

Introduction.....	1
The Whispering God: An Introduction to Grieving the Spirit.....	2
The Ruinous Triad: Becoming God’s Enemy.....	3
Terminating the Past	11

Grieving the Spirit: The Virtue of Taking God Seriously

Pastor Gene Giguere, September 13, 2026

Introduction

- 1) Good morning, Church! We finished our study of Simon the Sorcerer last time and we concluded that Simon was a believer indeed, although very immature, very carnal. The fact that he was a blood-bought, eternally-saved man has important implications.

Simon’s old way of thinking was still very new in him. Now, why is this important? What does this have to do with deserved suffering or divine discipline? In a word: *everything!* It shows us that Simon does not stand as the epitome of someone who approached Jesus with a faith that *does not* save, or as the Church’s first false convert.

Simon stands as something far more terrifying – and relevant to each and every believer within the hearing of my voice. *He stands as the epitome of grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit.*

When we look at Simon, we see something of what it means to break the heart of the indwelling God. Sin always grieves the Spirit and Simon’s return to his old lines – his envy and his lust for attention – certainly grieved the Spirit. This is a violation of **Ephesians 4:30**, which warns: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Simon caused grief to the Spirit by trying to turn God’s sacred presence into a commercial commodity to be ‘used’ for self-aggrandizement.

The Apostle Peter’s warning was stern. Had Simon continued in his sin, his ‘grieving’ actions would have turned to ‘quenching’ ones. When we quench the Spirit, we violate **1 Thessalonians 5:19**: “Do not quench the Spirit.” To quench the Spirit is to put out His fire in our life by refusing to repent and continuing in

sin. Simon allowed his past occultic habits to re-emerge and manifest themselves. Had he continued, his sin would have suffocated the spontaneous and living flame of the Holy Spirit's work in his life.

The Whispering God: An Introduction to Grieving the Spirit

- 1) Now, each and every day, a supernatural conversation takes place within the heart of every believer. God does not typically shout; He speaks to us, through the Holy Spirit, in a still, small voice – or “the sound of a low whisper” or “a sound, a thin silence” (**1 Kings 19:12**). His divine presence – the indwelling that makes us His Temple – is given to guide us into all truth, to comfort us in our trials, and to empower us to do all that the Father desires for us to do.

Jesus promised in **John 16:13**: “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth.” And **Nehemiah 9:20** [*Old Testament*] shows that He has been working this way for a very, very long time: “You gave your good Spirit to instruct them.”

- 2) Each time the Spirit prompts me to act, or to speak, or to refrain from speaking, I'm at a critical crossroad: I can either say, ‘Yes,’ or, ‘No,’ to the Holy Spirit. Every ‘Yes,’ no matter how small, closes the distance between me and God.

With each ‘Yes’ I'm making a decision to align myself with His agenda for my life, the Father's desideratum for Gene Giguere. With each ‘Yes,’ I say with the Lord Jesus, “The cup [τὸ ποτήριον] which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (**John 18:11**, NASB95) And notice: I say, ‘Yes,’ to τὸ ποτήριον, “THE cup” – not a general cup, but the *specific* cup which the Father in His sovereign wisdom has mixed for me; the *divine desideratum*.

But every, ‘No,’ creates some distance between God and me. And mark it down: saying, ‘No,’ to the Holy Spirit is no insignificant lapse in judgment; it is a dangerous step toward real spiritual danger. When I refuse His voice, His guidance, I block His power in my life.

- 3) But “fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (**Luke 12:32**)! *God has not left us without help!* Paul reminds us that there's a wonderful safeguard against grieving the Holy Spirit: If we'll only “walk by the Spirit” we “will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (**Galatians**

5:16). Here's a beautiful truth: The *Spirit* within us will empower us to do the things the Father desires of us – *if* we'll only step out of the way!

But to say, 'No,' to Him is to say, 'Yes,' to my Old Nature. And that decision empowers my old nature to do the things which are *opposed* to the Spirit. Paul continues: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (**Galatians 5:17**). This assumes that every truly saved person *wants* to do the things which please the Father.

And Paul could not be more clear: "the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (**Galatians 6:8**). That is, the *experience* of the exuberant life Jesus gave us at our new birth right now!

- 4) For "all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (**Romans 8:14**). And while I can never lose my 'sonship' – while I can never be less than a son of God – I *can* reject *the path* of sonship. And that's precisely what we do when we say, 'No,' to His leading. When we choose *roads of the earth* over *roads of the Spirit*, we grieve the One who's sealed us unto the day of my redemption (**Ephesians 4:30**).

The Ruinous Triad: Becoming God's Enemy

- 1) Now, when we allow worldly, sinful attitudes to dwell in our hearts, we commit spiritual adultery and bring deep sorrow to the indwelling God. James was writing *to believers* when he rebuked them with these words:

"You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" (**James 4:4**)

✠ James is talking about spiritual adultery. True believers are Christ's very Bride and whenever we embrace the world, or the things of the world, we're acting like an unfaithful spouse – and the result is catastrophic in the spirit-realm.

✠ He asks rhetorically, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? The word translated "friendship" here is *φιλία*, one of the

New Testament words often translated ‘love.’ And the word translated “enmity” here is *ἐχθρα*, which always indicates an act of *profound hostility*. Literally, it means *hatred*!¹ So, we might paraphrase James’ words like this: ‘Hey don’t you get that to *love* the world is *an act of hatred* toward God?’

So, James says, “Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God ...”

✠ James holds these two amazing states of being in delicate counterpoint: To become a *friend of the world* is to set myself up [think: *human bowling pin!*] as *God’s own enemy*, even though I am blood-bought and saved.

