

Grieving¹ and Opposing the Spirit



SABBATH—MARCH 11

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 7:51; Hebrews 10:24, 25; Ephesians 4:25–5:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21; Mark 3:28, 29.

MEMORY VERSE: “Do not make God’s Holy Spirit sad. He marked you with a seal for the day when God will set you completely free” (Ephesians 4:30, NIV).

THE HOLY SPIRIT has the special ability to lead us sinners to understand how sinful we really are. He also helps us to accept Jesus. The Spirit helps us to want God’s forgiveness.

We are weak sinners. But we can still fight against the Holy Spirit’s power. The Spirit does not force Himself on us.

Sin is very charming and appealing. But it is also very misleading. It leads to death. This is because sin is completely opposed to God. Instead, God is pure and holy and good. And the Holy Spirit shows us God’s goodness.

The Holy Spirit is against sin in every form. And He is grieved when we sin and do not want to give it up. The Holy Spirit is very powerful. But His positive influence can be ignored and put out in the same way that a fire can be put out with water. And we oppose the Spirit’s power when we continue in our sinful lives. The Gospels² tell us that there is one sin that cannot be forgiven. That sin is blasphemy³ against the Spirit (Matthew 12:31, 32).

This week we will study what the Bible has to say about not grieving, ignoring, or opposing the Holy Spirit. We also will study the sin that will not be forgiven.

DEFINITIONS

1. grieving—to cause someone to feel sad or unhappy. To cause someone to suffer. We cause the Holy Spirit to feel sorrow when we turn away from His desire to show us our sins and lead us to Christ.

2. Gospels—the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

3. blasphemy—something said or done that is disrespectful to God or to something holy.

TURNING AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 7:51)

Read Acts 7:51. What warning was given here in Acts 7:51? How important is this warning to us today, as well?

There are sins against the Spirit that we do as individuals. And there are sins against the Spirit that groups of people do. We can see this truth when we read Acts 7:51. Stephen points out that his accusers are “stiffnecked.” They are as proud as the Israelites when they worshiped the golden calf (Exodus 33:3). Stephen says this because the Israelites refused to listen to what the Holy Spirit had to say to them through God’s prophets (special messengers). Some of the people that Stephen warned also would not listen. They turned against the Lord Jesus Christ. They would not follow Him. Instead, they made the act of worship take the place of obedience to Jesus’ Word (the Bible).

God created humans. But we humans are fallen (sinful) and weak. So we must depend on God. But we still can fight against the work of the Holy Spirit. We can refuse the grace (mercy and forgiveness) of God. It is true that God is very powerful. But He does not force Himself on us. He respects our choices.

Suppose God wanted to force us to obey Him. Then why did He not force Adam and Eve to obey in Eden? God could have avoided the whole crisis (danger) of sin by forcing Adam and Eve to obey. Instead, God created all of us to be free. He gave us the power to choose between good and evil and right and wrong. And He gave us the power to choose between life and death. What a holy and precious gift God gave us!

Everyone, then, is responsible for the choices that he or she makes. But we also have a responsibility to others. We should encourage one another to be faithful. We should encourage one another to obey God’s Word (the Bible). We should help one another to stay close to Jesus (Hebrews 10:24, 25). Today we turn against the Holy Spirit when we turn against the Word of God. We turn against the Spirit when we do not listen to what His prophets (special messengers) have to tell us.

It is so easy to judge and criticize the people of Israel in Bible times for all of their mistakes. But what about our own poor choices? How would you feel if those poor choices were made as public as the mistakes of the people of Israel were long ago?

What are ways we can help others to love and to do good works? What is your responsibility to others to help them to do these things?



God has given us the power to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, and life and death.

GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT: PART 1 (Ephesians 4:30)

Read Ephesians 4:30. Paul uses a strong command in this verse to warn us not to “grieve the Holy Spirit” (NKJV). What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is a Person. He is not simply 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 jobs of the Holy Spirit is to open our eyes to sin (John 16:8). In this way, He leads us to Jesus, who forgives our sins and makes us holy. After all, God’s Spirit is called “Holy.” And He is holy because He hates sin. But He feels joy when we obey God in all things. We make the Spirit happy when we think and speak what is pure and holy. But the Spirit is grieved when we do anything that goes against the life He has called us to lead. Any choice we make to cling to sin grieves Him. We also grieve the Spirit when we make sin seem not so bad as it really is. And grieving the Holy Spirit is a serious thing.

