

9 Things That Grieve The Holy Spirit **We can block the Holy Spirit's work without realizing it.**

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"I have no interest in changing my long distance service." The irritation in my voice was unmistakable.

"You mean you don't want to save money?" persisted the saleswoman on the other end of the phone.

I slammed down the receiver and returned to my now cold soup.

"That's the third time they've called this week, and each time it's been in the middle of dinner," I complained to my husband. "It's so rude."

But I knew the "rude award" belonged to me. That poor telemarketer, desperately dialing numbers in hopes of one positive response . . . she was just doing her job, and I'd blasted her.

Sadly, being rude to her had been easy. I did not know her. Had the caller been a close friend, my attitude would have been more gracious.

There is another Person I have thoughtlessly offended because I did not know Him —the Holy Spirit. Oh, I professed to know Him. Having been a Christian for 15 years, I knew who He was, what He did, even where He lived (Jn. 14:17). In truth, I knew His résumé. I did not know Him.

One morning during my devotions, the Holy Spirit whispered to my heart, Lorraine, you love the Father. Jesus is your friend. Now, wouldn't you like to know Me?

It had never been my intention to resist the Holy Spirit, but by not fully yielding to Him, I had hindered His work in my life. I had observed that emotional responses often accompanied the Spirit's work. This made me nervous. My cognitive faith knew emotions were not always trustworthy. Perhaps that's why I had never fully embraced the Person of the Spirit. I had a slight fear —a mild distrust —of Him.

Now the Spirit was urging me to lay aside my reservations. Obediently, I waved the white flag of my will and surrendered.

My fear was confirmed. Emotion did accompany the work of the Spirit, and, ironically, this proved to be a tremendous blessing!

The Spirit deepened my love for Jesus. Never had I felt such empathy for the lost or had such a compelling desire to train disciples for Christ. Joy punctuated my writing. Passion permeated my teaching. Ministry was no longer a burden —I had a Helper eager to assist me!

The Spirit's constant companionship delighted me. Perhaps that was why I was so devastated when He pulled away.

Grieving the Spirit

One day several friends and I were discussing major changes in my former church. I made a somewhat derogatory comment about a church leader. Suddenly I felt a "lurch" in my spirit, as if something inside me had been ripped away. I knew I'd offended the Spirit, and that He had withdrawn to some far-off corner of my heart. I'd grieved the Spirit in the past, but the intensity of my remorse was new to me. I was sickened by my words, horrified by my arrogance, and saddened that I had hurt the One I loved.

I was grateful for the churning within me. It is impossible to understand grieving the Spirit from a strictly cognitive perspective. Grieving involves deep emotion. The Spirit's sorrow had become my sorrow. I hated sin with a new vengeance and resolved to know the things that grieved the Spirit so I could avoid hurting Him in the future.

As I dove into Scripture, two areas surfaced as being particularly grievous to the Spirit: the actions of the Israelites and the attitudes of the Pharisees. And my study revealed that we are often guilty of the same actions and attitudes.

Old Testament Grieving

The Israelites "rebelled and grieved [God's] Holy Spirit" (Is. 63:10). Psalm 78 documents the actions that prompted God's sorrow.

Forgetting God. "They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them" (Ps. 78:11). God freed the Israelites from captivity, parted the Red Sea, provided bread in the desert, and led His people to a prosperous land. "In spite of all this, they kept on sinning" (Ps. 78:32). God lamented, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you" (Is. 49:15). But "you deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Dt. 32:18).

Grumbling. "They spoke against God" (Ps. 78:19). Daily, God provided the Israelites with the "bread of angels." But they weren't satisfied; they whined for more. Their complaints made God "exceedingly angry" (Num. 11:10). Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses, God's appointed leader. "The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them," and Miriam became leprous (Num. 12:9). When God allowed the Israelites to glimpse the glory of the promised land, they grumbled about the great size of the people instead of being grateful for the great size of the grapes. God sighed, "How long will this wicked community grumble against me?" (Num. 14:27).

Disobedience. "They did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law" (Ps. 78:10). "Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 78:41). The Israelites' repeated disobedience saddened God. "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?" He asked (Ex. 16:28).

Disbelief. "They did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance" (Ps. 78:22). Ten times God is described in Psalm 78 as being angry, grieved, or vexed. Disturbed by their lack of faith, God cried, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe

in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?" (Num. 14:11, emphasis mine).

New Testament Grieving

God's Old Testament warning, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit," is repeated in the New Testament in Eph. 4:30, but the emphasis is different. In the Old Testament, grieving the Spirit was connected to the people's response to God. In the New Testament, grieving the Spirit also includes our response to one another in the Body of Christ. Paul explains this in Eph. 4:29–32 as he illustrates how we can keep from grieving the Spirit: avoid unwholesome talk; build others up rather than yourself; share; rid yourself of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, and slander; be compassionate.

The consistent goal of the Spirit in the New Testament is that we achieve unity by maintaining right relationships with one another and using our gifts to serve the Body.

Ephesians 4:12–13 says to serve one another "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith." Jesus' final plea before the crucifixion was that we would all be one and "brought to complete unity" (Jn. 17:23). Paul urges in Eph. 4:3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit."

