



Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? – Part 10
Various Scriptures
GCSP – 04/17/2010

As most of you know, I am not very mechanically inclined. I understand some of the basic principles but would be hard pressed to identify many of the parts of an engine by sight.

I owned and operated a small lawn maintenance business for several years in the late 80's and early 90's, so I did get to know some of the aspects of the small engines on my lawnmowers. The mowers I had came equipped with a pull-cord that you would yank to get the engine running. Pulling that cord rapidly would cause a minor spark; the spark would ignite the fuel; and the ignition of the fuel would set off a chain of events that got all of the engine parts operating as they should for me to start cutting the grass.

Occasionally I could not get the mower to start. Since I was not very mechanically inclined, and nothing was obvious to me right off the bat, I had to work through things in my mind to come up with the possible reasons my mower would not start. My initial thinking was either there was no spark or there was no fuel coming into contact with that spark. After making sure there was plenty of fuel in the tank and checking the connections for the spark plug wire I would sometimes visually inspect the spark plug itself to make sure it was not corroded.

All of that seemed to be fine as best I could tell so I then concluded that the fuel was not getting to where it needed to be to ignite the spark. After a little more tinkering I discovered that the fuel filter was clogged, thus no fuel was flowing. And with no fuel flowing, it did not matter how much spark was being created by pulling that cord. I could have pulled on the cord all day and all night with a full tank of gas and never got that engine started.

The power and benefit of that engine was closed off because of a dirty fuel filter.

I was all set to turn our attention to the baptism and/or filling of the Holy Spirit this evening but there was uneasiness in my spirit as I did some final reading before starting to type. The more I read the more I felt unsettled. So I knelt down to pray again and to ask for guidance in how this sermon was to take shape, and the Spirit brought to mind a passage that was briefly mentioned in one of the resources I had read.

Once I re-read that passage a peace came over me as to the text and topic for tonight, but a sense of heaviness and foreboding gripped me at the same time knowing that I had not done any preparation in this direction; I felt as if I now needed another week before preaching this sermon. And I could almost hear the Spirit chuckling and saying, "That's right where I want you to be."

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Prophecy of **Isaiah**.

Isaiah 59:1-2

Let's pray.

The dirt that is clogging the line between us and the power of God is sin. When sin is in our life it doesn't matter how much we pray or read our Bibles or attend services and Bible

studies or listen to good teaching and read good books, the power simply does not exist in our lives. We are cut off from that power by our sin; we have blocked out the Holy Spirit from functioning in our lives.

Isaiah begins with, “**Behold,**” which basically tells us that based upon something previous to this I am making a statement. So before we begin to dissect these two verses, let’s make sure we have the proper context from which the statement comes.

Back up to the beginning of **Isaiah 58**.

Isaiah 58:1-3a

The people of Judah had been crying out to God in complaint. Why was God not answering their prayers? Why was He not delivering them from their afflictions? They were not only praying to God but they were fasting and to their understanding they were humbling themselves before Him. What else is there God? Why do you remain silent when we are following this formula to stir You to action?

This was the attitude and the expectations of Judah. They thought if they would follow a prescribed formula, or follow five easy steps to getting anything you want from God, that God would be required to do as they pleased. They had denigrated God down to a puppet on a string or a genie from a bottle that had to obey them if they did this, this, and this in that order.

With a divine sarcasm that just drips from every word, God says of Judah, “**Yet they seek Me day by day**” (**58:2a**). God’s first indictment on Judah is that they have a false piety; a spiritual arrogance about them. They speak of seeking God, and apparently do seek Him, but they do not seek Him on His terms but on their own. In other words they are seeking God from a position of self-righteousness and with an agenda of getting what they desire, instead of seeking God on their faces in abject humility desiring only what He desires.

They were not coming to God in repentance, or in dust and ashes, as the Scriptures so often say, but were coming to God as His equal or even His superior and ordering Him around. And with this attitude they demand to know why God is not obeying them.

And beloved this is danger I see happening in certain segments Christianity today; ordering and commanding God to do certain things as we see fit. I understand that we can absolutely claim and expect the promises of Scripture when we are in complete obedience, but making the leap to commanding God and ordering Him to act according to our schedule and our whims and desires is crossing the line into assuming the throne instead of reverently leaving the details of God fulfilling His promises to Him.

Spiritual arrogance and false piety leave no room for conviction because we are coming from a position of not believing we have sin in our lives; a dangerous place to be.

Hold your place in **Isaiah** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **John**.

