

# GRIEVING & QUENCHING THE SPIRIT

Theme: The Spirit's presence in the believer is unlimited in potential—but His work can nevertheless be hindered by the believer.

Over the past few weeks, we've been considering a particular—and very wonderful—aspect of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the life of the believer: His indwelling. So far, in the past three studies, we've considered the blessedness of His indwelling ministry, and the persons in whom He graciously indwells, and the permanency of His indwelling. All of these are matters of God's grace toward us; that is to say, we don't make them happen or make ourselves worthy of them. They are God's unqualified gifts to us through His grace; and are utterly His doing.

But in this study—the last of our considerations on the subject of the Spirit's 'indwelling'—we take up the one matter that *is* dependent upon us; and that is, the hindrances we place on His indwelling work in and through our lives.

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There are two main ways that we can be a hindrance to the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit in us. They can be categorized as either (1) an active hindrance (that is, through our 'grieving' Him), or (2) a passive hindrance (that is, through our quenching Him).

## I. ACTIVELY, WE MAY HINDER THE SPIRIT'S WORK BY 'GRIEVING' HIM.

- A. The clearest passage of Scripture on this is found in Ephesians 4:29-30. In it, Paul was talking to believers about the the importance of sanctification in their speech; and He wrote,

*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:29-30; *emphasis added*).<sup>1</sup>*

To “grieve”<sup>2</sup> the Spirit is another way of saying that we bring sorrow to Him or cause Him to feel badly. To grieve someone, of course, is something which only possible to do because they are a Person. And the Holy Spirit's ability to experience such emotions is an aspect of His being that implies to us His full, divine Personhood (See Lesson #2: *His Personhood*). The Holy Spirit's 'grieve-ability' also implies that He does not work in us in such a way as to compel us to do things against our own will. Rather, He is 'gentlemanly' and 'gentle' and seeks to persuade us into action through His love; being sorrowful when we do not do as He wills. Just as a loving and gracious parent is saddened by a rebellious and insubordinate child's disobedience, so the Holy Spirit is saddened when we do those things that displease Him or when we rebel against His good will for us. Taking our 'cue' from the surrounding context of the above passage in Ephesians 4, we could go on to think of other things that would grieve the Holy Spirit—

such as lying (v. 25), giving way to unrighteous outburst of anger (vv. 26-27), engaging in theft (v. 28), and expressing “bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking” and “all malice” (v. 31). And what's more, given the fact that it is something that is contrasted with the filling of the Holy Spirit, we could even add “drunkenness” to the list (5:18)—or, in fact, any other substance or thing that we willingly allow to come into us, control us, and prevail over us as a Spirit-hindering influence.

B. Dr. Rene Pache<sup>3</sup> suggested that some of the names that the Bible gives to the Holy Spirit can also tell us what might grieve Him:

1. Since He is called “the Spirit of holiness”: in Romans 1:4, any impurity or 'unholiness' in the live and mind of the one He indwells would grieve Him.
2. Since He is called the Spirit of “wisdom”, of “understanding” and of “knowledge” in Isaiah 11:2, any deliberate ignorance, or laziness in obtaining knowledge, or resistance to truth that He wishes us to know and submit to can grieve Him.
3. Since He is “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus“, as Paul calls Him in Romans 8:2, then clinging to old patterns of our former deadness in sin or of lifeless patterns of religious ritualism apart from Christ would be a grief to Him.
4. Paul says that God has given us a spirit “of power and of love and of a sound mind” in 2 Timothy 1:7; and if this speaks of the Holy Spirit, then a stubborn adherence to weakness, or clinging to attitudes of hatred, or a lack of soberness in our inner man, would all grieve Him.
5. Because our Lord referred to Him as “the Spirit of truth” in John 14:17, then all lying, falsehood, heresy and hypocritical pretense would grieve Him.
6. Paul speaks of believers sharing “the same spirit of faith” in 2 Corinthians 4:13; and if this also speaks of the Holy Spirit, then fleshly doubts or attitudes of wavering faith would grieve Him.
7. As “the Spirit of grace” (as He is referred to in Hebrews 10:29), a lack of trust in the sufficiency of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, or a spirit of legalism, would “insult” Him.
8. And being “the Spirit of glory and of God”, as Peter calls him in 1 Peter 4:14, then living on the level of the mundane or keeping our focus only on earthly matters, or not doing all that we do to the glory of God would grieve Him.

