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"Preaching The Same Truth We Preached Before Kentucky Was A State"

Can Unsaved Sinners Resist the Holy Spirit of God?

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"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." (Acts 7:51).

FROM a child I have heard of sinners resisting the Holy Spirit. I have heard other ministers warn sinners, and I myself have warned them against resisting the Holy Spirit. I have heard strange stories of a man who, in resisting the Spirit, jumped out of a window of the church house to get away from the striving of the Spirit. I have listened to evangelists urge sinners to yield to the Holy Spirit, warning them that they might drive Him away never to return again. I have heard of men (though I have never met one) who asserted that they, having refused to yield to the Holy Spirit, were deserted by the Spirit and never again felt His strivings.

Now the writer does not deny that there is an element of truth in the above expressions, but he believes that there is also a vagueness in them which is confusing and misleading.

What is the sin of resisting the Holy Spirit? Just what does the sinner do in resisting the Spirit? What does the Spirit do in striving with the sinner? It is the purpose of this article to clear up some things which appear to be vague and obscure in the minds of many people.

The only New Testament passage that relates directly to our subject is Acts 7:51 and context. An exegesis of this text in the light of its context will answer three questions, namely — *Does the sinner resist the Holy Spirit? How does the sinner resist the Holy Spirit? Why does the sinner resist the Holy Spirit?*

I. DOES THE SINNER RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The passage under consideration gives clear answer that sinners do resist the Holy Spirit. This was the charge brought against the Jews by Stephen. In resisting the Spirit they were following in the steps of their fathers. *"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."*

There is an idea prevalent that a few times in the lifetime of a man the Holy Spirit comes to him in an effort to save (regenerate) him; that he may resist and overcome

the effort of the Spirit; and that after repeated and unsuccessful efforts, the Spirit leaves never to make another effort to save that man. This is called sinning away the day of grace and many evangelists get visible results in warning men that they had better come forward in profession of faith lest they drive the Spirit away and forever seal their doom. Such an invitation is confusing, misleading, and dangerous. It is not a Scriptural invitation. Under such an invitation the unenlightened sinner naturally thinks that in coming forward he is yielding to the Holy Spirit. Many a man has doubtless thought he had yielded to the Spirit when he came forward and gave the minister his hand, when in fact his eyes had never been opened to the Gospel way of salvation. Salvation is an experience in the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit enabling the sinner to understand Gospel truth. Let the reader ponder prayerfully John 3:3; 1 Corinthians 4:3, 6.

Stephen said, *"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost."* It is not something that the sinner does occasionally but is that which he does repeatedly and continually.

II. HOW DOES THE SINNER RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Resisting the Holy Spirit is rejecting the Word of God of which the Holy Spirit is the author. The sinner is resisting the Spirit when he hears the Gospel and rejects it and opposes the one who bears the message to him. The Jews to whom Stephen preached resisted the Holy Spirit in the same way as their fathers did. *"As your fathers did, so do ye,"* were his words to them. Their fathers resisted the Holy Spirit by rejecting the preaching of the prophets and by persecuting them. *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"*

Light is thrown upon the subject by reference to Nehemiah 9:29, 30. Nehemiah is explaining the cause of Israel's punishment and captivity by saying that Israel hardened their necks and refused to hear (Nehemiah 9:16). They

rebelled against God's prophets (Nehemiah 9:26). And in all this they were resisting the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit was speaking through the prophets just as He was speaking through Stephen. "Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedest against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets: yet they would not give ear." (Nehemiah 9:30).

REJECTING THE WORD OF GOD IS RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT. PERSECUTING PREACHERS OF THE WORD IS RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Andrew Fuller calls this the *indirect* influence of the Holy Spirit. The following quotation from him (Fuller's Works, page 742) is in full harmony with what we have said above —

"I conceive there is what may be termed an indirect influence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, having inspired the prophets and apostles, testified in and by them, and often without effect. . . The message of the prophets being dictated by the Holy Spirit, resistance of them was resistance of Him. It was in this way, I conceive, that the Spirit of God strove with the antediluvians, and that unbelievers are said always to have resisted the Holy Spirit."

Fuller then speaks of the *direct* influence of the Holy Spirit which is effectual in renewing and sanctifying the sinner. This is a good distinction to make. The sinner resists the indirect influence of the Spirit in presenting the truth to him through the preacher; but the *direct* influence of the Spirit is the direct impact of the Holy Spirit on the human spirit, and this is not resisted, because it is the power of the Almighty.

There was much and bitter controversy in the days of Stephen. "Then there arose certain of the synagogue which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia, and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." (Acts 6:9, 10).

And because they could not meet his arguments they killed him. In rejecting his message and stoning him to death they were resisting the Holy Spirit.

III. WHY DOES THE SINNER RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT?

THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST THAT ARE BEHIND

C. D. Cole

Colossians 1:24, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."

