Sins Against The Holy Spirit

“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” 1 Timothy 3:15.

There is no reference of course here, to a structure of stone, or brick, or iron or wood. It is rather and very clearly too. A reference to the spiritual house built up by living souls, in the true temple of God. When I call to mind a single text, it is enough to show this. It is where the apostle says “We are building together for the habitation of God through the Spirit. If we enter into this house as masters we may talk as we please about its furniture, about its ordering, about the guests; we can converse as we choose. If, on the contrary, the Holy Ghost, the third person if the Trinity dwells in this house, and we are here as his guests, we should study how to behave ourselves in the church of God, -the habitation of the Holy Ghost.

I desire, this morning to point out three sins against the Holy Ghost, as having a special, and most fatal, relation to the life or death of the church of God; and these three are:-

1. Resisting the Spirit.
2. Grieving the Spirit.
3. Quenching the Spirit.

RESISTING THE SPIRIT. You remember in that sermon preached by Stephen, he ends his great discourse with this pointed rebuke:—“Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.” Now, these words express the greatest possible sin which the church of God can commit; For the persons of the Trinity are so related, that an injury being done to one, all the others seek to avenge that injury. When the Jews stoned Stephen they rejected God a second time, having put to death the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, they now reject the third. How long suffering God is with them!—“All day long have I stretched out my hand to a disobedient and gainsaying people.” From the third hour to the sixth hour while he stretched his hands upon the cross, while every drop of blood from his five wounds pleaded for mercy. From the sixth hour until the ninth hour while there was darkness over the earth he still stretched out his hands and cried, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.” When will those arms ever stretch so wide as when upon the cross? And then he yields up the Spirit, dies, is buried, rises again, the third day, ascends to his Father, and in fifty days comes back once more to plead with them that they may receive him. And so, Stephen stands up, filled with the Holy Ghost, and once more Jesus Christ is pleading with Israel to have mercy upon themselves. And that is exactly what Jesus Christ did: - Beginning with Moses he explained to them all the Scriptures.” Jesus Christ has been put to death by you, and in putting Him to death you have crucified the Holy and the Just, and chosen in his stead a murderer.” But instead of being softened, they gnashed upon him with their teeth and dragged him out of the City and put him to death. Will the other persons of the Godhead remember to vindicate the man? When Moses came out of the mountain his face shone so that the children of Israel were afraid to come nigh unto him, and the glory was so bright he had to put a veil over his face. When Stephen ended his discourse they said he uttered blasphemous words against man and God, and the same light flashed from his face, and they that saw his face
said it looked like that of an angel. God said, “Do you despise me? I, God, reveal my glory in the face of my servant Stephen as a rebuke to your blasphemy.” And then, looking up towards heaven he sees Jesus Christ who had just seated himself upon his throne, rise up as if in indignation and impatient to vindicate the cause of his martyr, he says “I see Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and all three persons of the Trinity are involved in this scene, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost speaking by his servant Stephen. Now dear friends, this is a solemn lesson, not for the age, but for us. How flippantly we speak of the preacher, and how severely we use our ears with regards to his message that we hear. If he is elegant, fascinating and polished, we listen to him forgetting that God still speaks by the Holy Ghost, and that in rejecting his service we forget God, himself. Mark, when the Hebrews rejected the Son of God he says “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” But, back he comes and pleads with them through Stephen and again they reject Him, and then the sentence goes forth, “Lo, we turn to the Gentiles”, and now, what has come to pass with the house of Israel? Their synagogues still exist, services are still held, their forms and rites are still repeated every Sabbath mass is read, and feasts are still commemorated as in the time of Christ but what is wanting in the Jewish synagogue today? Only one thing; God is absent. He has not been there since the day they rejected the testimony of Stephen, and notwithstanding the splendor of the services, the imposing grandeur still visible in many of their churches today, all this is but the hollow voice coming out of the whitened sepulchre, the decaying body from which the soul of God has flown. Forsaken of God, Israel roams. And it is most lamentable to observe that the same thing exactly exists in our cities today. The same fate has come to the Christian Church of God here in our own city. What has become of the churches founded by those holy men, Cotton Mather, John Eliot, and many others, -men not behind apostles in their piety and faith. What has become to the churches founded by them? They are still with us today. You can find them, go into them, and you will listen to grand overtures pouring forth from grand organs, and from some remote corner a carefully selected choir of four voices render elegant and artistic melody. You will hear the voice of prayer, and everywhere you will notice imminent respectability. Is anything wanting in these, our historic churches? I say it reverently; only one thing, - the presence of the Holy Ghost. He has long since departed from them, and for years no movement of the Spirit among them been theirs. God sent them prophets, - George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards and others. Whitfield preached on yonder common, because in the city of Boston not a church would open its doors to him. Jonathan Edwards was driven out of Northampton because he rebuked the people for the want of spiritual life which he saw there. And has not the same thing come to pass? Instead of the pure and simple faith of the fathers we see the worshippers provided with forms of worship to read, but what is wanting? God is not there, My beloved brethren, I want you to understand that these people caused the Holy Ghost to be driven out of the church, and when that happens, I tell you it is the worst calamity that can come to a body once called the Holy Church of the Living God. In a crypt of an old cathedral in Europe I, with others was invited to pass into a little dark room to see the body of one of the princesses of Europe. We went in, and there in a glass coffin she lay, robed in the most exquisite silks and satins; upon every one of her skeleton fingers glittered diamonds and rare gems, upon her breast was a cross studded with precious gems, rare gems, and upon her head a crown into which had been wrought every kind of beautiful stones that could
be gathered together. Only one thing wanted. The princess was dead, and there she has been dead for centuries. And I went out into the cathedral, and there I saw the magnificent appointments of worship. The building was thronged with people who came from all parts of the world to walk through it and to gaze on its most wonderful architecture. While we stood admiring the priests came out in their gorgeous apparel, and a procession of boys clad in pure white chanting wonderful music as they marched headed by ones bearing aloft a cross studded with rich gems, but what was wanting in all of this? Nothing except the Holy Ghost. For centuries that magnificent church had been one desolate residence where God dwells not because the Holy Spirit had been resisted until a last he took his flight and has been there no more. Do I seem to speak severely? I am but simply setting forth the truth. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost as did your fathers." God rejected, Christ rejected, the Holy Ghost rejected. There are no more persons in the Trinity to reject, and now from the destruction of Jerusalem, Israel has been without Christ. Now, I bring you to the direct point. What is the offending member? The Ear. They would not hear. "Ye uncircumcised in hearts and ears," said Stephen. No sooner had Jesus Christ ascended to the Father than he spoke seven times like a voice of thunder "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches, and "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches," and he did not repeat that seven times without intending to emphasize that same word. Now I beg you to notice the emphasis upon this fact: - When a leper was to be cleansed, the blood was put upon his ear as well as his hand and foot. And so when a slave who may have his liberty at the end of seven years chooses to remain with his master he would bore his ear with an awl, and nail his ear to his master's door — a most significant act. By that act he says "Henceforth I hear thy slightest command, am obedient to thy will." So, we as Christians, should have that implicit obedience to the voice of God that will not question his ways, but always be listening to hear his commands. Have you heard him? I beg of you this morning to search your hearts, for the sin of sins is that having ears we do not hear, so that by and by the Holy Spirit will refuse to speak.

