

An Unheeded Warning

by J. Wilbur Chapman

The Spirit of God strives with men to bring them to salvation through Jesus Christ, but if they continue to resist, he will eventually cease his striving.

Scripture: Genesis 6:3, Psalm 95:7, Proverbs 29:1, Matthew 23:37, John 16:7, 2 Corinthians 6:2, Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Hebrews 3:15, Hebrews 10:26

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Repentance"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the importance of heeding the striving of the Spirit of God, as seen throughout the Bible from the Old Testament to the New Testament. He emphasizes that God's Spirit strives with individuals, convicting them of sin, unbelief, and the need for salvation through Jesus Christ. Chapman warns of the consequences of resisting the Spirit, urging listeners to recognize the urgency of responding to God's call before it's too late. He shares powerful stories and illustrations to illustrate the Spirit's work in drawing people to repentance and faith.

Transcript

TEXT: "My Spirit shall not always strive with men."--Genesis 6:31.

For the truth of this statement one needs only to study his Bible and he will find written in almost every book of Old Testament and New a similar expression. At the same time in the study of God's word it will be revealed to him that God has a great plan which he is carefully working out. We must be familiar with the beginning and the unfolding of this plan and with the conclusion he reached. When after the rebellion of his people and their unwillingness to obey his precepts we find him saying, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."

Then turning to the New Testament Scriptures we find almost a similar expression when Jesus reaches the climax of his compassionate and gracious ministry with the children of Israel. "He came unto his own and his own received him not"; and in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew and the thirty-seventh to the thirty-ninth verse, inclusive, we hear him saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you

desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

From that day on his special ministry was to the Gentiles, and he has been seeking in every possible way to bring us to an appreciation of what it means to know him and to be filled with all his fullness. We have but to stop for a moment and consider to realize that by many his overtures have been declined, his Spirit grieved and his Son rejected. Men have lived as if they had no responsibility towards him at all and in many instances they have put him entirely out of their consideration. If we compare present day indifference and sin with the condition of things at the time of the flood, and then again compare them with the position of Israel when Jesus turned away from them with tears, it would seem almost as if the world of the present day had made progress both in the matter of indifference and rejection; and therefore it is not strange that such an Old Testament text as this would be applicable to people living about us. It is a solemn text. "My Spirit shall not always strive with men." It is along the line of those solemn words of Dr. Alexander:

"There is a time, we know not when; A place, we know not where, That seals the destiny of man For glory or despair."

Again we read, "Ye shall seek me and shall not find me, and where I am there ye cannot come." That also is the spirit of the text. God tells us, "To-day if ye will hear his voice harden not your heart," which simply means that if we neglect to hear the heart will become hardened, the will stubborn, and we shall be unsaved and hopeless. Again he tells us, "Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation." So for men to act as if they might come at any time and choose their own way of salvation is to sin against him, and to all such he speaks the text--"My Spirit shall not always strive with men."

It is assumed that the spirit of God does strive with men. If he will not strive always, then he does strive at some particular time, and with many of us he is striving now. We may not be willing to confess it to our friends, but nevertheless it is true. In many ways he is bringing to our attention the eternal interests of our souls, and this is striving.

It is implied that men are resisting the Spirit of God. If this were not so there could be no striving, and the text indicates that men may continue so long to resist him and to sin against him that after a while the door of mercy will close and hope be a thing of the past.

I

What is the striving of the Spirit? I have no doubt but that many are asking this question seriously and fearfully and it is worthy of our most careful consideration.

1. It is just God speaking to us and causing us to say to ourselves if not to others, "Well, I ought to be a Christian; this life of worldliness does not pay." There is nothing but an accusing conscience, a weakened character and a blighted life as the result of it. Do not for a moment think that this is just an impression that has come to you; it is the voice of God and you would do well to hear it. This striving of the Spirit is simply the Spirit of God seeking to convince men that the only safe life is that which is hid with Christ in God, safe not only for eternity--the most of us believe that--but safe for time. Temptations are too powerful for us to withstand alone and trials are too heavy for us to bear in our own strength. The striving of the Spirit is just our heavenly Father graciously attempting to persuade us to yield to him, sometimes by providences.

