

**OPENNESS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**INTRODUCTION**

- A.** We have seen that the stigma (offence) of the Holy Spirit is his very presence.
1. In other words, the stigma of the Spirit is the Spirit himself.
  2. He by nature *offends*; all that is offensive about the Father and the Son is embodied in the person of the Holy Spirit.
    - a. When one is offended by the Spirit it is because he is offended by God.
      - (1) It is not possible to find God to be pleasant but find the Holy Spirit offensive.
      - (2) It is not possible to affirm all that Jesus Christ was and did, then turn around and reject the Holy Spirit.
    - b. The persons of the Godhead are united.
      - (1) Equally each has his own stigma.
      - (2) The Holy Spirit mirrors the other persons of the godhead; therefore how we respond to the person of the Spirit shows what we really feel about either the Father or the Son.
- B.** But since the Spirit can be offensive, why should we be open to him?
1. Are we not foolish or irrational if we deliberately open ourselves to one who is offensive and who offends?
  2. Answer: we must affirm God as he is; the Holy Spirit is God.
    - a. When our hearts are truly right with God we will find that God is not offensive at all!
    - b. We will instead find him glorious!
  3. But we must take God as he is and be prepared to affirm the presence of the Holy Spirit - however God may sovereignly choose to reveal himself.
- C.** Not long ago I pleaded with a fellow minister, 'Stay open to the Holy Spirit.'
1. He replied, 'I don't know what you mean by that.'
  2. Whether he was sincere or cynical in his reply, I want to show in this lesson what openness to the Holy Spirit is.

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- a. It is humility; the recognition that I don't have everything, I don't know everything.
  - b. It is the awareness that I need more of the Holy Spirit.
  - c. It is the self-conscious desire to find God wherever he is, to recognise him as soon as he appears and to miss nothing that could be received from him.
  - d. It is knowing that God is willing to give me so much more as long as I admit my poverty as opposed to saying 'I do not need a thing.' Rev. 3:17.
- D.** It is one thing for the Holy Spirit to open our hearts; or our understanding; it is another for us to be open to him instead of challenging him to open us first.
- 1. Admittedly, we have to be changed by God himself (by his sovereign power) before we are going to listen and obey.
  - 2. But is there not a case for our remaining open to the same Holy Spirit, having been converted, that we miss nothing he would say to us?
    - a. Answer: yes.
    - b. The underlying problem of the Hebrew Christians, to whom Hebrews is addressed, was that they had become 'hard of hearing' (Gr. - AV). Heb. 5:11.
      - (1) This means they had become closed to the point of not even being able to hear God any more.
      - (2) They felt no need to be open.
- E.** Why is this lesson important?
- 1. The only link between us and the Throne of Grace is the Holy Spirit.
    - a. If he is quenched or grieved we have cut off the only link that will let us know how God is moving today.
    - b. We must therefore maintain the best possible relationship to the Spirit.
  - 2. Although God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and therefore unchanging in his nature, he does not always reveal himself in one generation as he did in another.
    - a. We must therefore be open to the Spirit lest we miss the way in which this God sovereignly chooses to manifest his glory.
    - b. This is why Jonathan Edwards taught us that the task of every generation is to discover in which direction the Sovereign Redeemer is moving, then move in that direction.

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3. If we are closed (our minds fully made up) to whatever God may wish to do or say today we will miss his glory just as Israel missed recognising the Messiah when he appeared.
  - a. You could never have convinced the scribes, the priests or Pharisees that God's chosen Messiah would appear before their eyes - and they not see him!
  - b. But this *is* what happened!
4. If we are truly open to the Holy Spirit (because we are prepared to pay the price and go with whatever the stigma may be) there is probably more likelihood that we will not miss his glory when it is unveiled.
5. How one accepts this lesson is a fairly good indicator whether we truly love God and his word.

### **I EVERY GENERATION HAS ITS STIGMA BY WHICH THE BELIEVER'S FAITH IS TESTED**

- A. It is not so difficult to believe what God did yesterday.
  1. But what God did yesterday was highly offensive at the time.
    - a. We may say, 'I wouldn't have objected had I been alive then.'
    - b. But the only proof that we would have accepted what God did in a previous generation is our affirming what God is doing in ours.
  2. Even the Pharisees felt themselves very pious because they affirmed yesterday's men!
    - a. Jesus confronted them on this very issue. 'And you say, "If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets."' Matt. 23:30.
    - b. But by rejecting the equivalent offence - rejecting Jesus Christ himself - in their own day Jesus said to them, 'So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!' Matt. 23:31-32.
      - (1) It is sometimes said that the good is the enemy of the best; a church that is reasonably prosperous doesn't want revival.
      - (2) It is often true that the greatest enmity toward what God is doing today comes from those who became a part of what God was doing yesterday.
- c. I would not be surprised if:
  - (1) Whitefield's followers today would have rejected George Whitefield himself!