GRIEVING THE SPIRIT. The Apostle Paul says in Thess., "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God". It is a very beautiful word. You can not grieve an influence, and therefore the use of this word. You cannot grieve an enemy, you may resist them, and smite them, but you cannot grieve only one who is very near to you, and this at once suggests to me the great, loving, tender, gracious Person, my Friend, my Helper. God the Divine Father sent God His Son to be my counsel, tender of heart, kind in His desire to me, and I am admonished not to grieve Him. You may grieve a mother who loves you, you may grieve a father who is kind o you, but "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

How may we do it? Just one or two instances as it seems to me:

In the church we usurp offices which are His alone. In the church we usurp vessels which are His alone, and dare to venture our ideas as to the manner in which the worship of God should be conducted. What is our light regarding the worship of God? The first thing is this: - God is a Spirit and seeketh such to worship him, and they that worship him, and they that worketh him must do it in Spirit and in truth." Our worship must be in the Holy Ghost. Here the Word is preached from Sunday to Sunday. How is it preached? We have only one solitary statement as to how it was preached. "We have preached the gospel to you in the Holy Ghost. Here we praise God in the service of song.
How? “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves making melody in your hearts to the Lord.” Here prayer is to be offered. How is it to be rendered up? “Praying in the Holy Ghost.” Here the church meets to counsel and advise with reference to the arrangements of its affairs. And from the first council held we get these words. It seemed good to the Holy Ghost.” So it will be if the counsellors take the Holy Ghost to preside over the council. Now, suppose you say, “Praying is all right, but, alas our preacher prays in ungrammatical form and offends our ears; we think best to have certain forms, and read our prayers.” Suppose you say “Singing is all right and good, but that of the people is not up to the proscribed artistic standard, and we therefore will hire four persons to do our singing for us, and no matter if they are properly qualified as to spiritual life or not, they sing for us.”