John 16:7-9

In the NASB the Holy Spirit is called the Helper in this passage; in the KJV and other mostly older translations He is called the Comforter. The Greek word is *paraclete* or *parakletos*. Both Helper and Comforter are good translations of *paraclete*. A *paraclete* was one who was

sent to assist, to bring help and/or to bring comfort. In **John 14:16** Jesus refers to Himself as a *paraclete* when He speaks of the Father sending “another” *paraclete* in His place when He ascends into heaven.

The first characteristic Jesus gives of this other *paraclete*, is One who will convict the world of sin. And while it is very true that the primary context of this speaks of convicting unbelievers of their sin, we would be in error to think that that conviction is not also meant for believers when we are in sin as well (**1 John 1:9**). As Matthew Henry rightly states, “...conviction must prepare for comfort, and must also separate between the precious and the vile, and mark out those to whom comfort does not belong.”

The point Mr. Henry makes is that without conviction of sin comfort is not necessary in the sense we are looking at in Isaiah. Obviously comfort can come when grieved or persecuted or injured in some way, but the sense in which comfort is to come to Judah in this section of Isaiah’s prophecy, we are talking about comfort after repentance. This section of Isaiah begins in chapter 40 where it is clear that part of Isaiah’s calling was to comfort the people. But in chapter 58-59 we see that Isaiah’s calling is also to convict the people of their sin. So sin must be repented of before the comfort can come.

Mr. Henry also speaks of conviction separating the precious from the vile. Conviction of sin elicits one of two responses from God’s people: You will either be crushed by the weight of your sin and fall to your knees in repentance before a holy God or you will brush it aside and in an attitude of self-righteousness and continue to pursue your own agenda. The precious are those who repent, or as Jesus says in **Matthew 5**, “**Blessed are the poor in spirit**” (**v. 3**); “**Blessed are those who mourn**” (**v. 4**); “**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness**” (**v. 6**); and “**Blessed are the pure in heart**” (**v. 8**). The vile are the proud and those who refuse to repent; those who refuse to see their own sin but only see the sins of others (**Matthew 7:1-5**). Conviction separates the precious from the vile.

Lastly, Mr. Henry speaks of conviction marking out those to whom comfort does not belong. Those who become so blinded by their own self-righteousness and their own form of justice do not deserve, nor will they receive, the comfort of the Holy Spirit. When self-righteousness and vigilante justice rules the day the comfort of the Holy Spirit will be non-existent and you will in essence be marked out, or have the line between you and God’s power clogged.

Let’s go back to the prophecy of **Isaiah** now.

Isaiah 58:2b

After sarcastically speaking of how His people “**seek Me day by day**,” God also says they “**delight to know My ways**.” Again, remember God is mocking Judah with these statements, not commending them. So how could they and how could we be missing the boat by delighting to know the ways of God?

We miss the boat by simply accumulating the knowledge of God’s Word but not putting any of it into practice.

Ezekiel 33:32 says, “Behold you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them.”

The familiar words of James, speaks to this very issues as well: “**But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves**” (**James 1:22**).

Beloved, every time we miss or ignore the opportunity to obey God’s Word, to do exactly as the Lord tells us to do, we delude or deceive ourselves. And as we continue in this form of ignorance we will find ourselves becoming more and more spiritually arrogant and self-righteous because we are becoming numb or cauterized to sin, not seeing the need for repentance.

When you get yourself in this position you will only see the sins of others and not your own; your focus will become a sort of tunnel vision that does not allow you to see things from God’s perspective. You will delight in the ways of God and the accumulation of the knowledge of God but you will never see the primary application for your own life; you will become the one who is always wishing so-and-so was in attendance to hear this message instead of asking the Holy Spirit to convict you where conviction is needed.

Every time you open the Word of God, every time you listen to the Word of God being taught or preached, every time you go to your knees in prayer, your first priority is your own need for repentance not someone else. As the old negro spiritual says, “*It’s not my momma or my papa, it’s not my brother or my sister, but it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.*”

And just as God is mocking Judah He is mocking us when our first thoughts and inclinations are focused on the sins of others instead of on our own.

I regularly witness one of our Park County Sheriffs breaking the speed limit down Tarryall Road, both in his county Durango and in his personal vehicle. I also have on occasion witnessed him writing a speeding ticket to other motorists on that same stretch of roadway. This is a picture of us most of the time; we pay no mind to the Law of God when it comes to our own thoughts and behavior but we are quick to write those tickets when someone else messes up.

God continues with His indictment and mocking of Judah: “**As a nation that has done righteousness and has not forsaken the ordinances of their God**” (**58:2c**) The Lord’s indictment here is in their religious practices and their traditions and their feasts and festivals. While God Himself instituted most of what they were practicing it had become rote and ritual instead of a celebration of God. Judah was at ease with their spiritual condition.