So, in Ephesians 4:30, Paul talks about grieving the Holy Spirit. But before this verse, Paul talks about getting rid of our old way of life. He talks about the way we should live now that we belong to Christ. In other words, we should start living a new life. We should live a life that is holy and good, just as God is. We should be patient and gentle with one another. We should work hard to be at peace with one another and to be one in the faith with other believers (Ephesians 4:2, 3). After all, we are “made new” by the Spirit (Ephesians 4:23). We now follow Christ. He is our new Head (Ephesians 4:15). So, we must no longer live as unbelievers do (Ephesians 4:17). Instead, we will live a life that pleases God (Ephesians 4:24–31).

We must not allow any of the negative things mentioned in Ephesians 4 to find room in our hearts. Suppose these negative things show up in what we say and in what we do. Then the Spirit is sad and grieved. And grieving the Holy Spirit means rejecting Him. He does make us holy. He does change our lives. But He cannot change us when we want to keep on sinning.

The Holy Spirit cares about how we live. Read Ephesians 4:25–31. Now list the things we do that grieve the Holy Spirit. Why is the Holy Spirit grieved by these things?



Any choice we make to hold on to sin grieves the Holy Spirit.

GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT: PART 2 (Ephesians 4:25–5:2)

The Holy Spirit can be grieved. His grief tells us that God cares about us and what we do. This is because God is affected by what we decide and how we live.

Read Ephesians 4:25–5:2. What do these verses tell us to do? How different would our lives be if we followed these commands?

We make the Holy Spirit happy when we speak the truth in love. We make Him happy when we are angry about sin but do not sin in our anger. We make Him happy when we work with our own hands and use what we have made to do good for the poor. We make the Holy Spirit glad when we speak the truth and teach it to others. We make the Spirit glad when we share the good news of God’s mercy and forgiveness. And we make the Spirit glad when we are kind, tender with one another, and forgiving.

Read Ephesians 4:3, 4, 15, 16, 32. What do these verses teach us about what it means to live in the Spirit? How does a Spirit-filled life show itself in the community with other believers?

Ephesians 4 talks about how Christians are supposed to treat one another. Paul says they are supposed to be one in the faith. He mentions this idea several times. Why? Here is the reason: we live the life of God with other believers (Ephesians 4:32). How we relate to one another in the church, then, is a very important part of not grieving the Spirit: “The Holy Spirit makes you one in every way. So try your best to remain as one” (Ephesians 4:3, NIV).

In other words, the church is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17). And how we treat one another in the church really does matter to God. God’s Spirit cares deeply about how much we care about one another in Christ’s church.

It is important to know the truth of the three angels’ messages in Revelation 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, how do you treat those who have nothing to offer you in return?



We make the Holy Spirit happy when we use what we have made with our own hands to do good for the poor.

QUENCHING (PUTTING OUT) THE HOLY SPIRIT (1 Thessalonians 5:19–21)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21. In these verses, how can the Holy Spirit be quenched (put out)?



We must not quench, or put out, the fire of the Holy Spirit.

The word *quenching* brings to mind the idea of a fire. “Quenching” comes from a Greek word that also is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 and in Ephesians 6:16. This word hints that there is something about the Holy Spirit that is like a fire that we can put out. We should remember that the Holy Spirit does two important things for us. One, He gives us knowledge of sin. Two, He gives us power to overcome sin. Both things are related to the process of being made holy.

The Spirit speaks to us through the Word of God (the Bible). He tells us through the Word what we need to know so that we may live holy lives. Paul tells us one way we can avoid quenching the Spirit. He says we must not “treat prophecies [special messages from God] as if they [were not] important” (1 Thessalonians 5:20, NIV). But he also instructs believers to test all prophecies to make sure they come from God (1 Thessalonians 5:21, NIV).