But the church in Jesus' day lacked both service and unity, due in large measure to the ruling religious sect, the Pharisees.

"Pharisee" is derived from the Hellenized word pharisaioi, which means "the separated ones." By Jesus' day it appeared that the Pharisees had set themselves apart because they secretly believed they were spiritually superior to others. Jesus called them "vipers," "fools," and "blind guides." Stephen included them in his description of those who "always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51).

Why was God so upset with these leaders? The reasons should be of concern to us because we grieve the Holy Spirit if we are guilty of these same sins.

Pride. The Pharisees demanded seats of honor at public events. They loved the esteem of the people and being called "Rabbi." They expected to be served, rather than to serve. Jesus exposed their arrogance in a parable that portrayed a Pharisee as boasting, "God, I thank you that I am not like all other men" (Lk. 18:11).

What a contrast to Paul's teaching in Phil. 2:1–3: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit . . . then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."

Self-effort. The Pharisees trusted in their good works to make them righteous, rather than in God. They erroneously believed they could achieve spiritual blessing through the effort of the flesh. But Jesus said in Jn. 3:6, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

"Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength" (Jer. 17:5). "Apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). Scripture condemns all self-effort and warns us to beware of our tendency to act independently of God. "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Gal. 3:3).

Resistance to the Spirit. "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt" (1 Thess. 5:19–20). Guilty on both counts, the Pharisees doused the flames of the Spirit by attributing Jesus' works to Satan (Mt. 12:25–32) and thumbing their noses at the Scriptures concerning Christ.

The Pharisees' refusal to yield to the Spirit was rooted in their fear of the Spirit. The Pharisees clung to the comfort of the Law, insisting God would never work beyond the Law—at least, not without first consulting them! Jesus was surprisingly patient with their insolence and explained, "Every teacher of the law . . . is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (Mt. 13:52). And "do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . but to fulfill them" (Mt. 5:17). Still, the Pharisees turned a deaf ear, confident God would work as He had in the past. Their failure to embrace a new work of the Spirit ultimately caused them to oppose the God they claimed to serve.

Hypocrisy. The Pharisees were spiritual leaders with no Spirit. They professed to know God yet they failed to recognize His own Son. They put demands upon others they were unwilling to accept themselves. Jesus warned, "Do not do what [the Pharisees] do, for they do not practice what they preach" (Mt. 23:3). "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs . . . on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Mt. 23:27–28). Jesus' final analysis was sad: "These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me" (Mk. 7:6).

Legalism. Intellectualism was the god of the Pharisees. Consumed with order, tradition, and doctrine, they so immersed themselves in the study of God's Law and the explanation of it that they ended up missing God Himself! When the Pharisees scolded Jesus' disciples for failing to wash their hands before eating, Jesus rebuked them, "You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (Mt. 15:6).

In their zeal for theological correctness, the Pharisees reduced religion to a purely intellectual exercise, effectively squelching the Spirit and eliminating responses of the heart. Emotion was unwelcome, unless, of course, it was permitted by the Law. As a result, their hearts were hardened (Mk. 3:5). Jesus said angrily, "Woe to you . . . you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Mt. 23:23). Paul, himself a Pharisee, recognized the dangers of legalism and rightly warned, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

Consequences of Grieving the Holy Spirit

Grieving the Spirit carries serious consequences. The actions of the Israelites grieved the Spirit, and God withdrew His protection and fought against them (Is. 63:10, Acts 7:42–43). The attitudes of the Pharisees grieved the Spirit and they were condemned to hell (Mt. 23:13, Mt. 23:33). But the most common result of grieving the Spirit in the Old Testament was simply that He left. Prior to Pentecost, the Spirit was given to selected individuals for a temporary period of

time. That is why David, who experienced the coming and going of the Spirit in his own life, pleaded in Ps. 51:11, "Do not . . . take your Holy Spirit from me."

Today, the Spirit works differently. The moment a person accepts Christ as his Savior, he is immediately indwelt and sealed forever by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14, Jn. 14:16). We need never question our eternal destiny or doubt God's intentions toward us (1 Jn. 4:16). The Spirit will never leave us, but if we grieve Him, He may temporarily withdraw His fellowship and power. For the Christian who consistently abides in the Spirit, no consequence could be more devastating.

We cannot expect to understand grieving the Spirit apart from that aspect of the Spirit's personality that makes Him cautiously respectful of our will. The Holy Spirit never forces Himself upon us. At times, we may even wish He was more insistent, that He'd whack us on the head and shout, "Don't do that . . . it makes Me REALLY mad." Instead, He quietly, gently, convicts us of sin and leaves us to choose: Will I please Him? Or grieve Him?

To compile a list of everything that grieves the Spirit and carefully avoid each item on the list would, itself, grieve the Spirit! God doesn't want to immobilize us with a "don't do" list. And, ultimately, we'd end up trusting in a list to achieve our goal, rather than in God.

Instead, God prefers that we are continually aware of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence and sensitive to how deeply sin affects Him, and us. It is good to understand the biblical theology of grieving the Spirit. It helps when we are able to feel God's sorrow over sin. But the surest way to avoid grieving the Spirit is to know Him and walk in a moment-by-moment, love relationship with Him. Then, grieving Him becomes unthinkable.