When but a lad my old pastor used one night an illustration from which I never have been able to get away. It was the story of the old fisherman who took his little boy with him to fish and found that on his accustomed fishing grounds he was unsuccessful; so, leaving the boy upon the little island, he started away to fish alone. The mists came down in his absence and, missing his way, he lost his boy. He rowed everywhere calling him and at last he heard him in the distance, saying, "I am up here, papa; over this way." The fisherman found him, but not quickly enough to enable him to escape the cold night winds, and the boy sickened and died. The old fisherman said: "Every night when I stood at my window I could see his outstretching hands and always above the storm I could hear his voice calling me upward. I could not but be a Christian." My mother had just a few weeks before gone home to God, and I heard her voice as plainly as I could hear the voice of my friend at my side. Every vision of a mother in heaven, of a child in the skies, is a call of God. He seeks to persuade us by calamities. The Chicago theater horror, with its hundreds of women and children dead and disfigured, was God's call to a great city and to the world. This is the striving of the Spirit. Not with audible voice does he speak to us but by means of impressions and convictions. Let us not think for a moment that these come simply because the preacher has influence and may possibly be possessed of a certain kind of genius or power. These are God's warnings to us. Be careful, therefore, how you resist them. Jesus said in John the sixteenth chapter the seventh to the eleventh verses, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment. Of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." The word "reprove" is a judicial word. When the judge has heard the testimony for or against the criminal and the arguments of the counsel, he himself sums up the case and lays it before the jury, bringing out the strong points or the weak ones in relation to the criminal. This is reproof, and it is this that the Spirit does. He brings before us Jesus Christ and then presents unto God our treatment of him, and so it is easy to understand how the text could be true. "My spirit shall not always strive with men."

2. How may we know that he is striving? There are very many ways.

(1) If the attention is aroused and centered upon religious subjects and interests, then be careful how you treat God. The student who finds his mind constantly escaping from his books to the thought of eternity; the business man who cannot possibly escape the thought that he owes God something and ought not to slight him, these have proofs that the Spirit is striving.

After an evangelistic meeting which I recently conducted I received the following letter, which clearly indicates the striving of the Spirit:

"I had not attended the church for years until to-night, but being a visitor in C. and hearing that you were from the East and a Presbyterian I determined to go. I was lonely and it may be the Spirit was calling me. I heard you speak of your little boys and of the sainted mother who has gone before and my proud heart was touched. I, too, have two darling boys back in the old state, a loving Christian wife and a dear old mother who in parting said, 'Dear son, I am old and I may never see you again on earth, but if I am not here when you return, remember, my son, my boy, we must meet in heaven.'"

"How much that meant to her! I did not quite realize it then, but your talk to-night impressed me and I believe that her prayers are being answered together with those of a loving, courageous, steadfast Christian wife, and that I am at last, at the age of forty-two, beginning to see how great my opportunities to

do good have been and how my example has been a great hindrance and stumbling block to others in the way of life. Admitting that this life has no stronger emotion than our love for our families, how much more I am impressed to-night with my duty to him who gave his only Son to suffer that we might live in the life everlasting!

"In a busy business life and career I had drifted away from the safe anchorage of the church and Sunday school of my boyhood and had almost convinced myself that by charity and exercising good will and kindness in my business I could do almost as much good as if I were in the church; but I see my mistake. To make an army effective we must stand in the ranks, must be soldiers in the army of Christ ready and willing to do at all times whatever we see before us.

"I have written my dear old mother a letter to-night which I know will please her far more than if I had told her I had found a mine of California gold; her prayers, my wife's, yours and those of other true Christian men and women have been answered, and I realize that now, (not next week, nor next month, nor when I get my business finished and go back to the East) is the day and the hour to remember Christ and know that his love for us is greater even than the love that tugs at our heartstrings when we think of the dear little ones at home who lovingly call us father, and for whom we gladly endure the heartaches of separation when we know that our labors will contribute to their comfort and happiness.

"I realize from the standpoint of a business man how many there are in the world to criticise your best efforts and your work and how few who ever stop to say, 'I thank you; you have done me good.' I take time to-night to do more. I want to say that your message from the King of kings has not fallen on stony ground. I shall try to enter again the battle of life, not as only in search of the wealth of this world but in search of the wealth that the world cannot take away--life everlasting.

"You were right. Preach and pray the fathers into the Kingdom of God and the rest is easy, for all unconsciously our children follow in our footsteps, watch our every word and action; then how much, how much it means if our example is wrong!"

II

(1) Whenever we are convinced especially of the sinfulness of sin we may be sure that the Spirit is striving with us. There are times when we may be thoughtless and sin with impunity; but not so when the Spirit is doing his work, for sin is an awful thing.

(2) Whenever we are impressed with the heinousness of unbelief be assured that the Spirit is at work, for the worst sin in all this world is not impurity but rather that we should not believe on Jesus Christ. To reject him is to sneer at God, to trample the blood of his Son under foot, to count his sacrifice a common thing and really to crucify him afresh. In all this impression God speaks.

