



## *Grieve Not the Holy Spirit*

*By: Alex Karmarkovic*

Grieving the Holy Spirit is one of the sins concerning which there is scriptural warning. Paul wrote, “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). This passage has meaningful implications for believers today.

It will be beneficial to consider this text first in the context of the entire New Testament and in the light of the historical perspective of the Ephesian assembly.

This Scripture is one of few in the New Testament regarding sinning against the Holy Spirit. In fact, only six sins against the Spirit are specifically found in the New Testament. One of these, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (Matthew 12:31,32) is referred to in the Gospels; two are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles — lying to the Spirit (Acts 5:3,4) and resisting the Spirit (Acts 7:51); and three are dealt with in the Epistles — grieving (Ephesians 4:30), quenching (1 Thessalonians 5:19), and despiting the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:29). Moreover, three of these sins are generally applied to believers — lying, grieving, and quenching; and three to unbelievers — resisting, despiting, and blaspheming.

While there are not many references in Scripture to these offenses against the Spirit, the commission of any of them is fraught with the most serious consequences. Christ affirmed that blasphemy against the Spirit can never be forgiven (Mark 3:29). Those who despised Moses’ law died without mercy, but a “much sorer punishment” is reserved for the one “who ... bath done despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:28,29). The unbeliever who resists the Spirit of God risks the eternal loss of his soul. Ananias and Sapphira learned it was a grave matter to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1–10). One of the quickest ways for a believer to lose his spiritual power and effectiveness is by grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit.

Our text conveys some additional meaning when it is examined from the standpoint of the historical perspective of the Ephesian church. The history of the Ephesian assembly is chronicled in three different stages in the New Testament.

According to Acts 19, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit was an important part of the Ephesian assembly’s initial stage of development. This stage was also the period of the assembly’s first love. The miraculous working of the Spirit and the consequent expansion of the kingdom of God are especially emphasized here. God’s work expanded to such an extent that all Asia heard the Word of God within 2 years. Thus, a Spirit-filled assembly, aflame with the love of God, is seen to be prevailing over the powers of darkness.

The second phase of the Ephesian assembly’s history appears to have begun about the time the apostle Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians. A perusal of the Epistle indicates that a spiritual letdown probably had taken place at Ephesus in the decade following the church’s establishment. Heresy creeping into the church grieved the Spirit of God. The inspired Apostle therefore deals with this problem by admonishing the Ephesians to grieve the Spirit no longer. He also urges them to bring their spiritual experience up-to-date by being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

Looking at the third stage, about a generation later, it is evident from the second chapter of Revelation that the Ephesian assembly had either failed to respond to Paul’s message or that the response had merely been temporary. Thus, the

Apostle could not avert the downward trend that had begun to appear in the church many years before. The risen Christ declared with all candor that the Ephesian church, once blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3), was now in a fallen condition. Jesus said, “Be mindful ... of the height from which you have fallen” (Revelation 2:5, Weymouth).

Though the Ephesians can be commended for their energy, fortitude, and orthodoxy, Christ charges them with leaving their first love and calls them to repentance. William Barclay asserted that this church probably “had lost the atmosphere of brotherly love.” “It may be,” Barclay added, “that a hard, censorious, critical, fault-finding, stern self-righteousness had banished the spirit of love.”<sup>1</sup> If we truly love Christ, we will love one another. On the other hand, when our love for Christ wanes, so will our love for one another.

Moreover, the Epistles clearly teach that the Holy Spirit produces God’s love in our hearts. Paul stated that “the fruit of the Spirit is love” (Galatians 5:22), and that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5). It appears, therefore, that the failure of the Ephesians to ‘love Christ and one another was largely due to the fact they grieved the Spirit and consequently hindered Him from filling their hearts with God’s love. If we have left our first love, we need to repent and ask God to fill our hearts with His divine love once again. Having examined the text in two different contexts, we will now consider some truths about the Spirit of God that are directly or indirectly stated in the text.

The personality of the Spirit is strongly implied. Some think of the Spirit merely as an impersonal force emanating from God. They also usually refer to the Spirit as it. This impression is due in part to the fact the Authorized Version uses the impersonal pronoun itself when referring to the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:16,26. However, most translations have properly used the personal pronoun himself in these verses. The fact we are exhorted not to grieve the Spirit indicates that the Spirit is a person, for it takes someone with intelligence and feeling to be grieved.

In New Testament Christianity, J.B. Phillips remarked that “the Holy Spirit is not a vague influence for good, not even just a powerful Wind of Heaven, but a Person with a purpose and ideas of his own.”<sup>2</sup> In His Paschal message, Christ indicated that the Spirit was a person by using nine personal pronouns in two verses when referring to the Spirit. Jesus said: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:13,14, italics added for emphasis). Therefore, we should never speak of the Spirit as it, but as He or Him.

The purity of the Spirit is also stressed. The Spirit of God is described as “the Holy Spirit.” The third Person of the Trinity is referred to by this title some 97 times in Scripture — more often than by any other appellation. What is the significance of these frequent references to the Spirit as the Holy Spirit? They are intended to emphasize His moral character, the holiness of His nature. When the prophet Isaiah saw the Triune God in His immaculate purity, he immediately sensed his own shortcomings, saying, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). It was then that the cleansing fire purged Isaiah’s sin. The Holy Spirit abhors everything unholy and grieves when God’s children become sullied by anything unclean. This was the case at Ephesus (Ephesians 4:25–32).

Furthermore, the Spirit is called holy because His most important work is to make men righteous and holy (Ephesians 4:24). Thus, our sanctification is possible only through the Spirit’s working in our lives. Paul declared, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Peter stated, “Elect ... through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience” (1 Peter 1:2). How different all our lives would be if we really grasped the truth of the purity of the Spirit.

The phrase “ye are sealed” immediately suggests ownership. In Ephesians 1:13 we are not only told that the Spirit Himself is the seal, but also that the sealing takes place at the time of conversion. “After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). In other words, when we trust Christ as our personal Savior, the Holy Spirit enters the temples of our lives. This means that if the Spirit of God dwells in us, we have the divine stamp that we belong to the family of God. We are no longer our own but the “purchased possession” of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:14; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

The idea of preservation and safety is also implicit in the symbol of the seal (Revelation 7:2–8; Matthew 27:66; Revelation 20:3). The Spirit of God gives us the assurance of our salvation. “The Spirit itself [himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16). As long as the Spirit indwells the believer, His presence is a guarantee of preservation. God promised that we shall be preserved by the Spirit for the inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us. We “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5). Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that their “whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless” until Jesus Christ comes for them (1 Thessalonians 5:23). We are able to overcome “because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Finally, the prospect of Christ’s second coming is set before us. The Ephesian Christians are described as being sealed until “the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). Earlier in the Epistle, Paul spoke of the Spirit as the pledge of our heavenly inheritance “until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Ephesians 1:14). He expressed a similar thought to the Philippian Christians: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

Although we have already been redeemed from the penalty of sin through the sacrifice of Christ, the consummation of our redemption will not take place until the Rapture. At that time, Christ will change the body of our humiliation “that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). We shall then be completely delivered from the power and presence of sin and shall become like Christ. “When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). The believer has a glorious hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the meantime, “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3).

#### Endnotes

1. William Barclay, *Letters to the Seven Churches* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 21,22.
2. J. B. Phillips, *New Testament Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956), 22.

© Alex Karmarkovic

Reprinted from *Enrichment* journal, used with permission.