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RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT

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

From a child I have heard of sinners resisting the Holy Spirit. I have heard other ministers warn sinners, and I myself have warned, against resisting the Spirit. I have heard strange stories of the conduct of sinners in resisting the Spirit. In several states I have heard the same story of a man who jumped out of the building through a window to get away from the striving of the Spirit. I have listened to evangelists urge sinners to yield to the Spirit lest they drive Him away, never to return. I have heard of men (though I have never met one) who asserted that they, having refused to yield to the Spirit, were deserted and never again felt His striving. Now we do not deny that there is an element of truth in the above expressions, but we believe there is also a vagueness in them that is confusing and misleading.

What is the sin of resisting the Holy

Spirit? Just what does the sinner do in resisting the Spirit? It is the purpose of this message to clear up some things which appear to be vague and obscure in the minds of many.

The only New Testament passage that speaks of resisting the Holy Spirit 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 Spirit? How does

the sinner resist the Spirit? And why?

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. And 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.”* Many have the idea that a few times in a lifetime the Holy Spirit comes to a man and makes an effort to save (regenerate) him; that he may resist and overcome the efforts of the Spirit; and that after repeated and unsuccessful efforts, the Spirit leaves never to make another attempt to save that man. This is called sinning away the day of grace, and many evangelists get visible results by warning men that they 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 Scriptural. 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 gave his hand to the minister, when in fact the eyes of his understanding had never been opened to the gospel way of salvation. Salvation as an experience is the life-giving work of the Spirit enabling the sinner to under-

stand the gospel. John 3:1-7, *“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”* II Corinthians 4:3-6, *“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

HOW DOES THE SINNER RESIST THE SPIRIT?

Resisting the Spirit is rejecting the word of God of which the Holy Spirit is

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Depravity of nature is the only thing that keeps men from coming.

the author. The sinner is resisting the Spirit when he hears the gospel and rejects it.

The sinner is resisting the Spirit when he opposes the one who preaches the gospel to him. The Jews to whom Stephen preached resisted the Holy Spirit in the same way their fathers did. "...as you fathers did, so do ye" were his words to them. Their fathers resisted the Spirit by rejecting the preaching of the prophets and by persecuting them. Acts 7:52, "*Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?*" Help is given us upon the subject by referring to Nehemiah 9:29, 30. "*And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear. Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands.*" Nehemiah is explaining the cause of Israel's punishment by saying that Israel hardened their necks and refused to hear. Nehemiah 9:16, "*But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments.*" They resisted God's prophets. Verse 26, "*Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.*" And in all this they were resisting the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit was speaking by the prophets just as He was speaking by Stephen. Verse 30, "...yet would they not give ear." May I repeat: Rejecting the Word of God is resisting the Holy Spirit. Persecuting the preachers of the Word is resisting the Holy Spirit.

Andrew Fuller calls this the indirect influence of the Spirit. The following quotation from him (Fuller's Works, page 742) is in perfect harmony with

what we have been saying: -

"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 antedeluvians, and that unbelievers are said always to have resisted the Holy Spirit."

Fuller then speaks of the direct influence of the Spirit which is effectual in renewing and sanctifying the sinner. This is a good distinction to make. The sinner resists the indirect and objective influence of the Spirit in and by the preacher but the direct and subjective influence of the Spirit is not resisted, because it is the direct impact of the Holy Spirit on the human spirit. To resist this would be to overcome the Almighty. There is no evidence that the criminal is superior to the officer because he resists his command to submit to arrest, but if he takes the weapon away from the officer and remains at large, there is evidence of his superiority.

WHY DOES THE SINNER RESIST THE SPIRIT?

The passage before us also gives plain and unmistakable answer to this question. "*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears...*" The sinner resists the Spirit (His indirect and objective ministry) because his heart is wrong and his ears are not attuned to the word of God. In short, it is because of his depravity of nature. Romans 8:7, "*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*" The carnal mind is enmity against God and cannot be subject to God's law. God's words are full of wisdom, but to the natural man they are foolishness. I Corinthians 2:14, "*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him:*

neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." A dear brother once remarked to me that I did not believe the sinner could resist the Holy Spirit. I replied that I believed the sinner could do nothing but resist the Holy Spirit until he was given a new mind and a new heart by the Holy Spirit. God be praised that the blessed Holy Spirit is equal to the task of giving all kinds of sinners a holy disposition of mind and heart!