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**(2)** Spurgeon's followers today would have rejected Charles Spurgeon himself!

**B.** The offence in what God is doing in the present is almost always changed sufficiently from what he did previously in order to test one's love of God and true openness to the Spirit.

**1.** Not a single person listed in Hebrews 11 had the luxury of stepping into the stigma created by yesterday's man or woman of faith.

**a.** Enoch 'walked with God.' Gen. 5:24.

**b.** Noah 'walked with God.' Gen. 6:9.

**(1)** Noah might have concluded: I have proved that I please God as much as Enoch did since I am doing what Enoch did.

**(2)** The result of Enoch's openness to the Spirit was that he was translated - God took him so that he did not see death. Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5.

**(3)** But Noah walked with God and was not translated (as he might well have wished) but had to endure a terrific stigma: maintaining it was going to rain (unprecedented) and that judgement was coming on the earth.

**(4)** 'By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.' Heb. 11:7.

**c.** Abraham was not allowed to do what Noah did.

**(1)** Perhaps there would have been little stigma to building another ark!

**(2)** But Abraham's stigma was different. 'By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.' Heb. 11:8.

**d.** That is not all; Abraham had to embrace a far greater challenge later. 'By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son.' Heb. 11:17.

**(1)** He might have said, 'I've paid my dues. I've shown I love God - no more bearing of the cross for me!'

**(2)** Sometimes we may feel we've done enough for God - enough for a lifetime!

**(3)** But Abraham had to bear yet another offence!

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2. All those described in Hebrews 11 were faced with a new and unprecedented stigma in their own generation.
  - a. If you ask: How can I know I would qualify for a place in Hebrews 11 had I been living in ancient times?
  - b. I answer: if you embrace today's stigma you would have embraced whatever stigma there was in a previous day.
    - (1) You may say, 'I could never die like the martyrs of old.'
    - (2) I say: You would if you show today that you bear the stigma God puts before you. 'Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.' Luke 16:10.

## **II WHY BE OPEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

- A. Because God still speaks today. 'Today, if you hear his voice.' Ps. 95:7.
  1. But did this refer to the Holy Spirit?
    2. Yes. 'So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" Heb. 3:7-11.
- B. Some will say: surely the Bible is the infallible, inerrant and unchanging word of God, and this was given yesterday.
  1. I answer:
    - a. God's word - the Bible - is infallible, inerrant and unchanging.
    - b. God gave us the Bible yesterday.
    - c. But the Holy Spirit *applies it today*.
  2. The application of God's word by the Holy Spirit will be to focus on an aspect of that word which will be the offence of today.
    - a. The Holy Spirit continues to speak - clearly, directly and immediately; through:
      - (1) Prophecy.

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**(2)** Word of knowledge.

**(3)** Vision.

**(4)** Audible voice.

**b.** But he will never, never, never conflict with or contradict anything in the Bible but only make it clearer!

**(1)** The Holy Spirit speaking today is *not* new revelation or in competition with the Bible (like the Book of Mormon - or the Koran - which contradict the word of God).

**(2)** The proof of the Holy Spirit's voice or manifestation will be that it vindicates and magnifies the Bible.

**C.** Openness to the Holy Spirit is what will put us in good stead not to miss what God is in today.

**1.** There is no great stigma (speaking generally) in defending what Athanasius (4th century) stood for.

**a.** He stood alone - and won.

**b.** But nobody will be ridiculed (that is, in the church) for saying that Jesus Christ is truly God - co-eternal and co-substantial and co-equal with the Father.

**2.** There is no great stigma in defending justification by faith alone today - even with some Roman Catholics.

**a.** Martin Luther (1413-1546) stood alone.

**b.** But he won the day; today Christians grant that we are saved by faith alone in Christ's work on the cross.

**3.** The stigma *may* repeat itself:

**a.** Creation over against evolution brings offence.

**b.** Hell over against annihilation brings offence.

**c.** So one must not rule out that a challenge to an ancient truth once vindicated could re-emerge as a new battle that must be won.

**d.** Remember however that the rule of thumb will be that the new stigma will be a *stigma* and it won't be easy to accept and stand for.