(3) When we see the danger of dying in our sins he is moving us. It is a mystery to me how men can close their eyes in sleep when they realize that any night God might simply touch them and time would give way to eternity and the judgment would be before them. As a matter of fact men are not indifferent to this, and the fact that they are not proves that the Spirit of God is opening their eyes.

(4) When he strips us of excuses be sure that he is working. The man who has said, "I will wait until I am better," begins to realize that his past sins must be taken into account and no future resolutions can touch them. The man who has said, "There is time enough," suddenly realizes that between him and eternity

there is but a beat of the heart. The one who has claimed that hypocrisy in the church kept him out of it comes to see that hypocrisy proves the life of the church, for men never counterfeit that which is bad money but rather that which is good.

(5) Whenever we see the folly of trusting in any other word than Christ's then the Spirit of God is with us. Not reformation, for it does not touch the sins of the past; not resolution, for this is too weak, and though we may seem better than others, this may be true only according to our own standard. When we see the folly of these positions the Spirit of God is doing his work; so be careful how you treat him.

III

What would be the consequences of the Spirit ceasing his work? We really could not express it in words. No man has power or energy to make it plain. We can only just hint at the condition.

1. There would be an opposition to religion, for whenever you find a man turning against that which has been the world's hope remember that the state of that man is awful in the extreme and will grow worse.
2. There will be an opposition to revivals, to all preaching and to the ministers of the Gospel wherever this spirit is made manifest. We ought to tremble for ourselves if this is our spirit, or for others if it is theirs.
3. Wherever men settle down into some form of error this is a description of one who has sinned against the Spirit of God, for there is a longing in every soul for something outside of and beyond one's self; and the things of the world cannot alone satisfy.
4. When men continue to grow worse and worse and seem to glory in their shame there is great cause for solemn thought. In the light of these suggestions the text is given, "My Spirit shall not always strive with men."

IV

Why should he cease his striving? Not because he is not compassionate, for he is; nor forbearing, for that is his character; not that he is without patience, for he is infinite in this grace; nor because he is without mercy, for his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

1. But because it will do the sinner no good to continue his pleadings. It is a known law of the mind that truth resisted loses its power. Why should God continue when we only spurn his offers of mercy?

Agassiz, the great Christian scientist, tells of his work in the mountains when his assistants lowered him to his work by means of a rope and a basket. They always tested his weight before letting him down; and yet he said that one day when they had lowered him deeper than ever they found that they could not lift him, though they had tested his weight before he had been lowered. They must go away over the mountains to secure other assistance. "And then," said the scientist, "when they did lift me they found that their failure was due to the fact that they did not take into account the weight of the rope." Every time you refuse Jesus Christ as your Savior and God calls you again you must lift against that other refusal, and this is why it is so difficult for some to come to Christ.

2. Because to continue warning is to hinder the sinner. The more light we have the greater guilt. Better would it be for the sinner when all hope is gone for the Spirit to leave, for he shall be called to account for warnings. Oh, the solemnity of the day of judgment!

3. Because to resist the Spirit of God is for men to sin willfully if the rejection is final. It is a sad thing to say "no" to God, and if we sin willfully there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.

V

What is meant by the Spirit not striving? Not that he will be withdrawn from men in general, but rather from the individual.

1. He may not follow the sinner, who will be indifferent to preaching, to praying, to his own spiritual condition, for he has given himself over to error.

2. It simply means that we have come to the limit of his patience, for we have trifled with him in our continued rejection.

3. It also means that there is just some one point where he will cease to work. That point may be here and that day may be now, and so the text is solemn. A long time ago an old woman tripped and fell from the top of a stone stairway in Boston as she was coming out of the police station. They called the patrol and carried her to the hospital and the doctor examining her said to the nurse, "She will not live more than a day." And when the nurse had won her confidence the old woman said, "I have traveled from California, stopping at every city of importance between San Francisco and Boston, visiting two places always--the police station and the hospital. My boy went away from me and did not tell me where he was going, so I have sold all my property and made this journey to seek him out. Some day," she said, "he may come into this hospital, and if he does tell him that there were two who never gave him up." When the night came and the doctor standing beside her said, "It is now but a question of a few minutes," the nurse bent over her to say, "Tell me the names of the two and I will tell your son if I see him." With trembling lips and eyes overflowing with tears she said, "Tell him that the two were God and his mother," and she was gone.

I cannot believe that God has given any of you up. You would not be listening to this message, you certainly would not be reading these words if he had. He has not given you up. I beseech you therefore hear him. It would be a sad thing for you to say no to him at the last and have him take you at your word, and if he has not given you up I am persuaded that there is some one else in the world deeply concerned for your soul.

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