

WHY GRIEVE YOUR COMFORTER?

Today's Text: Isaiah Chap. 63

Extracts:

For [the Lord] said, "Surely they are My people, children who will not lie." So He became their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and He bore them and carried them, all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them [Is. 63: 8-10]

*Dan Brown's **The Da Vinci Code**, is a runaway best seller, the movie version of which will soon be released. It is based on the blasphemous claim that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus who bore Him a child! In Italy, an atheist, Luigi Cascioli, recently took Rev. Enrico Righi to court for writing in a parish bulletin that Jesus did exist, and that he was born of a couple named Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem and lived in Nazareth. The atheist is suing to stop the church from "deceiving people by furthering the fable that Christ existed" and from "gaining financially by 'impersonating' as Christ someone by the name of John of Gamala, the son of Judas from Gamala."¹*

As we approach end-times, many more of such blasphemies will surface. However, as bad as Jesus-bashing may seem, Dan Brown, Cascioli and their fellow travellers can still be saved and go to heaven if they repent. That is because, in the words of Jesus Himself, "anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him" [Matt. 12: 32]. But what of those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit? Jesus says that they will NEVER be forgiven and that they are "subject to eternal condemnation" [Mk 2: 29].

Since other religions do not even know or recognize the person of the Holy Spirit, it means that Christians are the ones who face this grievous danger. I can even postulate that the believers who go to hell are those who have blasphemed the Holy Spirit. We do so when we grieve Him. How do we do that and how can we avoid it? Find out in today's lesson.

¹ "Italy court asks: Did Jesus exist?"

<http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/01/22/christ.book.ap/index.html>

1. The Holy Spirit as the Comforter

In His last comforting dialogue with His apostles, Jesus dwelt at length on the person of the Holy Spirit. He told them [**Jn 14: 16-17, 26**]:

I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever- the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.... The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

If the Holy Spirit is another Helper, then, Jesus is the first Helper. Jesus told His apostles, “I will not leave you orphans” [**Jn 14: 18**], and “let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” [v. **27**]. Therefore, as we face the uncertainties of an increasingly wicked world, we need a dependable comforter. That role is ably played by the Holy Spirit in several ways, such as:

(a) *The Holy Spirit enables us to call Jesus Lord*

You remove Jesus and all religions will be the same! Have you ever found yourself in an official setting with people from different religions? When a Christian is invited to say the opening prayers, the instruction from the organizers is, “Please, make the prayer acceptable to all. Don’t say ‘in the name of Jesus!’” If you want to be user-friendly, you may accept that proposition; otherwise, you may have to refuse to lead the prayer all together. However, some people have been known to brave the odds and pray to the Father through His Son, Jesus. The only reason that they are able to do so is that “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” [**1 Cor. 12: 3**], and “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” [**1 Jn 4: 4**].

See how the Holy Spirit transformed Peter the coward, who had denied Jesus thrice during His trial, to Peter the rock who could stand boldly after the Pentecost experience and preach the Christ to a world audience. In one day, about three thousand souls received Christ and were baptized [**Acts 2: 1-42**]. Also, you will recall that when Ananias came to meet Paul, he said to him, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and *be filled with the Holy Spirit.*” Soon after, Paul received water baptism and was filled with the Holy Spirit, and “immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” [**Acts 9: 17-20**]. Here was a man who had made the persecution of Christians his passion, the young man who held the clothes of those who killed Stephen [**Acts 7: 58**].

(b) *The Holy Spirit is our cable provider to spiritual channels*

Without a satellite dish or cable connection, we cannot receive cable TV channels, no matter how good may be our TV sets. In like manner, the Holy Spirit is the one who opens our eyes to spiritual dangers to avoid and God's promises to hope for. When the doctor says that there is no hope, the Holy Spirit will show you the end of the matter, that all shall be well. When you are scared to take a tough professional examination or test, the Holy Spirit will show you in advance that you have passed!

Take the case of Israel that was threatened by the king of Syria [2 Kgs 6: 8-17]. Each time he planned his strategy of attack, the Holy Spirit would reveal it to the prophet Elisha who would warn the king of Israel. After several failures, the Syrian king got worried. He called his servants and asked, "Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?" One of them replied, "None, my lord, O king; *but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom*" [vv. 11-12]!

In another stressful situation, Stephen was surrounded by a hostile mob that was about to stone him to death for proclaiming the divinity of Jesus. There was bound to be fear in the human heart. However, Stephen, "being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!'" [Acts 7: 55-56]. With such assuring presence, he was no longer afraid to die for Christ. In the light of the Holy Spirit, we can afford to walk by faith and not by sight [2 Cor. 5: 7].

(c) *The Holy Spirit enables us to call God our Father*

The word of God says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but *you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'*" [Rom. 8: 14-15]. Since it is by the Holy Spirit that we can call Jesus Lord and those who believe in Jesus are the sons of God [Jn 1: 12], it follows that Spirit-led people are the sons of God by adoption, joint heirs with Christ, the only begotten Son of God [Rom. 8: 17; Jn 3: 16].

(d) *The Holy Spirit makes us temples of the living God*

The surest evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit is when He indwells us and our bodies become God's temple [1 Cor. 6: 19]. Then, He will dwell in us and walk among us and He will be our God and we shall be His people, sons and daughters [2 Cor. 6: 16-18]. Then, He will make even our enemies to be at peace with us [Prov. 16: 7]. Then, we will not be afraid of what anybody can do to us [Ps. 118: 6]. When our enemies surround us like bees, they will be quenched like a fire of thorns. When

they push us violently that we might fall, the Lord will help us and in His name, we will destroy them [**vv. 12, 13**]!

