

Hindering the Holy Spirit

by A.B. Simpson

A.B. Simpson's sermon emphasizes the importance of not hindering the Holy Spirit through disobedience, pride, and neglect in both personal and communal worship settings.

Scripture: Acts 7:51, Isaiah 63:10, Matthew 12:31-32, John 14:26, Romans 8:9, Galatians 5:25, Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Hebrews 10:29, James 4:4

Topics: "Sensitivity to God's Voice", "Hindering the Holy Spirit"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the importance of not hindering the Holy Spirit in our lives and communities. He explains that we can quench, grieve, and resist the Holy Spirit through disobedience, doubt, and worldly distractions. Simpson warns against the dangers of pride, criticism, and formalism in worship that can stifle the Spirit's work. He encourages believers to remain sensitive to the Spirit's leading and to foster an environment of faith and obedience to fully experience His presence and power. Ultimately, he calls for a deep reverence for the Holy Spirit, urging us to avoid actions that could lead to spiritual apathy or rejection of God's grace.

Transcript

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."--Eph. iv: 80.

"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost"--Acts vii: 51.

"Quench not the Spirit."-1 Thess. v: 19.

It is very touching and solemn that while the Holy Ghost might, in the exercise of His omnipotence, coerce our will, and compel us to submit to His authority, yet He approaches us with the most deferential regard for our feelings and independence, even suffering us to resist and disobey Him, and bearing long with our willfulness and waywardness.

There are several terms used in the Scriptures to denote the manner in which we may sin against the Holy Spirit.

I.

We May Quench the Spirit.

This has reference, perhaps, mainly to the hindrance we offer to His work in others, rather than to our resistance of His personal dealings with our own souls.

Among the various hindrances which we may offer to the Holy Spirit may be mentioned such as these:

1. We may refuse to obey His impulses in us when He bids us speak or act for Him. We may be conscious of a distinct impression of the Spirit of God bidding us to testify for Christ, and by disobedience, or timidity, or procrastination, we may quench His working, both in our own soul and in the heart of another

2. We must suppress His voice in others, either by using our authority to restrain His messages, when He speaks through His servants or refusing to allow the liberty of testimony. Many hold the reins of ecclesiastical authority unduly, and thus lose the free and effectual working of the Holy Ghost in their churches and in their work.

There is a less direct way, however, of politely silencing Him by forcing Him out, and so filling the atmosphere with the spirit of stiffness, criticism, and a certain air of respectability and rigidity that He gently withdraws from the uncongenial scene, and refuses to thrust His messages upon unwilling hearts.

3. The Spirit may be grieved by the method of public worship in a congregation.

It may be either so stiff and formal that there is no room for His spontaneous working, or so full of worldly and unscriptural elements as to repel and offend Him from taking any part in a pompous ritual. An operatic choir and a ritualistic service will effectually quench all the fire of God's altar, and send the gentle dove to seek a simpler nest.

4. The Spirit may be quenched by the preacher, and his spirit and method.

His own manner may be so intellectual and self-conscious, and his own spirit so thoroughly cold and vain that the Holy Ghost is neither recognized nor known in his work. His sermons may be on themes in which the Spirit has no interest, for He only witnesses to the Holy Scriptures and the person of Christ, and wearily turns away from the discussion of philosophy, and the stale show of critical brilliancy over the questions of the day or the speculations of man's own vain reason.

Perhaps his address is so rigidly written down that the Holy Spirit could not find a opportunity for even a suggestion, if He so desired, and His promptings and leading so coolly set aside by a course of elaborate preparation which leaves no room for God.

5. The spirit of error in the teachings of the pulpit will always quench the Holy Spirit.

He is jealous for His own inspired Word and when vain man attempts to set it aside He looks on with indignation, and expose such teachers to humiliation and failure.

The spirit of self-assertion and self-consciousness is always fatal to the free working of the Holy Ghost.

