

Series: "The Holy Spirit"
Bearing Fruit: Making a Difference

In this series of messages we are looking at the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Today I want to talk with you about allowing the Spirit to *control us*, and what happens as a result.

Ephesians 5:18 says, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit." We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. It's like, if you're going to get drunk, get drunk on the Spirit! The goal of every follower of Jesus should be to be filled with the Spirit.

Sometimes we live in a way that hinders the Spirit from filling and controlling us. Ephesians 4:30 says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." and 1 Thessalonians 5:19 states, "Do not quench the Spirit." We can cause the Holy Spirit to be sad and to grieve. We can quench the Spirit's presence and effectiveness in us, as water quenches a fire.

What might be some ways we can cause Him to grieve, or quench Him? By ignoring Him – we are so caught up in our own pursuits, it's like He doesn't even exist. Or when feel the Spirit prompting us to do something and we don't do it. Or, the Spirit convicts us something is wrong, but we go ahead and do it anyway.

As we think about grieving or quenching the Spirit, let's take this a step further, and talk about ***the sin against the Holy Spirit – the so called unpardonable sin.*** Is there a sin we can commit that God does not forgive? Yes! Look at these words found in Matthew 12:31-32: "Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

Jesus says every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, except one: blasphemy against the Spirit. ("Blasphemy" means to curse or revile, speak irreverently or with contempt). *This is a serious matter, to say the least!*

What is this sin against the Holy Spirit that is so bad that it will not be forgiven? This sin is referred to in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The context in Matthew and Mark is this: The Pharisees were accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, when indeed He was casting out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, this suggests that the unpardonable sin might be to claim that what the Spirit is doing is actually the work of *Satan*.

In *Luke*, the setting is different: Luke brings together a number of isolated sayings of Jesus. Let's look at this passage: Luke 12:8-12. "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say."

Here in Luke's gospel, Jesus words about the unforgivable sin don't seem to be related to the surrounding teachings, so it's hard, for me at least, to place His words in any kind of context. In any case, in all 3 gospels, Jesus does *not* tell us plainly what this unpardonable sin is.

As in all sound Biblical interpretation, we have to compare Scripture with Scripture. How do these verses compare with the rest of Scripture?

Throughout Bible, the message we get is that any sin can be forgiven if we repent. For instance, 1 John 1:7-9 says this: "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Notice it says the blood of Christ cleanses us from *all* sin (verse 7), and if we confess our sins God will forgive us and cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness (verse 9). The Bible doesn't say when we repent, our sins will be forgiven, *except for these*: (and then it lists some). So, when are we not forgiven? When we do not repent.

There is a lot of truth in the classical interpretation that says the unpardonable sin is *not one isolated act, not one specific thing we do, but to persistently, repeatedly ignore or resist the Holy Spirit as he prompts us to repent and put our faith in Christ as our Savior.* To commit the unpardonable sin is to become so hardened in our sinful attitudes and behavior, so resistant to God, that we lose all sensitivity to the Holy Spirit as He tries to lead us to salvation in Christ. And we remain so hardened and blinded to the Spirit's work that we may curse or ridicule or mock God. We may even claim that what the Spirit is doing is evil or of the devil. This sin becomes "unforgivable" because we never do repent, even to our dying day. My pastor friend and mentor, Rocky Riedel, once said: If you're afraid you've committed the unpardonable sin, you haven't!

The way to be sure we are not guilty of the unpardonable sin is to obey the Spirit as He prompts us to turn from our sins and trust Christ to forgive and save us.

Let's move on. We have been looking at how we can block the Spirit and grieve the Spirit and how we can sin against the Spirit. Let's look at the flip side of this.

What can happen when we allow the Spirit to fill and control us! When the followers of Jesus in the first century church – ordinary people, by the way – got filled with the Spirit, they "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). *They made a difference. They impacted their world for Christ!*

That's what God wants for everyone who names the name of Christ. He wants us to make a difference in our family, in our neighborhood, in our world. Most of us want to feel that our life will count for something. That we're not just taking up space on this planet. That we leave some kind of legacy – that we will be remembered for something good and worthwhile we did.

Jesus' way of putting this was that we should "bear fruit". Listen to what He said: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16).