Suppose you say “Preaching is good, but we must have something that will cause the people to stare with admiration, and therefore want as literary a man as can be found, and as for our officers, if we get into trouble which is beyond ourselves to settle amicably, why, we have only to call in an attorney.” Do all this, and you only have to listen some quiet moment when alone with God, and you will hear “Ye do resist the Holy Ghost.” How will it be with us if we refuse to let him take the place that belongs to him. Suppose you get together, a few of you, and say, “Now, we want a man who can draw more people here. When you call a pastor to attract the people you are in danger if setting aside the Holy Ghost so that he may leave you. It is a dreadful thing when he does.

I have been to Sir Walter Scott’s house. You are shown in; there is the table where he wrote, and there are the inkstand and pens upon it. He has only gone out for a moment, Here is the couch where he slept, and here the library with his books and pictures. You go from room to room. How homelike it seems. Only one thing wanted; Sir Walter Scott is not there, and so in the church, if you have not the Holy Ghost it will be as the house without its master and you will know it as soon as you are in the church, if you have not the Holy Ghost it will be as the house without its master and you will know it as soon as you are in the church for he is not there you do not feel him. Now there are two persons in Scripture also that I want you to remember. One’s name is Uzziah and the other one is Uzziah. You remember the story of the ark being carried on the cart, and how when it was shaken and jostled Uzziah put forth his hand to steady it, and the swift punishment that overtook him. What was the matter with Uzziah, and the other. Was he not interested in the welfare of the ark? Of course. And hadn’t he the best of intentions in the world in steadying it from falling? Certainly he had. And why was God so angry with him? Because God does not want us to take care of Him. We cannot steady ourselves, much less him. This is what the church of Jesus Christ sometimes undertakes to do, to steady the ark. It is a sign of the age that all sorts of inventions are brought up to entertain people. It is simply an attempt on the part of officious people to steady the ark. “But” you say of the preacher, “Isn’t it necessary to draw people? Yes, but it is not my business or yours. “I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me.” It is my place to hold up Jesus so I can say to you “Before whom Jesus Christ is set forth in the midst of you.” My responsibility ends there when I hold up Jesus Christ. Let us be careful we do not steady the ark lest God’s anger be kindled against us. Now, as to Uzziah. He was prosperous king in Jerusalem. He thought he would go into the tabernacle and offer
sacrifice. He had not been called to that office. The priests said he must not do so, but he paid no heed and rushed in to the holy place, swinging his censer, and God instantly smote him with leprosy in the forehead and he remained so for life. How many a man because he is eloquent thinks he is qualified to minister in the sanctuary of God. His entering into such a place is blasphemy. Rationalism is leprosy. God smites with the leprosy of pride, self conceit and rationalism. Only those who have been intended by the Holy Ghost can presume to stand in the Holy place. Although there is much more I could say on this point I must hasten on.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT.

Beware of putting out the light which has been kindled. Jesus says “A bruised reed will I not break nor a smoking flax will I quench.” You are like a cracked reed that makes no music but that He will fling it away. And instead of burning, you are only a smoking wick that sends up offensive reek, and not flame. But mark, He says “I will not quench it.” And so long as there is a spark of life in the wick it is cherished. Alas, too often it goes out entirely. More and more every day I realize it. As I look back and call up the long list of names who have been as bright and shining lights in this church. Where is James? I remember him ten years ago in this place, a young man so full of hope and promise. I saw him yesterday and spoke with him. He has become wealthy, and when I inquired about him they tell me the larger part of his money is going in fast horses; he has a fancy for the race. Oh, James how my heart breaks over you. Your face was so radiant, and your soul so happy and now when I speak to you there is neither response nor light. It is but the smoking of the wick after the flame has been extinguished. Then there was Mary. Where is she? Well do I remember her consecrated life and joyful testimony years ago. Well, she has married and become wealthy. Not satisfied with her commodious residence she has urged her husband to build another, and I might go through the list but I have not time.

I plead with you this morning not to quench the Spirit; and so I have told you how you should behave in the house of God, in this earthly temple, but you have been introduced into a temple whose builder is God, who dwells today with men in the Holy Ghost. The place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Oh, let us be careful how we behave in the house of God, and I plead with you again who are not believers I beseech you this morning to come to Jesus Christ, to take Him as your Friend and Saviour, and follow Him to the end, which may God grant, for His name’s sake. Amen.

A.J. G.
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