When a man stands up in the sacred desk to air his eloquence and call attention to his intellectual brilliancy, or to preach himself in any sense, he will always be deserted by the Holy Spirit. He uses the things "that are not to bring to naught the things that are." And before we can expect to become the instruments of His power, we must wholly cease from self and be lost in the person and glory of Jesus.

6. The spirit of pride, fashion and worldly display in the pews, is just as fatal as ambition in the pulpit.

Such an atmosphere seems to freeze out the spirit of devotion, and erect on the throne of the lowly Nazarene a goddess of carnal pride and pleasure, like the foul Venus that the Parisian mob set up in the Madeleine at Paris in the days of the revolution, as an object of worship. From such an atmosphere the Holy Ghost turns away grieved and disgusted.

7. The quickening and reviving influences of the Holy Ghost are often quenched in the very hour of promise by wrong methods in the work of Christ's church.

How often, on the eve of a real revival, the minds of the people have been led away by some public entertainment in connection with the house of God, or its after-fruits withered by a series of unholy fairs and secular bids for money, and the introduction of the broker and the cattle-vender into the cleansed temple of Jehovah, as in the days of Christ.

8. The spirit of criticism and controversy is fatal to the working of the Holy Ghost.

The gentle dove will not remain in an atmosphere of strife. If we would cherish His power we must possess His love, and frown down all wrangling gossip, evil speaking, malice, envy, and public controversy in the preaching of the Word.

Sometimes a single word of criticism after an impressive service will dispel all its blessed influence upon the heart of some interested hearer, and counteract the gracious work that would have resulted in the salvation of the soul.

A frivolous Christian woman returning one night from church with her unsaved husband, was laughing lightly at some of the mistakes and eccentricities of the speaker. Suddenly she felt his arm trembling; she looked in his face and his tears were falling. He gently turned to her, and said: "Pray for me; I have seen myself tonight as I never did before." She suddenly awoke with an awful shudder to realize that she had been frivolously wrecking his soul's salvation, and quenching the Holy Ghost.

And so, public controversy is as fatal to the Spirit's working as personal criticism.

It is when the children of God unite at the feet of Jesus, and together seek His blessing, that He comes in all the fullness of His life-power.

At the Council of Nice it is said that a great number of grievances were sent unto Constantine, the presiding officer. After the opening of the great Council, he ordered them to be gathered into the centre of the large hall, and then a fire kindled under them, and as they went up in smoke and flame, the Spirit of God fell upon the assembled multitude, and they all felt that in the burning of their strifes and selfish grievances they had received the very baptism of the Holy Ghost.

The Spirit may be quenched in the hearts of our friends by unwise counsel, or ungodly influence.

The little child may be discouraged from seeking Christ by a worldly parent, or the ignorant assumption that it is too young to be a Christian, or too busy with its studies, or its social enjoyments, for such things.

The attractions of the world and claims and pressures of business, may be interposed in the way of some seeking heart, and we find in eternity that we put a stumbling-block in our friend's way, from which he fell into perdition.

Let us be very careful lest, in our willfulness and pride, we not only miss ourselves the inner chambers of the kingdom of heaven, but hinder those that would enter from going in.

Oh! if we would cherish the faintest breath of life in the rescued waif that has been snatched from a watery grave, if we could fan the expiring flame of life in a friend's bosom, let us be careful lest we quench the spark of everlasting life in a human soul, and stand at the last, responsible for the murder of immortal beings, and crimson with the blood of souls. "Quench not the Spirit."

II.

We May Grieve the Spirit.

This is a very tender expression; it suggests His gentleness and patience; grieved rather than angry with His unfaithful and distrustful children.

1. We may grieve Him by our doubts and distrust of His love and promises. Thus Moses grieved Him when he struck the rock instead of gently speaking.

Many are afraid of the Holy Ghost and think Him a despot and a terror; shrinking even from His too close approach, as though He would consume us by His holiness. He wants us to love Him, and come near to Him as the gentle mother; to believe in His promises, to count Him faithful, and to treat Him as one who does come to us and dwell within us.

