

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 4:12:2001
Reading: Acts 5:1-11

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

10. FAILURES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

A stranger once entered the grand cathedral of Freiburg in Germany and asked permission to play on its world-famed organ. The organist in charge at first refused. But after much persuasion, and perhaps a gratuity, he was prevailed upon to allow this stranger to play, and he sat down before the organ. His fingers brought from the instrument the most wonderful music. At last the man in charge turned to this stranger who was playing and said, " May I ask your name Sir ?" " Mendelssohn," replied the visitor, who was indeed no other than the great composer himself. " And to think that I refused YOU permission, " the man answered. My just as Mendelssohn wished to play the Freiburg organ, so the Holy Spirit desires to produce music in our hearts and lives. But so often He is met by a refusal. How often as Christians we hinder the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and how many of us, when we look back upon our lives will have to exclaim in the words of that organist " To think that I refused YOU permission."

You see the greatness of an offence is determined, not just by the nature of the offence, but by the dignity of the one against whom it is committed. For example we have heard about the different caste systems in India. Well, in India a Brahmin, a member of the Hindu priestly caste could strike a pariah, a member of a low caste with impunity, but the same offence committed against the Maharajah of the State, that is against the Prince would be visited with the most severe penalty. There is no difference in the nature of the acts, but there's a world of difference between the dignity of the persons struck. Is it not the same with the Holy Spirit ? But who is the Holy Spirit ?

Well, the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it like this: " In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost." You see the fact, that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person, equal in power and majesty with the Father and the Son means that every sin committed against Him is Serious. So it is to this topic, " FAILURES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE HOLY SPIRIT," that I want to direct your thoughts this There are three sins that I want to highlight that can be committed by the believer against the Spirit. These involve three Scripture references and the first comes in (Acts 5:3) where we read of the Christian, " LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT," and I want to call this:

(1) THE FAILURE TO BE SINCERE

Now others have lied in the same way that Ananias and Sapphira did, lied about money, lied about property, lied for the sake of gain. Indeed many others have lied more grievously and persistently.

What then was the peculiar awfulness of this sin that brought such swift retribution ? Well, this was a dramatic incident and it had three sides to it. You see this sin was committed against the background of:

(a) THE LOVING MINISTRY OF THE SAINTS:

This was a time of tremendous spiritual power. Things were happening in the fellowship of the church in Jerusalem in spite of the opposition recorded and because of the intercession offered. (Acts 4:24) The presence and power of the Spirit of God was evident among the believers in a very noticeable way. In

(Acts 4:33) we read of " great power," and " great grace." And what was experienced was seen in an overwhelming spirit of sacrificial giving. (Acts 4:34) Believers were parting with their property as mutual care: concern: compassion took control of this church. There was PARTICIPATION here. They didn't say out there and say, " Let the pastor or elders do it." No, they took their resources and pooled them and said, " Together we'll stand." (a)

Do we know anything about this practical ministry ?

Are we obedient to the Biblical injunction, " Let us not love in word, neither in tongue but in deed and in truth." (1 Jn 3:18) Now it was against this background of the (a) that there came:

(b) THE LYING MINISTRY OF THE SERVANTS:

Now some have questioned whether or not Ananias and Sapphira were true believers. Its best to see them as genuine Christians for several reasons:

1. They were included in " the multitude of them that believed," (4:32)
2. They were involved with the Holy Spirit thus indicating a personal relationship to Him.
3. If they were not true believers what lesson then about sin, did this give to teach all the rest who were true believers. (5:11)
4. Satan can be involved personally with believers. (Matt 16:21)
5. Finally, death can be divine chastening for a believer. (1 Cor 11:30 1 Jn 5:16)

Ananias which means, " God is gracious," and Sapphira which means " beautiful," wanted to bask in some of the glow that had surrounded Barnabas and the rest. They too had a little bit of land. They too sold it. But then came that fateful, family conference. They decided to keep back part of the price. Oh, they had still had the time and opportunity to explain to Peter that they were giving a percentage of the price. " Peter, we don't feel, we can give it all." My the Holy Spirit wants our all but He will use whatever we give, but He will not be party to PRETENCE OR HYPOCRISY !

My here is our first failure in our relationship to the Holy Spirit the (1) We can lie against the Holy Spirit. George McDonald wrote, " Half of the misery in the world comes from trying to look, instead of trying to be what one is not." The name that the Lord Jesus gave to this practice is " hypocrisy." Originating in the Greek theatre, the word " hypocrite," initially referred to an actor who donned elaborate masks to play his roles. When Christians put on masks they play roles too. I

wonder, what does God think of our playacting ? What does God think when we pretend to be something we we are not.

