The young lady who wears immodest, form-fitting, revealing clothes, is resisting the Holy Spirit. To willfully reject the evidence of the Word of God (whether in specific command or in broad principle), is to resist the Holy Ghost. It is giving God the Holy Spirit a slap in the face.

2. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

Many people are alarmed about the sin of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit because Jesus said that those who commit this sin shall never be forgiven. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is a serious sin. Jesus said so. Every other sin (including murder, drunkenness, and adultery) can be forgiven—but not this one! In Matthew 12, the Scripture tells how Jesus healed a person who (because of demon possession) was blind and dumb. Jesus cast out the demon and this greatly impressed the people,

so that they asked the question, “Is not this the son of David? Is not this the Messiah?” They felt this man finally must be their long-looked-for Messiah, but the Pharisees were strictly against Him. They were jealous, and in their envy and hatred for Jesus, they said, “This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of devils.” In other words, they said that Jesus was using Satanic power to cast out devils.

Jesus answered the charge by pointing out that Satan cannot work against himself. Satan would not work against himself. If Satan did that, then his own kingdom would fall, and that just couldn't be. The devil wouldn't work against himself. The devil doesn't cast out devils. Jesus continued, “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.” Jesus was casting out demons, but the power which they attributed to the devil, was really by the Holy Spirit. And then it was that Jesus said, “Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven” (Matthew 12:31). And Mark (in his parallel account) says, “But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation, because they said, He hath an unclean spirit” (Mark 3:29-30). Mark gives a clear reason why Jesus said that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost would not be forgiven: “Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.”

They attributed to the devil something that was really of the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is deliberately, willfully, maliciously, and against better knowledge—giving the devil the credit for what the Spirit of God does.

We must be careful what we say about the Holy Spirit. If we don't know whether something is the work of the Spirit or the work of Satan—we had better not pass judgment. I believe in the standards and the worship patterns established at my home church. I expect to live by the biblical principles that are upheld, to defend them, and to die by them—but we must be careful not to think that every other group is wrong just because they do things a bit differently from the way we do them. Many come and say, “What do you think of this preacher, or of that preacher? What about certain aspects of the charismatic movement, and the healing campaigns, and the mass evangelistic crusades?” I feel that most of these groups fail to preach **the whole Gospel**—but I hesitate to pass a fixed opinion about them lest I may attribute to the devil something which is really of the Holy Spirit. When it comes to the cults (and those who deny Jesus Christ), it is a different matter. But when not sure whether something is the work of the Spirit or the work of Satan, we had better not pass judgement.

3. Quenching the Holy Spirit

The word “quench” is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, where we are admonished to “quench not the Spirit.” The phrase “quench not the Spirit” is nowhere formally explained in the Scriptures, but it is usually a fire that we quench. In Ephesians 6:16, for example, we are told to put on the whole armor of God so that we might be able “to quench the fiery darts of the wicked (one).” The Holy

Spirit is symbolized **by fire** at several places in the Scriptures, and therefore it is fitting that the word “quench” should be used in connection with our attitudes toward the Holy Spirit.

The word “quench” means “to suppress” or “to stifle.” Quenching the spirit is simply saying “no” to His message and to His voice. The Spirit speaks primarily through two channels—the written Word (as we read the Bible), and the spoken word (as we hear the preaching of the Gospel). And the Spirit’s message is like a fire. A fire illuminates, and just so the Holy Spirit takes the Word of God when we read it, and helps us understand it. He illuminates the message. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says that God’s truth must be “spiritually discerned,” and in the same chapter, we are reminded that the deep things of God are “revealed unto us by his Spirit.” If I will not accept what He shows me as I read, I’m quenching the Spirit, and the light that is in me is becoming darkness.

The Spirit also speaks through the teaching and the preaching of the Word. And if we are urged from within, while the Word is being expounded, to say “Amen” or “Praise the Lord”—there is nothing wrong with saying it. The New Testament indicates that the manifestations of the Spirit occupied a large place in the life of the early church, especially among the Corinthian brethren. In fact, they seem to have gone overboard in the matter of the manifestations of the Spirit, because Paul emphatically declared that their worship services must be conducted decently and in order. But in the church at Thessalonica, there seems to have been an opposite situation. It appears that their services were growing more and more cold and formal, and Paul reminded **them** to “quench not the Spirit.”

In Corinth, let everything be done decently and in order.

In Thessalonica, quench not the Holy Spirit.