Unfortunately, not all spirits are peaceful and good. But the Bible is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV). This means that the Spirit led men to write it. The Bible is “a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105, NKJV). So, the Bible is a measuring stick or ruler. It helps us to know if a prophecy is from God. Lamps in Bible times had burning wicks. These lamps shed light before the feet of those who walked in the night. The Bible tells us how to “keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25, NIV). We do that by surrendering ourselves to the teachings of the Word of God. And we do it by obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Many profess (claim) to believe that the Bible is the Word of God. But they interpret (explain) the Bible in ways that take away its authority. They rob the Bible of any real power in their lives. Also, there is another reason why we must not despise the Word of God or treat it without respect. For then we will put out the lamp that is given to us to lead us on our way. This lamp (the Bible) leads us to do good works. So we must not fail to live out its truths in our lives.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:7, 8. In these verses, what does it mean to be called “to be holy” (NIV)? What parts of your life need “to be [made] holy”?

BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT
(Mark 3:28, 29)

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

Perhaps no other sin has been more misunderstood than the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Some think that Jesus is talking about a particular kind of sin that is very terrible. But we must remember that all sins are terrible to God. Some sins might have more horrible results than others do. But what did Jesus mean when He spoke about the sin that cannot be forgiven?

Really, none of these verses says that this sin cannot be forgiven. Instead, these verses say that this sin will not be forgiven. What does that mean? Let us remember what the work of the Holy Spirit is meant to do. His work is to lead sinners to be aware of their sins. His job is to fill them with the desire to accept Jesus. Jesus alone forgives sin. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an ongoing (continuous) choice. It is a choice to continue to refuse to let Jesus save us. Blasphemy against the Spirit, then, happens when a person stubbornly chooses to turn against the Spirit's offer of salvation in Jesus.

Jesus is not talking about someone saying a few bad or lying words. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit happens only when a person continues to turn away from Jesus and refuses to believe in Him. Blaspheming (not respecting) the Holy Spirit is not a one-time event. Instead, it is a chosen way of life.

"Here is what some people did. They did not accept the truth about Jesus. Instead, they held on to their wicked ways. They accused Jesus of doing His wonderful work through the devil. This was the sin against the Holy Ghost."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Loma Linda Messages*, page 156.

A human heart that stays stubborn will turn against God. It will refuse to give Jesus the honor He deserves. A heart that is hardened will fail to accept the truth that Jesus saves us. This sin cannot be forgiven. God is not powerless. He can forgive any sin and is willing to forgive. But He cannot forgive a person who will not confess his or her sin. This person does not accept forgiveness through Jesus.

How can we be sure that we are not living in a way that opposes God and turns away the Holy Spirit? (For example, read 1 John 5:3 and Romans 8:14.)

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: The fact that people ask if they have sinned the sin that cannot be forgiven shows that they most clearly have not sinned it. Suppose they had sinned the sin that cannot be forgiven. Then they would not be worrying about having done it. Their worry is all the proof they need that they truly are still open to the Spirit's leading. What each person should do is claim the holy life of Jesus.

Really, there is only one person God cannot forgive. That person is the one who again and again refuses to come to Jesus for forgiveness. "The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not happen because of just one word or act. The sin against the Holy Spirit is a steady, ongoing choice over time to turn away from the truth and the proof for it."—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 1093. "The sin against the Holy Ghost is not something that cannot be understood or explained. The sin against the Holy Ghost is the sin of refusing to answer, time after time, the invitation to repent [turn away from sin]."—Page 1093.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Suppose someone who came to you was afraid that he or she had sinned the sin that cannot be forgiven. What would you say to this person? What Bible verses would you use to help? Why is an understanding of salvation by faith alone so important for helping someone who feels he or she is hopelessly lost?
- ② We quench (put out) the Holy Spirit when we refuse to act or speak as He leads us to. How are we in danger of quenching the Holy Spirit? In what parts of our lives (if any) do we find ourselves refusing to be led by God? How can we learn to surrender those parts of our lives to Him instead?
- ③ Sometimes God allows certain terrible situations to come into our lives. Perhaps we do not like those situations. Or maybe we do not understand them. This experience happened to Job. Why can negative thoughts work against the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives? How can we trust God more fully? And how can we give our lives completely to Him, even during the most difficult times?
- ④ Some are afraid of being "poisoned" by what they feel are evil influences in the church. So they pull away completely from the body of believers and do their own thing instead. What is wrong with that idea? What example does the Bible give us to follow instead?