I think we are guilty of this sin more than we realise. What about our GIVING ? The giving of our TIME: TALENTS: TREASURE ! Like these two we can profess that our all is on the altar when we keep part of the price ? What about our PRAYING ? The Lord Jesus said, " When ye pray use not vain repetitions."

(Matt 6:7) Are you SINCERE in your praying ? Are you praying to get man's praise or Gods praise ? What about our SINGING ? We sing it so glibly, " I surrender all." Isn't it a marvel that God doesn't come down and take the tongues out of throats ? Indeed look at what happened here. There was:

(c) THE LIVING MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT:

For Peter said, " Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost ?" (6:3) Can you see here that:

(1) THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON:

My the Holy Spirit is not an " optional extra," reserved for benedictions, baptisms, or those we label " charismatics." Others give the impression that He is more like a heavenly genie in a bottle, Who, if you rub Him with the right mixture of prayer and faith, will perform miracles for you. But the Holy Spirit is not an optional extra ! He is not to be reserved for special occasions or exclusive groups, nor He is a trick-performing genie. The Holy Spirit is not an influence as the Unitarians or the J.W. accept. He is not some kind of power or energy flowing from God. The Holy Spirit is a person Who is imparted to every believer at the moment of conversion. (1)

(2) THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A DIVINE PERSON:

Look at (Acts 5:4) " Unto God." The Holy Spirit is GOD. He is sometimes referred to as the third person of the Triune God, not because He is the least, but because He is the last to be fully revealed in the Scriptures. We are Trinitarian's are we not ? In our worship we come to God, through the Son and by the Spirit. (Eph 2:18)

(3) THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A DIVINE PERSON WHO WILL NOT BE PARTY TO PRETENCE:

The Holy Spirit knew all about this trick. He stood sadly and silently by as Ananias gave the gift. Then he flashed the whole lying picture into Peters unsuspecting mind, gave him an instantaneous gift of discernment, and told him what to do. Look at (5:5) My God struck these pair dead for pretending a full dedication which they had not made.

And this action of God was meant to impress upon the church the seriousness of the sins of the saints. It had that effect as (5:11) indicates. " And great fear these things." What if such a thing happened today ? Can you imagine if a pastor or elder or church leader was speaking falsehood to the church and suddenly fell over dead. What would that do to us ? We would surely begin to think about our own integrity or the lack of it. Dr. Barnhouse of the basis of this passage, would never let his congregation sing the third verse of " Years I spent in vanity and pride."

The third verse goes like this, " Now I have given to Jesus everything, now I gladly own Him as my King."

" You see," said Barnhouse " if God acted in the same way today, He did in the fifth chapter of Acts, you'd have to have a morgue in the basement of every church and an undertaker on the personal staff." The truth is, we would not have a pastoral staff either. Oh, here was a church so operating in the power of the Holy Spirit that sin was an exception rather than a rule. Liars could not stand this church in Jerusalem. A church that had a holy awe and respect for God. Is this us ? Do we fear God ? Or are we guilty of this sin ? The sin of hypocrisy: pretence: deception. Are you lying to the Holy Spirit ? (1) My second reference is found in

(Eph 4:30) where we read of a Christian " GRIEVING THE SPIRIT," here we have the second area of failure.

(2) THE FAILURE TO BE SPIRITUAL

Look at (Eph 4:30) Notice it is not: " Grieve not AWAY the Holy Spirit." The word AWAY is not here. There's no such thing as a Christian grieving away the Spirit. Now hymnology might lead us to believe otherwise. Do you know that verse,

" Return, O Holy Dove return,
Sweet messenger of rest,
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast."

But that is not a Biblical conception. Certainly David prayed, " Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." But now He has come to indwell us and abide forever. Indeed Paul says here, " Ye are sealed redemption." Now that's interesting. You see Ephesus was a seaport and there was a great trade in timber. Timber merchants went to Ephesus and purchased the timber but they could not always take it away with them at once. It had to be floated later to its destination. But when they purchased the timber they put their mark on it, the mark of appropriation: of possession: of ownership.

It was theirs and remained theirs until it was finally redeemed. My we too have been purchased and possessed. (1 Cor 6:19) And by and by the Saviour is coming to claim us. And it is until that day that we are sealed. So we cannot " grieve away," the Holy Spirit, but we can " grieve Him." Dr. Charles Howard, a professor in a Bible College in North Carolina told how on one occasion, one of his daughters had disobeyed.

The family had a meeting. She admitted her misbehaviour and the family agreed on a proper discipline.

