

Are You Listening?

by J. W. Jepson

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The shadow of the truck stretched longer and longer as it cruised down Interstate 5. Cal (not his real name) was a good driver with a clean record. This was his regular run, and he was familiar with this gray ribbon.

The hum of the diesel droned in his ears, and his eyes scanned the road ahead. But Cal's thoughts were on something else. Deep inside a struggle raged. The pastor had been trying to turn him to Christ, and for weeks Cal was under conviction of sin.

Suddenly something happened ahead. Cal had to take quick action, almost piling up his rig. Shaken by the experience, he went the next day to see the pastor. "Pastor," he said, his voice trembling with emotion, "I think God is telling me to get saved."

"I think so, too," the pastor replied.

Coincidence? Perhaps, but nothing like that had happened to Cal before. It occurred while the Holy Spirit was wrestling with his soul. The correlation was significant.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is talking to people. It is not usually in an audible voice; however, He is communicating.

Nicodemus came to Jesus one night. Like the truck driver, his mind was on spiritual matters. Jesus told him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:5 - 8).

We do not see the wind, but we witness the effects of its power. Likewise, we do not see the Holy Spirit, but we observe the results of His influences on the human spirit. He urges the sinner to repent, trust Christ, and live for God. The heart yields, and the person is changed—born of the Spirit.

The Bible is the Holy Spirit's message, and He works diligently to call our attention to it. "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: '*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*'" (Hebrews 3:7, 8). As He did the truck driver, He brings people into

circumstances that reinforce the impression of truth upon the mind. He sharpens the conscience. He reproves the world of sin (John 16:8).

The Holy Spirit does not move the human will by force. His influence is moral, persuasive. He seeks to turn the heart by truth. He combines infinite values, eternal considerations, and powerful motives, and thrusts the full weight of their logic on the reason in a mighty effort to turn the soul to God.

But moral, persuasive influences can be accepted or rejected. You see a man standing on a high ledge. He is about to jump. You have no way to restrain him physically. You have only one tool—persuasion. So you address his reason, urging the strongest, highest values and considerations you can muster. You appeal to his emotions with tender passion. But what he does with your plea is up to him. The decision is his alone.

Sin is spiritual suicide. The Holy Spirit appeals to the reason, urging the strongest, highest values and considerations. Truth floods the sinner's mind, but what the soul does with the Spirit's gracious plea is its own choice.

The Holy Spirit is giving himself to the thankless task of saving people from their own self-destruction. But so long as they are committed to their self-indulgences, they frustrate Him and make their own salvation impossible. No one can be born of the Spirit until that person stops resisting the Spirit.

Acts 7 records Stephen's defense before the council. As he addressed them, he leveled this charge: "You always resist the Holy Spirit" (verse 51).

These were religious men. They attended worship, tithed, prayed, fasted, read the Scriptures. Their public conduct was highly acceptable. Yet they always resisted the Holy Spirit. Not just often—*always*—while attending worship, tithing, praying, fasting, reading the Scriptures. Because their hearts were wrong, everything was wrong. They did everything to be seen of men (see Matthew 23:5).

How do people resist the Holy Spirit? By rejecting the truth as He presents it to the mind. This is done in various ways: rejecting the truth outright; putting off obedience; diverting one's attention to something else; embracing error—by any action other than honest, immediate surrender to God.

It is alarming to see how willingly some professed Christians sin against the light. When they make up their minds to do what they want to do, what the Bible says no longer matters to them. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30). "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7).

God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Genesis 6:3). Strive implies resistance. The Holy Spirit wrestles with people because they stubbornly refuse to repent and believe the gospel.

But the gentle Holy Spirit does not take man's abuse indefinitely. The people of Noah's day found that out, and they found it out the hard way. It is a sad day to the heart of God when His Spirit, constantly frustrated, has to call it "quits" on a person.

What does resisting the Holy Spirit lead to? What are its consequences? Jesus said, "If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness" (Matthew 6:23).

As the Holy Spirit is grieved, the person has less and less interest in the gospel. The heart becomes unaffected by its presentation. Truth no longer moves the soul. The mind becomes settled in deception and error. The heart becomes cold and hard.

The Bible records the tragedy of some who were "successful" in resisting the Holy Spirit. "But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul" (1 Samuel 16:14). Israel "rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them" (Isaiah 63:10).

How horrible it is when a person's attitude and lifestyle become so obnoxious to the Holy Spirit that He can no longer stand that person. "Woe to him who strives with his Maker" (Isaiah 45:9).

Look at that precious soul! All heaven is filled with anxiety over him, and yet he trifles! Against the opposition of the Holy Spirit and his own reason he stubbornly rejects the Savior. He recklessly dashes on, crashing every roadblock the Spirit of God throws in his path. Once the siren of conscience shattered his complacency as he raced down the broad way to destruction, but now it is almost silent.

There he stands on the precipice. The Holy Spirit makes one last desperate effort to save him, but he wrenches himself from the Spirit's restraining grasp and flings himself into everlasting torment! The sight is unbearable. Heaven groans in grief.

Proverbs 29:1 warns, "He who is often reproved, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

God is patiently "telephoning" people's hearts. But if they continue to ignore ring after ring, the time can come when the Holy Spirit "hangs up" on them. So answer now, while He is still calling.