2. We grieve the Holy Spirit when we refuse to wholly yield ourselves to Him, and hold back from entire abandonment and surrender, or when, having so surrendered ourselves, we shrink back from His actual leading and refuse to meet the tests He brings, and lie upon the wheel in stillness while He moulds the plaster in clay.

He is grieved at our willfulness and rebellion and resistance. He knows we are losing a blessing, and that we must again go through the same discipline if we are to have our blessings from Him.

He sees in it the spirit of distrust and unbelief, and He feels wounded and slighted by our shrinking.

3. We grieve the Holy Spirit when we fail to enter into the fullness of His grace, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our complete Saviour.

He has not written one word that we can afford to allow to become of none effect. It is an insult to His wisdom and love to treat the higher visions of His grace as if they were not binding upon our life.

They should fully honor Him, press forward into all His will, and feel they owe to Him as well as themselves that they should lose nothing of all that He has wrought, nor seem to come short of entering into His rest.

Oh, how many of His children are grieving Him as a mother would be grieved, if after having, at great cost and toil, provided bountifully for her children, they should refuse her bounty or despise her rich provision!

4. We grieve the Holy Spirit when we fail to hearken to His voice.

He is constantly calling upon us to listen, and He never speaks in vain, nor can we ever afford to miss the slightest whisper. When, therefore, we fail to hearken, and dash along with heedless impulsiveness, He is deeply grieved, and has to call in the loud and painful tones of trial and chastening.

How He bewails His ancient people for their refusing to listen to His living voice: "Oh, that my people had hearkened to my commandments, then had their peace been like a river, and their righteousness as the waves of the sea."

5. We grieve the Holy Spirit when, having heard, we presume to disobey His voice.

This is very serious, and full of terrible danger. It is an awful thing willfully to neglect or defy the distinct command of the Holy Ghost. We cannot do it without losing the sense of His presence, and being conscious that He has withdrawn the manifestation of His love, until we deeply and penitently recognize our sin, and step into the path of obedience where we separated from His companionship.

6. Nothing grieves the Holy Spirit more than a divided heart and the cherishing of any idols in our affections which separate our supreme love from Christ.

There is a remarkable passage in the book of James which declares that "the Spirit which dwelleth in us loveth us to jealousy" (marginal reading), and in the same connection it is added, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? that is, a heart set upon earthly things is guilty of spiritual adultery, the Holy Ghost looks upon it with jealous love, grieved and insulted by the dishonor done to our divine husband by our unfaithful affections.

7. We grieve the Holy Spirit whenever we neglect, pervert, or dishonor the Holy Scriptures.

This is His word, and not one utterance or one jot shall fall to the ground. How we grieve Him when we explain its precious promises, and make of none effect its exact commands; and how He loves the heart that feeds upon the truth and honors the Bible in its least promise and command!

8. Especially do we grieve the Holy Ghost when we dishonor Jesus, or let anything separate us from Him, or cloud our conception of Him, and interrupt our devotion to Him.

He is jealous for the honor of Christ; therefore, whenever self, or any human being comes between us and Christ, whenever the glory of the Master is obscured by the glory of the servant, whenever even truth or work becomes more distinct than Christ Himself, the Holy Ghost is grieved; and He is pleased when we exalt the Saviour, and give Him all the glory.

9. The Holy Spirit is grieved when we ignore Him.

He longs after our love and trust.

10. The Holy Spirit is especially grieved by a spirit of bitterness toward any human being, and therefore the apostle says, "Let all bitteresses, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption."

III.

We May Resist the Holy Spirit.

This has special reference to the attitude of the unbeliever, with whom the Holy Ghost is striving with a view to convict him of sin and lead Him to the Saviour.

1. The sinner resists the Holy Spirit when he tries to shake off religious impressions.

This may be done in many ways. Sometimes the soul, under the Spirit's striving, tries to quench its impressions in pleasure, excitement or business. Sometimes it treats them as nervous depression, low spirits or ill-health, and seeks a remedy in change of scene or thought; very often it resorts to light reading, worldly amusements, frivolous society, perhaps indulgence in sin, and the devil always has plenty of auxiliaries to suggest distracting thoughts, and help to dispel the sacred influences that God is gathering around the heart.