She would not be allowed to attend some social functions for several days. This was fine with her, until she thought about her plans for the weekend. She became angry and went to her father and said some very hurtful, unkind things. Dr. Howard said her words cut him deeply. He sat alone for a few minutes and suffered. In a while, he felt the arms of his daughter clasping his neck. She leaned over and said, " Daddy, I hurt you, but by what I said, didn't I ?" " Yes, darling, you did." His daughter began to weep and sob. Then she said, " Oh, I'm so sorry I have hurt you Daddy. I'll never do it again." Is there anything in your life hurting the Holy Spirit right now ? Anything that grieves Him ? When was the last time you said, " Oh, Lord, I'm so sorry I have hurt you ?" The

root idea of the word "grieve," is "to cause pain." How do we "grieve," the Holy Spirit ?

(a) BY IGNORING HIS INDWELLING:

Do you know what it is to ignore someone ? They're talking to you, and telling you about something and your eyes: heart are miles away ? Are you living as if there is no Holy Spirit ? Do you ever give a thought to your Heavenly Guest ? Are you disregarding the Holy Spirit's presence within ?
(a)

(b) BY INFRINGING HIS INSTRUCTIONS:

Look at the context of this command. You see we are given a wonderful yardstick in the verses that surround this challenge. For Paul specifies the things that grieves the Holy Spirit ! What are they ?

(1) UNSEEMLY CONDUCT:

LYING: (4:29) Do Christians lie ? Have you ever said to the Lord, " Lord, if you bring me out of this mess, I will do this I will do that I will give this amount to Your work ? Have you kept your word ? Do you need to say with the psalmist " I will pay my vows unto the Lord." (Ps 116:14) BAD TEMPER: (4:26) Some of you might not lose your temper, but do you sulk ? Are you irritable: touchy: difficult to live with ?

STEALING: (4:28) Do you steal your employers time ? One Christian employer said: " The only people I cannot rely on are the Christians, they take advantage of me because I'm a believer." (a) UNSEEMLY CONDUCT: Grieves the H.Spirit:

(2) UNPROFITABLE TALK:

(4:29) Talking for talking's sake, talking because we are undisciplined and our tongue is not under control. Illust: An unsaved person said, " If that is all Christians have to talk about I don't want their fellowship." Do not talk for talking sake: do not be a chatterbox. " Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." " Corrupt communication," means " unwholesome talk." That which is " rotten, putrid, or filthy." Many years ago when Dr.Ironside was giving the Bible Readings at Keswick.

After one of the morning sessions several gathered around him to chat. Then a little man pushed his head in through the group and said, " Are there are any ladies here, I want to tell you a joke." Ironside said, " There are no ladies here but the Holy Spirit is present and if He can hear it its all right." The man disappeared. The emphasis here is also on decay-spreading conversation which runs others down and delights in their weaknesses. A person who engages in this is like the fabled slave who took poison into her system a little at a time, and then more and more, until at last here whole being was so full of poison that her very breath would wither the flowers. Are there not believers like this ? Whose conversation consists in nothing else but running others down ? Augustine, hung this motto on his dining room wall, " He who speaks evil of an absent man or woman is not welcome at this table." My these are the things that grieve the Holy Spirit. (1)(2)

(3) UNCHRISTLIKE ATTITUDES:

(4:31) Do you know what that word, " grieve," means ? It means " To cause sorrow to." Are you bringing sorrow to the gracious Holy Spirit by your Unchristlike attitudes ? " Bitterness," a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner man. Someone does something we do not like, so we harbour ill will against him. Bitterness leads to " wrath," which is the explosion on the outside of feelings on the inside. Wrath and anger often lead to " clamour," (brawling) and " evil speaking," (blasphemy) A life filled with anger a church full of angry people is a pain to the Holy Spirit which hinders His work. D.L. Moody tells of a town that he and Ira Sankey visited for a mission. It seemed as if they were beating the air, there was no power in the meetings. One day, D.L. Moody said that perhaps there was some Christian who was cultivating an unforgiving spirit. Immediately, the chairman of the committee who was running the mission, got up and left the meeting right in view of the audience. The arrow had hit the mark, and gone home to the heart of the chairman of the committee. He had trouble with someone for about six months. He at once hunted this man up and asked him to forgive him. He came to Mr. Moody with tears in his eyes and said, " I thank God you ever came here." That night the inquiry room was thronged.

" Have I grieved Thy Holy Spirit ?
Have I quenched His power within ?
If I have, O Lord, forgive me:
Cleanse my heart from every sin."

(1) Lying to the Holy Spirit: (2) Grieving the Holy Spirit
My last reference is found in (1 Thes 5:19) where Paul speaks of the Christian " Quenching the Spirit." That is:

(3) THE FAILURE TO BE SENSITIVE

Look at (1 Thes 5:19) Now lets try and put these words in their context. Notice here:

(a) THE HISTORICAL SITUATION:

Lets take (5:19-21) together for they form a unit.