Much more could be drawn from many of the other names of or references to the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures; but these ought to be enough to both shock us with how much we must grieve Him, and to move our hearts by how much He must love us to still indwell us! May we grow to grieve Him less and less!

## **II. PASSIVELY, WE MAY HINDER THE SPIRIT'S WORK BY ‘QUENCHING’ HIM.**

A. The key verse for understanding this would be found in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. In writing to these believers, Paul urged them, “do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The word for “quench”<sup>4</sup> is used elsewhere in the New Testament for the quenching of fire—either literally (as in the idea of extinguishing the flame of a lamp in Matthew 25:8); or figuratively (as in the image of quenching a smoldering wick in Matthew 12:20, or a fiery dart in Ephesians 6:16, or even the flames of eternal judgment in Mark 9:44-48). In this verse in 1 Thessalonians, though, it is used as a figure for stifling or suppressing the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us. This is a verse that Dr. Leon Morris very effectively translates, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.”<sup>5</sup> He writes, “Exactly how the Thessalonians were trying to put out the

Spirit's fire is not clear. But many passages in the New Testament indicate that the manifestations of the Spirit occupied a large place in the life of the early church"<sup>6</sup>.

B. Dr. Morris goes on to suggest that the problem may have been the opposite from the kind of problem which prevailed in the church at Corinth. With the Corinthian believers, Paul had to restrain those who were going into excesses in their experience of the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12-14); while in Thessalonica, he may have had to deal with believers who were who were somewhat idle and inactive (see 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12), and who were discouraging any manifest expression of the Spirit to the loss of power and joy in the life of the believers in their midst. Herbert Lockyer suggested some ways that the Spirit can be "quenched" by us today:

1. "We can put out the fire of the Spirit in another's heart" through criticism or ridicule of a preacher (as Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:20, "Do not despise prophecies").
2. "We can quench the fire of the Spirit in our own hearts" through "insufficient materials" of spiritual growth, through "neglect" of prayer or study of the Scriptures, and through the "dross and dirt" of this world.
3. "Disobedience to the Spirit's promptings" can also quench the Spirit's fire in us through such things as:
  - a. "self-glorification",
  - b. "confidence in the flesh",
  - c. "the fear of man", or
  - d. "the mingling of strange fire upon the altar of God" in the form of combining worldly measures with the work of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

To this, we might also add that allowing ourselves to be robbed of the joy of our salvation can quench the work of the Spirit. The apostle Peter wrote, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). When we stifle the joyous sense of hope in Christ that should be displayed in our lives, we rob the Holy Spirit of the opportunity to bear witness of Christ's work in us to unbelievers; and thus we further quench Him.

C. And again, when we consider all the ways that we daily "quench" something that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us—choking out His flow through us like putting a kink in the garden hose—we should grow both shamed of our sin against Him and awestruck at His faithful love for us. May we learn to cease quenching His work, and thus allow Him to do freely and unobstructedly whatever He wills in and through us!

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So then; as we have already seen, the degree to which the Holy Spirit indwells the believer is truly unlimited. He indwells us fully and perfectly; and because that indwelling is by God's grace—and not in any way a result of our works or worthiness—He will never be taken away from the believer. But the degree to which the indwelling Holy Spirit works in and though the life of that believer *is* capable of being greatly limited. It is limited by the failure of the believer to actively cooperate with Him or by the failure of the believer to keep from passively hindering Him.

May it be that, by God's grace, we neither 'grieve' nor 'quench' this divine indwelling Helper and Friend; and all so that the promise of Jesus will be fulfilled in us—that "he who believes in

Me, the works that I do he will do also” (John 14:12).

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<sup>1</sup>All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

<sup>2</sup>Greek, *Lupew*; to injure, grieve, pain, cause to sorrow.

<sup>3</sup>This list is adapted from Rene Pache, J.D. Emerson, trans., *The Person and Work of The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), pp. 107-108.

<sup>4</sup>Greek, *Sbennumai*; to extinguish, put out, restrain.

<sup>5</sup>Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, rev.*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Co., 1991), p. 175.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Herbert Lockyer, *The Holy Spirit of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1981), pp. 220-223.