Very often it will become provoked and offended with some acts on the part of Christians, sometimes perhaps connected with the religious services, and will resolve to give up attending, or find some petty excuse for getting out of the way of the influences that are troubling its content. All these efforts to escape are but the stronger evidence of the Spirit's striving, and He patiently and lovingly continues to press the arrow still more keenly into the wounded heart, until it is laid prostrate at the feet of love.

2. The sinner resists the influences of the Holy Spirit in leading him to conviction of sin.

It is not enough to awaken concern in the soul, and even alarm-there must be a distinct working of Scriptural conviction in order to secure lasting peace and sound conversion; and, therefore, the Holy Ghost has promised to convict the world of sin.

He does this by bringing before the conscience the memory of actual transgressions-the recollection of any forgotten sins, the iniquities of youth and childhood, the secret sins known to God only, the aggravations of sin, the warnings and light against which it has been committed, the love that has been resisted, the threatenings of the divine law, the unchangeable holiness of the divine character, the tremendous sentence against all iniquity, the deep inward consciousness of guilt, the still more terrible sense of the wickedness of the sinner's heart, the hopeless depravity, the consciousness of willfulness and unbelief, and the dreadful fear of its hopelessness, the impossibility of its salvation.

Thus the Great Advocate sets in array our transgressions, until the heart seeks some escape from itself, and Satan is ready to suggest a thousand excuses, palliations and false hopes, through which the guilty spirit seeks to evade the force of its conviction.

It thinks of the faults of others, and plausibly reasons that it is no worse than they; it eagerly seizes upon the inconsistencies of Christians, and tries to excuse itself by their failure; it recalls its own miserable attempts at goodness, and tries to find some comfort in its own righteousness; it seeks false refuge in the mercy of God, and eagerly tries to persuade itself that the picture of Christ's anger against sin, and the stories of judgment and perdition, are fictions of obsolete theology.

It says peace, peace, when there is no peace, and heals slightly its hurt, resisting with all its might the blessed Spirit, who wounds only that He may heal.

Happy they who fail in the foolish attempt, and in whose hearts the arrows of the King are so sharp and keen that the wound can never be staunched save by the blood of Calvary.

3. The sinner resists the work of the Holy Ghost in leading him to decision.

Even after he has been driven from his previous refuges, and has been awakened to his profound concern, and thoroughly convicted of his sin, and fully admits the claims of religion and the justness of his

condemnation, he seeks another door of escape in procrastination.

He will surrender, he will resist no more, he will accept the Saviour, but not now, he is not quite ready yet.

Perhaps he argues that he does not feel strongly enough, that he wants a deeper conviction, more light, a little more deliberate consideration, perhaps a little more time to alter his circumstances and change his life; but really what he is pleading for is a reprieve for his sinful heart, a little longer in the indulgence of his self-will, and disobedience to the gospel.

And his course is just as dangerous and just as truly a rejection of Christ as if he did it deliberately and directly; while at the same time it has the self-deceiving aspect of being a sort of yielding, at least a nominal consent, to all the pleadings of the Holy Ghost. He is resisting the Spirit, and his to-morrow often means, as the eyes of heaven read the words, NEVER.

4. The sinner resists the Holy Spirit in His gracious attempts to convict the soul of righteousness and lead it to believe on the Son of God.

The Spirit's object is not merely to produce concern, alarm, and even the profoundest repentance, but the blessed goal of all His gracious movements is the trust trustful acceptance of Jesus, and the believing assurance of His forgiveness and salvation.

It is here that Satan and self-will fight their hardest battle. The soul will consent to live a better life, will be willing to weep and mourn, will do anything rather than accept the very gift of salvation and believe the naked word of God, that its sins are forgiven for His name's sake, and that it is accepted in Jesus Christ, as He is accepted.

How desperately it fights against this simple act, clothing its unbelief in the guise of humanity and modesty, and thinking it presumption to dare to make such a claim!