From the forgoing, we easily recognize that no human being or idol can comfort us as much or as well as the Holy Spirit does. Yet, many of us are busy each new day grieving Him, to make Him unwanted. In the 63rd Chapter of the book of Isaiah, God is reminding the people of Israel how their ancestors grieved the Holy Spirit on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land and the high price that they paid for it. Let us find out.

2. How we grieve the Holy Spirit

To grieve somebody is to provoke or anger or enrage him/her. We cause them pain or anguish on account of our conduct. With respect to the Holy Spirit, we are telling Him to get out of our bodies and spirit and leave us to run our lives as we choose!

In today's lesson, God reminded Isaiah how much He was ready to comfort the children of Israel. He regarded them as His people who would not lie [**Is. 63: 8**]. When they were afflicted, He was afflicted and "the Angel of His presence saved them." In "His love and in His pity He redeemed them" [**v. 9**]. But what was their response? "They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit." And how did God deal with their rebellion? "He turned Himself against them *as an enemy and He fought against them*" [**v. 10**].

The *key* source of grieving the Holy Spirit is rebellion, which is closely linked to the sins of witchcraft, stubbornness and idolatry [**1 Sam. 15: 23**]. It manifests in the following ways, among others:

(a) *Unbelief*

The word of God makes it clear that without faith it is *impossible* to please Him [**Heb. 11: 6**]. In spite of the numerous miracles that God had performed before the children of Israel, such as the plagues on Egypt and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea by foot, they kept complaining and grumbling about everything. The manna was tasteless unlike the cucumbers, leeches, and meats that they used to eat in Egypt!

The turning point in God's patience with them came when He asked Moses to send 12 spies (one per tribe) to the Promised Land to find out about the land and its occupants, to assess their strengths and weaknesses and the state of their economy [**Num. 13: 1-20**]. After forty days of hard work and analysis, all the spies agreed that the land was in deed as good as the Lord had described it [**vv. 26-27**]. However, ten of the spies brought back an evil report that there were giants in the land who would make it impossible for the children of Israel to occupy it. Only Caleb and Joshua

disagreed with them, maintaining that they should rather focus on God's promise rather than on fear of man. The majority view carried the day and the people cried all night and wanted to stone Moses for misleading them [**vv. 27-33; 14: 1-10**]!

In spite of Moses' plea on their behalf, God punished them for their unbelief. The generation (20 years old and above) that did not believe did not enter the Promised Land [**Ps. 95: 8-11**], "nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it" except Caleb and Joshua [**Num. 14: 23-24**]. The journey took forty years, that is, a year for each day that the spies had spent [**v. 34**]. Therefore, God does not treat lightly any lack of faith in Him.

(b) *Lying*

To lie is to say what is not true or to uphold an error. There is hardly anyone I know who does not tell at least one lie per day! This is because truth hurts. How many people can tell their spouses, friends or colleagues the truth about their breath, weight or conduct? Yet, before God, there is nothing like white lie or black or yellow lies. A lie is a lie is a lie and liars cannot inherit the kingdom of God [**Rev. 21: 27**] because it is a sin against the Holy Spirit.

See what happened to Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. They sold a possession and kept part of the proceeds while telling Peter that they had given all to God. They died instantly. Peter had asked Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to *lie to the Holy Spirit* and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?" [**Acts 5: 1-5**]. Can you then imagine the danger that we place ourselves when we cheat on taxes, tithes and offerings, when we cook church books, when we do not live the gospel that we preach?

(c) *Blasphemy*

Blasphemy can take several forms. For example, it is blasphemy to say irreverent things, especially untruths, about God or any member of the Trinity. False prophecy is a form of blasphemy because somebody is attributing to God what He has not spoken. Whatever the form it takes, God does not treat it lightly because it is a sin against the Holy Spirit. It is rebellion.

In one case, Korah and his group questioned the spiritual authority of Moses and Aaron over the children of Israel, saying, "You take too much upon yourself, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" [**Num. 16: 1-3**]. In reaction, God opened the

ground which swallowed up all the rebels and their possessions [vv. 19-35]! In another example, Hananiah, a false prophet, tried to turn the people away from Jeremiah's true prophecy by claiming that it was the "Lord of hosts, the God of Israel" that also spoke to him! In response, God sent through Jeremiah to the false prophet, "I will cast you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the Lord." A few months later, the false prophet died [Jer. 28: 1-17]. This is a clear warning, especially to those with the gift of prophecy, to be sure what is the word of God and what is their own opinion.

(d) *Seared conscience*

Some people resist for so long the inner voice calling for repentance that they no longer hear it. They live an abominable life style that puts them at enmity with God. That is what is called a seared conscience. Paul puts it eloquently when he wrote, "now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, *speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron*" [1 Tim. 4: 1-2]. God has given such people up to vile passions because "those who practise such things are deserving of death" [Rom. 1: 26-32]. Therefore, be careful that you are not endorsing or condoning sin all in the name of being politically correct!

3. Conclusion: there is yet hope!

God does not waste time with those who have blasphemed the Holy Spirit. He kills them *instantly* because they are going to hell any way, whether they live long or not, whether they repent or not! Mary Baxter's testimony confirms that there are many believers and ministers in hell largely because of unforgiving spirit, double lifestyles and such like sins against the Holy Spirit.² However, there is yet hope! Writing about his past, Paul said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, *although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief* [1 Tim. 1: 12-13]. It is most likely that you have put your eternity in heaven in jeopardy more out of ignorance than deliberate choice. Get on your knees right away and reconcile with God because you don't own the next minute.

Why grieve the Holy Spirit, your Comforter?

² Mary K. Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Hell*, New Kensington, PA 15068; 1993: pp. 51-52, for example