

Most students of Scripture are well familiar with the troubles the Israelites had in trying to keep one foot planted faithfully in front of the other. There was the golden calf incident, for example. Complaining about the water. Complaining about the manna. Complaining about not having a king like everybody else.

You know the stories.

In keeping with the natural fallout from such forgetfulness, of course, they met with a lot of consequences over the years. Diseases. Delays. Defeats and derisions. The hard discipline of God. And though it was every bit warranted, the hardships they endured weren't easy for the Lord to watch. In fact, in one of the Bible's most tender passages, Isaiah wrote that "in all their suffering, He suffered" (Isaiah 63:9).

When they hurt, he hurt. When they grieved, he grieved.

This tips us off early on to an interesting aspect of God's character. He is not some distant deity, unfazed by what happens between the tree lines of our lives. He can hurt. He can feel. He can be wounded, mistreated, and heartsick.

We've seen it in the Father. We certainly saw it in the Son. We still see it in the Spirit.

Read Acts 5:1-9

I've been trying really hard not to write these studies in your typical three-point sermon outline. But maybe the best way to tackle this particular topic is to go back to the old standby, breaking down a few of the specific ways we fall guilty in the "grieving" area.

The first and most obvious way is through *failing to maintain a pure lifestyle*.

Certainly, purity involves a lot more than sexual cleanness, but the Bible does include it so often in its lists of egregious sins that it's worth warning one another about. I mean, who knew the Bible could be so far ahead of its time, touching on a subject that's as modern-day as Saturday night television and halftime at the Super Bowl?

"For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality. . . The person who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who also gives you His Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 8).

To sin is to "reject" his authority in our lives, to treat him like an intruding imposter, to elevate our own idols into positions of prominence, strong-arming the Spirit like revolutionaries executing an overthrow.

And it hurt him. Not in a sulking way. Not in a see-if-I-care kind of snippiness. Not in a way that makes him feel the need to defend His Word, but rather forcing him to assume the undesirable role of "avenger" (1 Thessalonians 4:6), seeking to correct the short circuits in our character before we go beyond merely hurting ourselves and start taking other people with us.

Family Feuds

Speaking of which, another way we offend the Holy Spirit is by *treating one another badly*.

The context of Paul's familiar statement in Ephesians 4:30—"Don't grieve God's Holy Spirit, who sealed you for the day of redemption"—includes a bam-bam combination of direct assaults against "bitterness, anger and wrath, insult and slander" (vs 31).

In other words, let your sin leak out onto other people enough, and you'll have more than your own mess to clean up. Like most moms or dads would say, you can do whatever you want to them, but don't go picking on their kids. If you've ever tried getting too close to a mockingbird's nest, you find out real quick that the egg protector never takes both eyes off home base.

And so it is with the Holy Spirit, who broods over his people with a parent's brand of protection. He knows that battles across bloodlines do nothing but damage and divide, hammering pockmarks into the unity and mission of the church. When we war with each other, we set ourselves in contention against the Spirit of God, who will not allow such discord to continue untreated.

The Big Head

And finally, point number three (if you're still keeping score at home): we insult the Holy Spirit when we use *him to prop up our own pride*.

The most vivid example of this is the story of Simon the sorcerer, found in Acts 8, a guy who liked to be called "the Great Power of God" (vs 10). But even a grand showman can sometimes have the guts to know when he's licked—like when Philip blew into town at the Spirit's direction, sending demons shrieking off in search of shelter, even returning the paralyzed to their upright positions.

A little later, when Peter and John arrived, Simon "offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power too, so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit'" (vs 18-19).

But the Spirit is not for profit. Or for reputation. Or for playing to the crowd. That's why every time a singer loves his key change more than his message, every time a minister starts living for compliments and recognition, every time a writer thinks his clever words exempt him from cultivating Christian character, the Spirit is wounded, insulted, maligned, taken advantage of.

Yet this one whose heart can break at our misbehavior is also the one who can put us back together. For he is willing to suffer but not to leave us forsaken. In order that we grieve him less, he gives us his healing.

Acts 5:3 "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit."

Notice who's involved here. We know how Satan feels about untruth. Why is it so biting to the Holy Spirit?

Acts 5:4 "You have not lied to men but to God."

What veils this truth from our eyes? What would help us live with a more ongoing awareness of how near and present the Spirit is?

Acts 5:9 "Why did you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord"

Think about the danger and audacity in what she's being accused of here. In what ways can we be just as daring?

The Spirit can be grieved and rebelled against. A God who could not be disobeyed would be more tyrant than shepherd. And a God who didn't hurt when we sinned would be more slaveholder than Father. His Spirit lives too close not to feel it when we ignore him or rebel against him. But he also lives too close to overlook it, to turn the other way, to be content until he's shown us what sin can do and how to stop it.

Holy Spirit, it helps me to know that you can hurt. May this knowledge help me keep from hurting you myself.