In other words, we need to be careful that we don’t go overboard in our enthusiasm and seek “strange fire,” and yet at the same time, we must avoid becoming cold and formal, and thus dampen enthusiasm and fervor. There should be a balance between structure and order, and at the same time, there must be an opportunity for the Spirit to work during an assembly of believers for worship. Thus we must not stifle the urge to say, “Praise the Lord”—but even more important—we must guard against quenching the Spirit by merely becoming one who hears the Word and then fails to do it.

4. Grieving the Holy Spirit

The key Bible passage is found in Ephesians 4:30 which says, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” The Holy Spirit is the Guide and Director of the newborn child of God, just as a parent is the guardian and teacher of a child. When we acted contrary to the advice and warning and counsel of our parents, we hurt their feelings and grieved their hearts. And just so, to act contrary to the counsel and direction of the Holy Spirit, is to grieve the Spirit, and to hurt the heart of God.

The meaning of the Greek word translated “grieve” means “to be in heaviness” or “to be sorrowful.” It is the same word that is used many other places in the Scriptures: for example, the rich young ruler went away “sorrowful.” The disciples in the upper room became “exceeding sorrowful” when Jesus told them that one of them would betray Him. And just so it is possible for you and for me (as believers in Christ) to produce sorrow and heaviness in the heart of the Spirit of God.

The setting (in which the words “grieve not the Spirit” is found)—names a number of misdemeanors that make the Spirit sorrowful. Verse 31 says, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you . . . and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:30-32).

Bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking are all sins that grieve the Holy Spirit.

Bitterness is the translation of a word which means “a longstanding resentment; a spirit which refuses to become reconciled.” So many of us have a way of nursing our bad feelings just enough to keep them warm, and we brood over the insults and injuries received in the past. The more we think about these things, the deeper-rooted they become. Bitterness grieves the Holy Spirit, and thus every one of us should pray earnestly that God will help us to forget.

Anger is smoldering resentment; it is a deep-seated spirit of ill-will; it is a kind of selfish, sinful, ill-temper that simmers on for days. Sometimes the person who is angry, refuses to talk; he won’t say anything; he acts abnormally; he smolders with resentment because of something that someone else said or did to him.

Wrath (by way of contrast) speaks of storms of uncontrolled temper. Wrath is the kind of anger that quickly flares up and just as quickly dies down. It is the kind of conduct that some display when the car won’t start or the meals aren’t ready on time. Wrath is anger with the lid off. One can be angry, and bite his lip and keep it. But wrath is displayed in slamming doors and kicking things around. Wrath is the kind of thing that suddenly boils over; anger is the kind of thing that simmers on for days. Both are sins that deeply grieve the Holy Spirit.

Another breach of conduct which brings pain to the Holy Spirit—is clamor. Clamor is loud, insulting language. It speaks of raised voices, violent arguments, and yelling at one another. There are very few homes where there’s never a loud, harsh, unkind word spoken. There are very few places where there is no undue scolding and blaming and insinuating. Many children never heard their parents apologize to one another (or to the children) for loud words they had carelessly spoken in an unguarded moment. If you get loud and use insulting language when the wheels of the home don’t turn to suit your desires, you bring sorrow to the Spirit of God.

A final sin listed in Ephesians 4, which grieves the Holy Spirit, is the sin of evil speaking. To “speak evil” of another is to rehearse the shortcomings of the other person with a critical, fault-finding spirit. There’s probably no other sin in the Bible that’s condemned more clearly than the needless repetition of the faults of other people. Andrew Blackwood says he knew a woman who loudly proclaimed that she was filled with holiness, and when she shouted “Hallelujah” it seemed that the windows rattled in the house next door, and yet, he says, “In all the years I knew her, I never heard her say a kind word about anyone.” This, along with the other sins named in the foregoing paragraphs, grieves the Spirit of God.

To “grieve” the Holy Spirit, is to act contrary to His direction and counsel, especially in the area of our speech and thus make Him sorrowful and sad.

To “resist” the Holy Spirit is to willfully reject the teachings of the Word of God.

To “blaspheme” the Holy Spirit is to attribute to the devil something that really is of God.

To “quench” the Holy Spirit is to stifle the voice of the Spirit, and to suppress the conviction He brings.

It is a serious thing to offend the Holy Spirit. Offending Him robs us of peace and of usefulness. And if one continues to grieve and insult and quench Him, it may rob that person of his eternal reward.

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