There are two things I want to do by the help of God in dealing with this text. I want to show you what the text says and then help you to get the meaning of it. May the Holy Spirit enable me to unfold it and enable you

to see it and be exercised by it.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS: It says that Christ is not through suffering. There are afflictions yet to come. Paul, in his sufferings, was filling up or completing the portion of affliction appointed for Christ. The full cup of sufferings appointed for Christ has not been emptied; there was more to follow. He further says that there is a joy on his part in

The passage before us gives clear and unmistakable answer to this question. "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." The sinner resists the Holy Spirit (His indirect influence) because his heart is wrong and his ears are not attuned to the Word of God. He neither understands nor loves the Word of God. God's words are full of wisdom but to the natural man they are foolishness. A dear brother once remarked that I did not believe the sinner could resist the Holy Spirit. I replied that I believed that the sinner did nothing but resist the Holy Spirit until his resistance was overcome by the Holy Spirit. The preached Word is the objective ministry and the indirect influence of the Holy Spirit, and this the dead sinner rejects and resists because it is foolishness to him. Our Lord told Nicodemus that except a man be born from above he cannot see or understand the kingdom of God. The indirect influence of the Spirit in the Word is resisted until overcome by the *direct* influence of the Spirit in quickening power.

The Gospel must not only be presented to the sinner, but a divine work must be wrought in the sinner if he is to be saved. Objective truth, however plainly presented, is not sufficient for salvation. The sinner must be given eyes to see and a heart to understand it. Putting a larger lamp in the light socket will not enable a blind man to see; he must be given the ability to see. *In the new birth the Holy Spirit gives eyes to see and a heart to understand the Gospel.* This is His direct and subjective ministry and is not resisted. The child does not resist its birth.

Thus we see that it takes more Spirit in human conversion. Paul describes his conversion as the effect of being apprehended (laid hold of) by Christ (Philippians 3:12), and of having Christ revealed in him (Galatians 1:16). The objective ministry of the Spirit is resisted, but not subjective. *When this distinction is made the truth of man's impotence and the Spirit's omnipotence is conserved, otherwise we have the creature mightier than the Creator.*

this privilege of filling up the sufferings of Christ that are behind or lacking. It views the afflictions of Christ as being divinely apportioned, part of which had been endured with more to come. More sufferings for Christ.

THE MEANING OF THE TEXT, OR ITS MESSAGE: It does not mean the vicarious sufferings of Christ by which He atoned for our sins. It does not mean that He will have to

suffer more to obtain eternal redemption for sinners.

It does not mean that He is still suffering in His own person. His personal sufferings are over. He died once but He now lives forever. Romans 6:9, "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him." Never again will He be spit upon and mocked and crowned with thorns and crucified. Never again will He be forsaken of God and made to cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Never again will He be taken from a cross and buried in a tomb. But if a believer were to lose his salvation that is what would have to be done, before He could be saved again. God forgives and saves sinners on the ground of what Christ did when He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. If sin is put away by His death and it comes back upon us, then He would have to put it away again the same way He did the first time. When Christ redeemed us, for how long did He redeem us? For two weeks, or two years, or two million years, or for eternity? Here's the answer: Hebrews 9:12, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Or for the time we live without sin, or for the time our faith lasts? Then it would not be eternal redemption.

It is true that our faith and redemption are coextensive, and since our redemption is eternal then they are coeternal. I Peter 1:5, "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

The word for afflictions means "pressure." Think of

the pressure brought to bear upon Christ while on this earth. Pressure of the devil--the devil again and again attacked our Lord. Luke 4:13, "And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season." Matthew 16:23, "But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Pressure from the world--"I have overcome the world." Pressure of poverty--poverty is pressing upon people today, but none so poor as Christ. II Corinthians 8:9, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Luke 9:58, "And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

It means that He is suffering in His church body. This is His representative body. Christ is still suffering in the members of His body which is the church. Paul was a member of that body and was filling up in his own flesh the afflictions of the body of Christ apportioned to him.

All the afflictions of Christ yet to be endured are to be endured by his people. He has borne His cross once for all; His people are to bear theirs while in this world.

All this speaks of the vital union between Christ and His people. They are so dear to Him that what is done to them is reckoned by Him as being done to Himself. When Saul was persecuting the saints the Lord met him and asked, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me." In the

day of judgment, He is going to say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these ye have done it unto me." "He that receiveth you receiveth me," Matthew 10:40.

All this tells of a great honor bestowed upon us as His people. Suffering for Christ and the truth is a great privilege. Acts 5:41, "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Hebrews 11:25, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

The world hated our Lord. Hypocrites like Judas and the scribes; selfrighteous people like the Pharisees; infidels like the Sadducees; licentious men like Herod and Felix; politicians like Pilate had no love for the Son of God. They couldn't have any peace of conscience while He was around.

I want to leave with you a question that will search your hearts if you will ponder it. Are you a sufferer for Christ and the truth? Or are you merely an uninterested spectator looking on but taking no part in the reproach of Christ? You are either a persecutor, a sufferer, or a spectator. Which are you?

• In redemption God shows us His loving heart; in providence, His mighty hand.