If we're going to make a difference, i.e. "bear fruit", we need to have the fruit of the Spirit in us. When we receive Christ and are reborn spiritually, the Holy Spirit comes and lives in us. And we become a new person in Christ. We take on a new nature. But, unfortunately, we still have the old, sinful human nature in us. In Galatians 5 it's called "the flesh". These two natures battle within us. Galatians 5 lists some of the behaviors that result when the "flesh" or our unredeemed human nature is in control: "sexual immorality, impurity of mind, sensuality, worship of false gods, witchcraft, hatred, quarreling, jealousy, bad temper, rivalry, factions, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like that" (Galatians 5:19-21 *J.B. Phillips translation*).

On the other hand, there are these things to look for when the Holy Spirit is in control. These qualities are called the "fruit of the Spirit". When the Spirit reigns, there are 9 character traits/behaviors evident: "By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Let's look more closely at these.

Love. The Greek word is "agape". This is not a warm, fuzzy feelings toward someone; not the love we feel towards people we like or are naturally fond of. Rather agape love means acting unselfishly, with the interest of the other person at heart. This love is often difficult. It is doing good to those who hate us, blessing those who curse us, praying for those who mistreat us (as Jesus has said – Luke 6:27-28). Most of us simply can't love this way without the power of the Holy Spirit inside us.

Joy. This is not just being happy. Happiness depends on outward circumstances. Joy is deeper. Joy is rooted in God, and having God's Spirit in us. When the Holy Spirit is in control, we can experience joy no matter what our outward circumstances may be.

Peace. This word does not mean the peace we might get soaking up the sun on the deck of a cruise ship in the Caribbean, where we're freed for a week or so of the cares and stress of our routine. It is not the absence of trouble or difficulty. But rather it's an inward tranquility we experience even in the midst of the storm. When the Spirit is in the driver's seat of our life we will have peace that the world can't give, nor take away.

Patience. The Greek word here could be translated "long-tempered". Especially it is patience with *people*. How much patience do we have with our children, the testy neighbor, with the customer service rep on the phone who can hardly speak English! When the Spirit is in control we will be more patient with people.

Kindness. Sometimes we are just so unkind in the things we say and do – often to people closest to us. Spirit-controlled people are kind people.

Goodness. (The New Revised Standard Version translate this “generosity”, which is not the best rendering of the Greek word). This is just a general word for goodness. When self is in control, or our sinful nature dominates, our language can be filthy, our thoughts and desires impure, our behavior bad. But when the Holy Spirit is in control, there will be a genuine purity and wholesomeness about us.

Faithfulness. This means we are trustworthy, dependable, faithful in our responsibilities. I once talked to someone who expressed remorse that he had not been more faithful in fulfilling his responsibilities in the church. Can people rely on us? When we say we will do something do we carry it through? The pastor who followed me in a church once said this about one of the people in the church I had left: “(Name) makes a lot of promises, but doesn’t deliver much.” Holy Spirit dominated people are faithful in fulfilling their obligations and promises.

Gentleness. The New Testament word here is hard to translate into English. It carries with it the idea of being modest, teachable, courteous, considerate, submissive to God. The opposite of this fruit is to be proud and haughty and non-submissive. If I’m inconsiderate towards you, if I brag a lot, if I’m too bull-headed to see anyone else’s point of view but mine, who’s in control? The flesh! But Spirit-controlled people are humble, teachable, courteous and considerate.

Self-control. There are many areas where self-control is necessary if we are to be useful to the Lord. We need self-control in our desire for material things...in our sexual urges...in our criticism of others...in our eating and drinking habits. A beggar came up to a lady on the street and in a sorry-sounding voice said to her, “Lady, can you help me. I haven’t eaten in three days.” She replied wistfully: “Oh, if only I had your will power.” When the Holy Spirit is in charge of us, self-control will be one of His fruits.

So, these are the 9 fruit of the Spirit. Now think about it: Aren’t these qualities to be admired and desired? Wouldn’t you like your husband or wife to have these character traits? Your boss? Your customers? Would you be pleased if your children grew up and acted like that? Think of how we might be able to influence other people for Christ, how we might make a difference in our family, work, school, community if we could be this kind of person! Think what a different world it would be if the Holy Spirit, rather than sinful human nature, had control of people.

How can we allow the Holy Spirit to control more of our life? Here are a few Scriptures that can instruct us. Galatians 5:16 says, “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Walk by the Spirit. Pay attention to Him. Talk to Him. Listen for Him. Long to live a holy life. As the Spirit urges us to do the God-thing, do our part in trying to resist the urgings of our sinful nature. And then there is Galatians 5:24: “Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” This is a promise from God we can claim! If we’ve given our life over to Christ He can help us put to death the old sinful nature. Yes, the old evil nature will still be with us as long as we’re on this earth, but Jesus can help us overcome it each and every day.

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