Many souls hold back at this point for months and years, and know not that in all their doubts and fears, their hard thoughts of themselves and of God, they are simply resisting the Holy Ghost, who is striving with them to lay their sins forever at the feet of Jesus, and go forth into His everlasting peace.

5. At this point the resisting soul is led by this great enemy to erect a whole line of false refuges, and run under their cover, instead of fleeing for refuge directly to the hope set before it in the gospel.

One of these refuges is outward reformation of life. The sinner will do better, will take the pledge, will turn over a new leaf, will make large promises and comfort his soul with the flattering unction that he is a changed man, while all the while he has the same evil heart, and it will produce the same fruits when the mere effort of will has spent itself.

Another refuge of lies is a religious profession. He will get confirmed or join the church and begin a life of formalism; perhaps give something to the cause of Christ, and even attempt some Christian work, but he is only a whited Pharisee, and within the sepulchre are dead men's bones and all uncleanness; and he will find before long, that his old heart has still the same loves and hates, yet he has effectually suppressed the voice of the Spirit.

He meets every fear and conviction with the consciousness of his religious profession, and he will even go to the gates of the judgment hall saying, "Have we not eaten and drunken in Thy presence! and Thou hast

taught in our streets;" but He will profess unto them, "I never knew you."

Poor Ignorance, in Pilgrim's Progress, went up to the very gates of heaven with an easy conscience; every conviction had been stifled by his shallow professions and imagined works of self-righteousness; and so multitudes have escaped the pain of an evil conscience, and the Spirit's striving, to find it turn in the hour of judgment into the remorseful horror of eternal condemnation.

And so we might speak of almost countless other false refuges, all of which have the effect of quieting the troubled heart, but not saving the soul. They are like sandbags thrown up in the outworks of our souls, in which the arrows of the Lord are lost or muffled, but which are no protection from the armies of destruction.

6. It is possible for the soul to resist the Holy Ghost openly, directly, willfully, and presumptuously, until it drives Him from its door and commits the fatal sin of willfully rejecting the offered Saviour in the full light of the Holy Spirit's revealing, and perhaps with the full consciousness that it is defiantly refusing God.

There is such a thing referred to in the Scriptures, "If ye refuse and rebel ye shall be destroyed;" "I called and ye refused." "If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment. suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

The blasphemy of the Pharisees against the Holy Ghost seems to have consisted in rejecting Jesus after they had sufficient light to know that He was the Son of God.

It was, therefore, not only the rejection of Jesus, but the deliberate rejection of the Holy Ghost and His witness to Jesus, when they knew it to be His witness.

Essentially, therefore, it is the same sin as any soul may now commit, when in the full light of God, and conscious that He has directly called it to accept the Saviour, it defiantly refuses.

The effect of such an act may be, and perhaps usually is, the withdrawal of the Spirit from the soul until it is left, past feeling, to a hardened heart, and a doom on which the voice of divine appeal and the light of mercy will never fall again.

This is, perhaps, what is meant by the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost which never hath forgiveness.

Let no one think he has committed this sin if still in the heart there is a willingness to yield to God and accept the Saviour.

If there is even a fear that any reader may have committed this sin, and a great longing that it may not be so, rejoice exceedingly, and yield this moment even to His faint touch of heavenly influence, lest it should be withdrawn, and the soul left under the sad sentence, "He is joined to his idols, let him alone." The good Payson once said to his young friend, who had spoken of a slight religious influence, and wondered if it was enough to act upon, "A little cord has dropped from heaven, so fine that you can scarcely feel it or

perceive it; it just touches your shoulder for a moment; dear friend, grasp it quickly, for it fastens to the throne of God, and it is for you perhaps the last strand of saving mercy; grasp it and never let it go, and it will grow into a cable of strength that will anchor you to the skies and keep your precious soul unto everlasting life."

Oh! let us be fearful and careful lest we sin against the Holy Ghost by quenching the Spirit, by grieving the Holy One, by resisting our best Friend, or by blaspheming His mighty name.

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