The preached word is the objective ministry and the indirect influence of the Spirit, and this the dead sinner rejects and resists because it is foolishness to him.

John 3:3, "*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" The indirect influence of the Spirit in the word is resisted until resistance is 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 done in the sinner, if he is to be saved. Objective truth, however plainly presented is not sufficient for salvation. The gospel is effectual in salvation only when it is accompanied by the power of God. Apart from the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, I Corinthians 1:23, "*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.*" The sinner must be given eyes to see and a heart to understand and to love the truth. Putting a larger lamp into the lamp socket will not enable the blind man to see; he must be given the ability to see. In the new birth the Spirit gives the eye to see and the heart to love the gospel. John 3:7, "*...Ye must be born again.*" This is His direct and subjective ministry and is not resisted. This is the power of God and to successfully resist it is to over-power God. It is a birth and the child cannot resist its birth.

Again we say that it takes more than the preached word to effect conversion.

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Paul describes his conversion as the effect of being apprehended (laid hold of) by Christ; Philippians 3:12, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Having Christ revealed in him. Galatians 1:15-16, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen..." The objective ministry of the Spirit is resisted by the natural man; Romans 8:7, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God..." But the subjective is not because it is God at grips with puny man.

THE DRAWING POWER OF CHRIST

John 12:32-33, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die."

When I began to study this text I supposed it spoke of the drawing power of the cross, and was about to follow Maclaran, who calls the cross of Christ the universal magnet. But the text does not say that the cross will draw men but that Christ will do the drawing.

The story of the cross as a means of grace will draw nobody of itself. Apart from the drawing power of Christ by the Spirit, the cross is not a magnet to attract but an offence that repels. Paul preached the cross to the religious Jew and it was a scandal to him; he preached the cross to the intellectual Greek and it was foolishness to him. It required the effectual call of the Spirit to make it attractive to anybody. Those who understand the meaning of the cross, trusting their souls to the crucified and risen Christ, are denominated "the called."

THE TEXT IN THE LIGHT OF UNIVERSALISM

Does the text, when fairly interpreted, give any support to the teaching that all men, considered as individual sinners, will be drawn to Christ and be

saved? If it does, there is a hopeless contradiction in the Scriptures, for there is abundant teaching that many will be damned.

There is no word corresponding to the word for "men" in the original text. It simply says, I will draw all unto me. If some word should be supplied, why not supply the pronoun "mine"? "I will draw all mine unto me." This harmonizes with the general tenor of Scripture. Jesus said, John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:44, 45, 65, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.... And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father." John 17:2-3, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

If it could be proved that "men" is the proper word to supply, even then the passage would not be conclusive as teaching universal salvation. Any real student of the Bible knows that the word "all" is often used in a relative and restricted sense, meaning all kinds of ranks of men. It is said in Acts 22:15, "For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." It is obvious that Paul did not preach to every individual sinner, but he did preach to all ranks and classes of men. Matthew 3:1, 5, 6, "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea.... Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized

of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." I Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is the root of all evil..." I Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

If the Arminian insists that the verse means to "draw towards Christ," and that the drawing is universal without the implication of universal salvation, we reply with a few questions to show the absurdity of his contention. Are men drawn toward Christ without the gospel? Can a man be drawn toward some one of whom he has never heard? Are the heathen being drawn to Christ when they fall down before idols? Is Christ and an idol the same? Moreover, the expression is never used of an attempt but of an accomplished fact.

HOW ARE MEN DRAWN TO CHRIST?

What happens in the experience of one who is drawn to Christ? Is it a physical or a mental experience? It is not a physical coming to Christ for this is obviously impossible. It is a mental and soul experience. It is the sinner under conviction for sin, sorry for his sins, hating his sins, unable to make amends for past sins, and unable to live without sinning, placing his hope and confidence in Christ.

WHY MUST MEN BE DRAWN TO CHRIST?

The necessity is declared. John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him..." And if we say that the sinner can come without being drawn, we deny the word of God. Why will men refuse to come to Christ? The fault is not with God. He interposes no objections, but rather commands men to come. Depravity of nature is the only thing that keeps men from coming. And in drawing them to Christ the will is not forced, but a new nature is imparted so that the man willingly and gladly comes.

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