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4. The Holy Spirit will not deceive us.
  - a. If we are on good terms with him, we will know what he is *in* and *behind* and what he is *doing* and *saying*.
  - b. He is not likely to let those in whom he dwells ungrieved in large measure miss what is on the cutting edge (in heaven's eyes).

### **III WHAT IS OPENNESS TO THE SPIRIT? HOW MAY WE KNOW WE ARE OPEN?**

- A. That we are open in our hearts as well as our heads.
  1. It was Lydia's *heart* that the Lord opened. Acts 16:14.
  2. It is possible to be theoretically open (open in theory, that is, we give intellectual assent) but closed in our hearts.
    - a. Why would we be open in the head but not the heart?
    - b. Because we may accept the validity of, say, a study like this one - yet remain afraid.
  3. The chief impediment to openness to the Spirit is fear. 'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.' II Tim. 1:7.
- B. We must become vulnerable.
  1. Vulnerable (def.): able to be hurt; unprotected against attacks.
  2. Becoming vulnerable means that:
    - a. We are willing to be hurt - or embarrassed.
    - b. We cease protecting ourselves with things such as:
      - (1) Defence mechanisms (setting up defences in our minds).
      - (2) Excuses why we should not be involved.
      - (3) Worrying about our reputation with friends - even closest friends.
- C. That we are extremely sensitive to the Spirit.
  1. The Holy Spirit is a person who can be grieved (Eph. 4:30) or quenched (I Thess. 5:19).
    - a. We grieve him chiefly by bitterness - having an unforgiving spirit (which is why we slander people). Eph. 4:30ff.

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- b. We quench the Spirit chiefly by:
  - (1) Protecting ourselves from vulnerability.
  - (2) Speaking against what God is presently doing - supposing God *couldn't* be doing *that*!
- 2. When the Spirit is (1) unquenched *and* (2) in us in large measure (which means we cultivate our relationship with him by giving him time and walking in the light - I John 1:7):
  - a. We will go with the Spirit's flow.
  - b. We will feel it when we are displeasing him.
  - c. We will recognise what he is doing and saying.
- 3. NB: 'Extremely' sensitive.
  - a. The Spirit is easily grieved.
  - b. Only a high level of sensitivity to the Spirit will recognise the Spirit elsewhere:
    - (1) In the word that is preached.
    - (2) In the prophetic word.
    - (3) In various manifestations.
- D. How *can* we become open if we fear we are not open but want to be open?
  - 1. Be sure there is no unconfessed sin in your life. I John 1:9.
  - 2. Be sure there is no bitterness or grudge against anyone. Eph. 4:31ff.
  - 3. Be sure you do not speak against anyone. James 3.
  - 4. Be sure you have a solid prayer and Bible reading life. Luke 18:1; II Tim. 2:15.
  - 5. Walk in all the light God gives you. I John 1:7.
  - 6. Learn to know the Spirit's voice. Heb. 3:7-8.
  - 7. Develop a familiarity with his ways and the ability to recognise his presence. Heb. 3:10-11.

## CONCLUSION



## *Openness to the Holy Spirit*

- A.** Some warnings:
- 1.** Do not assume you are open to the Spirit today just because you may have been yesterday.
    - a.** Mary and Joseph proceeded without Jesus, 'thinking he was in their company.' Luke 2:44.
    - b.** Our relationship with the Holy Spirit must be current.
  - 2.** Do not assume you are open because you have taken a strong stand on some valid issue.
    - a.** For example you can take a stand on specific issues and not be necessarily open to the Spirit:
      - (1)** Abortion.
      - (2)** Inspiration of scripture.
      - (3)** Sound teaching.
    - b.** You could have the gifts of the Spirit and not be open; after all, they are irrevocable. Rom. 11:29.
  - 3.** Do not assume you are open to the Spirit because God is blessing you.
    - a.** You may be prospering.
    - b.** You may have been healed.
    - c.** You may have a good job.
    - d.** You may know God's guidance.
- B.** The consequence of not being open is horrendous; it means probably:
- 1.** You cannot enter God's rest. Heb. 3:7-11.
  - 2.** God swears an oath against you. Heb. 3:11.
  - 3.** You cannot hear him speak again. Heb. 5:11ff.
  - 4.** You cannot be renewed again to repentance. Heb. 6:6.
- C.** But if you are open to the Spirit - and able to recognise him at work:

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- 1.** You are at peace with yourself.
- 2.** You are not likely to miss what he is doing.