Hold your place in **Isaiah** and turn with me in your Bibles to the prophecy of **Amos** (**Daniel, Hosea, Joel**, and then **Amos**, if you need a little help).

Amos 6:1a

As believers, the only security we should have is in our salvation, in God, in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and in the Word of God. We can rest in that but we cannot rest in our own merits or in our own righteousness. We cannot be secure in our own self-erected kingdoms or our own interpretations of Scripture or our own traditions and rituals.

Those who place their trust in their bank accounts will fail; those who place their trust in their physical abilities will be disappointed; those who place their trust in other people will be disillusioned; those who place their trust in knowledge and intellect will be put to shame.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones” (Proverbs 3:5-8).

The prophet Amos is telling us that we cannot feel at ease or feel secure at any time if that ease and security is coming from anyplace other than trusting in the Lord and in our obedience to his Word.

And beloved, we are so apt to spiritual blindness. We are self-deceived at just about every corner because we do not follow the mandates of Scripture.

Someone gossips about a brother or sister, whether the information is true or not, and instead of stopping it in its tracks we soak it up. Someone has a complaint about a brother or sister and instead of telling them to go to their brother and sister alone as Scripture says, we dive into the issue head first. Someone mistreats us and instead of letting love cover it or praying for them we fall into Satan’s snare and allow it to become an offense.

The bottom line is we immediately react to all of these examples and more according to the flesh instead of according to the Spirit and to God’s Word. And we feel at ease in Zion and secure in the mountains of Samaria, and God says “Woe to you!”

Back in **Isaiah**, God continues...

Isaiah 58:2d

“They ask Me for just decisions, they delight in the nearness of God.” This is hypocrisy. The gist of what God is saying is that they put on the appearance of having godly motives and godly intentions in all that they do, but they are merely putting on a show for the purposes of being viewed as blameless in their iniquity. Again, 20-20 vision when looking on the sins of others but blind when it comes to their own sin.

We have a preview of the Pharisees in the behavior of Judah; they are **“whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness,”** as Jesus called them (**Matthew 23:27**).

And in their spiritual blindness and hypocrisy, they have the audacity to cry out to God.

Isaiah 58:3a

We fast and we are humble before You God (a lie), so why aren’t You acting according to our wishes? And the rest of chapter 58 deals with the hypocrisy of their fasts and their utter lack of humility; which brings us to the two verses of our primary concern tonight.

Isaiah 59:1a

“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save.” Apparently the people of Judah were questioning God’s power to deliver them when they were not getting their way. Isaiah quickly corrects the error of their thinking; God is not impotent nor is He responsible

for the lack of deliverance. God is still all-powerful and fully capable of doing any and everything He pleases.

How often do we make the same mistake of questioning God's power? And if your answer is never or not very often, every time you take matters into your own hands you are questioning the power of God. Every time you deal with a situation as you see fit instead of giving God the time and the space to handle it according to His will and purpose, you are questioning God's power.

Isaiah 59:1b

"Nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear." God heard their cries. God knew exactly what they wanted from Him. But when they did not get an immediate answer, or did not get the answer they wanted, they questioned if God had even heard them. They assumed God either could not hear them or that He was ambivalent to their needs.

And again, how often do we question if God has heard our prayers? I could offer you the same illustrations as above to show you how often you question if God heard your prayers, assuming you did pray about these things in the first place. Every time you take matters into your own hands you are questioning if God heard your prayer. Every time you deal with a situation as you see fit instead of giving God the time and the space to handle it according to His will and purpose, you are questioning if God heard your prayer.

The psalmist says, **"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"** (**Psalm 66:18** – KJV). **Proverbs 28:9** says, **"He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination."**

The issue is not God's power and not His ability to hear your prayers, the issue is sin.

Isaiah 59:2a

"But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God." God is God and He never changes, so when there is something amiss in your relationship with God guess who's to blame? If you aren't as close to God as you once were, guess who moved away? If the power of the Holy Spirit is not evident in your life, guess who grieved who?

Hold your place one last time in **Isaiah** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Proverbs**.

Proverbs 1:24-31

"I will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes; I will not answer; they shall eat of the fruit of their own way." When we choose our own ways instead of God's ways, in ALL that we do, we are building a wall of separation between God and us. God will mock us and indict us and cut off His power and the fellowship of His Holy Spirit in our lives.

And finally, back in Isaiah, he says, **"And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear"** (**59:2b**). How can we survive with God's face turned away from us? How do we live if God does not hear us? How do we expect the filling of and the power of the Holy Spirit when we are not in proper relationship with God?

“Then they will cry out to the Lord, but He will not answer them. Instead He will hide His face from them at that time because they have practiced evil deeds” (Micah 3:4).

Let's pray.