Now of course we need to remember that these Thessalonian believers did not have a completed Bible as we do, but there were PROPHETS in the Early Church and these prophets stood up in the meeting and openly declared the will and mind of God. (1 Cor 14:3) F.F.Bruce says: " Prophesying is declaring the mind of God in the power of the Spirit." Of course there were dangers in this kind of ministry, because Satan or the flesh could seek to counterfeit a message from God, and thus lead the church astray. If the church restrained the speakers they might be guilty of " quenching the Spirit." If they believed all that was spoken, they might be obeying false prophets. So the answer was to " prove all things." There must be a discerning of the spirits.

(1 Cor 12:10 1 Jn 4:1-4) Today, of course we have a completed revelation in the Word of God and there is no need for prophets. The apostles and prophets helped lay the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) and have now passed from the scene. The only " prophetic ministry," we have today is in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. So that is (a) But look at:

(b) THE ACTUAL ILLUSTRATION:

The word " quench," means " put out the fire," and in using this word " quench," Paul picture's the Spirit of God as fire. In (Isaiah 4:4) we read of the Spirit of God as " the Spirit of burning," in (Rev 4:5) He is compared to " seven lamps of fire burning before the Throne." Do you know what the fire will do ? When the fire of the Holy Spirit begins to burn in a life there are some things that will immediately be evident.

1. The Fire WILL BURN OUT:

All that is unworthy ! The Holy Spirit refines and reveals in a life all that is not worthy of Christ. So young believers begin to alter their ways and habits.

Things begin to go out of their lives, they drop certain things that previously they did without question. The fire will burn out all that is unworthy.

2. The Fire WILL BURN IN:

All that is praiseworthy ! If we take the picture of the potter and the vessel we realise what a crucial part the fire plays in the work of the potter. My the colours and the design are all made glorious by the fire. So, in the life of a believer not only do some things go, but others come in, new interests, new standards, new ambitions, new motives. The whole life becomes beautiful in colour and design, and all this is the result of the activity of the Holy Spirit. (1) (2)

3. The Fire WILL BURN THROUGH:

Does fire not have a tremendous penetration ? Have you never seen workmen cutting through a massive steel girder with a burning flame ? My a life can begin to count for God when that life, in which the Holy Spirit burns fiercely, can burn through indifference, through hostility, through prejudice, through resentments. The fire of the Spirit has begun to burn. The fire of God is glowing in the life. But just a word of warning the fire must be the fire of the Holy Spirit !

In the Old Testament we read of " strange fire," with which some of the sons of Aaron transgressed and this brought upon them the sentence of death. (Lev 10:2)

We live in an age when there are many who are eager for new and novel spiritual experiences. Their unorthodox interpretations of Scripture and questionable expeditions into the realm of the mystical and emotional signify this " strange fire." My this is the " wild fire," of fanaticism that allures its followers onto the marsh land of subjective emotions and feelings. But we don't want that. The Charismatic Movement can have it. We want the true fire of God, burning out, burning in, burning through ! But come back to what Paul says, " Quench not the Spirit, think of (a) (b)

(c) THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATION:

(a) IN RELATION TO OURSELVES:

How do we quench the Holy Spirit ? By being insensitive and unresponsive to the Word of God that is preached ? (1 Thes 5:19) How do we quench the Holy Spirit ? By sin and disobedience. Do you know what will quench or dampen a fire ? Lack of fuel ! So when the Holy Spirit is denied the

necessary fuel which the Word and Prayer supply He is quenched. Am I speaking to some Christian worker this in whom the fire was once bright: but now in the place of fire there is nothing but ashes. Have you lost your vision: your passion: your enthusiasm ? Why is the fire not as fierce as it used to be ? (a) Then we can dampen the Holy Spirit's power:

(b) IN RELATION TO OTHERS:

Do you know what will dampen a fire ? Buckets of water ! Have you never seen the fire quenched in a young convert ? I have. He has stood up and he has confessed Christ, possibly for the first time, and some old Christian has come along and critcised him for the way he expressed himself. Have you quenched the fire of the Holy Spirit in others ? By criticism: jealousy: unkindness ! My have we ever thought that we may be quenching the Holy Spirit after a service in which He has been present in power ? I remember when I was going into Bible College. " Any fire or gift you have they'll take it from you." Do you know what he was doing ? He was seeking to quench the fire of the Holy Spirit in my heart ?

My these are our failures in our relationship to the Holy Spirit.

(1) (2) (3)

Illust: The story is told of a lady who sat down before a grand organ and ran her fingers over its keys. She struck a chord of music which thrilled her whole being with its majestic melody. But when she tried to strike that chord again she could not. IT WAS A LOST CHORD ! Do you recall the chord of joy which once vibrated within you ? Where is it now ? Has it gone ? Is your cry this

" Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord and His Word." Can we recover that lost chord ? Bless God, the Holy Spirit is still within us. The question is: Will you remove those hindrances to His ministry in your life ? So that He can glorify Christ in you !