I forget who I *am*, and the life Jesus has given me in my new birth. Pride sets in: I embrace independence, rather than dependance. I am no longer taking God seriously. And when this happens, I grieve the Holy Spirit who lives with in me. Left unchecked, divine discipline is inevitable.

And so, James warns, “Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (**James 4:6b**).

✠ We’ll say more about this in a moment, but James completes his thought by leaving us with some hope. He gives us the remedy to this dangerous spiritual predicament, and he does so succinctly. *How do I recover from grieving the Spirit and setting myself as God’s own enemy?* The answer is simplicity itself:

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God [by walking in the Spirit]. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners [through *contrition, confession* and *repentance*], and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (**James 4:7-8**).

✠ And there it is, the key to restoration and the removal of divine discipline. David, who knew a thing or two about divine discipline, put it like this in **Psalms 32:1-7**:

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

² Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts [*reckons*] no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

¹ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 419.

³ For when I kept silent [*about my sin, when I refused to confess*],
my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me
[*this is divine discipline*];
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer
[*sin results in both spiritual and physical strength*].
Selah

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you [*in confession, ὁμολογέω*],
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,”
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.
Selah

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found
[*before the process of ‘quenching’ completely extinguishes the Spirit’s voice*];
surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him
[*the ‘rush of great waters’ are the latter stages of divine discipline*].

And then this beautiful post-repentance affirmation:

⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.
Selah

David came to a place in his life where he *took God seriously*.

This is beautiful, right? But did you know that a believer – one of God’s own children(!) – can make himself an enemy of God? Look again at **James 4:4**: “Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” Do you know what God said of His people, the children of Israel in **Isaiah 63:10**? It says, “they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore, he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.” This is a *problem*! Even the thought of God becoming our enemy should horrify each and every one of us!

- 2) But this is what happens when I grieve the Spirit – when I say, No,’ to His agenda for my life and say, Yes, to the world, the flesh or the devil: which I call, *The*

Ruinous Triad. In Christian theology, *the world, the flesh, and the devil* are recognized as the three primary adversaries of those who desire to please the Father. They oppose all that is holy and they work to distract us from the Father's desideratum.

The world hates God. That's why John wrote, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (**1 John 2:15**).

My flesh hates God and the things of God. That's why Paul wrote, "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot" (**Romans 8:7**).

And the devil hates God and the things of God. That's why John wrote,

"Whoever makes a practice of [present active participle of ποιέω] sinning [ἁμαρτία] is of the devil [ὁ διάβολος], for the devil [ὁ διάβολος] has been sinning from the beginning [ἀπ' ἀρχῆς]. The reason the Son of God [ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ] appeared was to destroy the works of the devil [ὁ διάβολος] ... ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God [τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ], and [καὶ] who are the children of the devil [τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου]: whoever does not practice righteousness [μὴ ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην] is not of God [οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ], nor is the one who does not love his brother [καὶ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ]" (**1 John 3:8-10**).

✠ What we do indicates *whose kids we are*: either "the children of God" [τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ], or "the children of the devil" [τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου]. This seems pretty straightforward but it's not. Because there is a third category – the one that is the subject of our study this morning: "children of God" who live like "children of the devil. These believers grieve the Holy Spirit – make Him groan within them – and they make themselves God's enemy until they repent.

This *Ruinous Triad* is rooted in biblical passages such as **Ephesians 2:1-3**. Let's see if we can spot them:

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world [*there's the world*], following the prince of the power of the air [*there's the devil*], the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh

[and there's the flesh], carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

- 3) By the High Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas and some other Scholastic theologians identified the world, the flesh, and the devil as the three great enemies of the believer's soul.²

The devil tempts from without; *the world* tempts through societal pressures, and *the flesh* tempts from within – it is our ‘internal traitor.’ At a time when some thought that the way to conquer the flesh was to beat down the physical body in the practice of asceticism, Thomas Aquinas wisely taught that the solution was not to destroy the body, but to seek God's grace, God's help.³ He called this an ‘infusion of grace’ (*infusio gratiae*), a phrase I like very much.⁴

Indeed, we are *only* ever truly protected from this *Ruinous Triad* by running to God – by submitting to His Spirit and walking in fellowship with Him. Again, “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (**Galatians 5:16**). And the Holy Spirit is explicitly called the “Spirit of Grace” in both **Zechariah 12:10** and **Hebrews 10:29**. And **Hebrews 10:29** warns of the tremendous punishment that will be “deserved by the one who has ... outraged [ἐνυβρίζω, *to insult*]⁵ the Spirit of grace [τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος]”!

- 4) So, the world, the flesh, and the devil each represent a distinct type of spiritual challenge:
- The World refers to the values of our culture which resist God's truth and promote empty alternatives. And so, John warns us:

² Cf., ‘The World, the Flesh, and the Devil: Introduction,’ *Monastery of the Holy Cross: Silence in the City*, December 11, 2025; <https://chicagomonk.org/about/the-priors-blog/the-world-the-flesh-and-the-devil-part-1/>

³ Those interested in ideas of the so-called ‘Angelic Doctor’ should look at: Aquinas, Thomas, ‘Whether Spiritual Sins are Fittingly Distinguished from Carnal Sins?’, in the *Summa Theologica*, online at: https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.FS_Q72_A2.html; and Question 77, Articles 1 and 2 (“Whether the will is moved by a passion of the sensitive appetite?”), detailing how an unruly desire or sudden passion can effectively blind us or bend our will away from God, online at <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2077.htm>; and Question 109, Article 8, where he establishes grace as the believer's essential healing anchor, online at https://ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/nature_grace.viii.i.viii.html.

⁴ For instance, Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne), IX, 569, although I obviously disagree with his connecting an ‘infusion of grace’ with “penitence”!

⁵ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 342.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 Jn. 2:15–17).

- The Flesh refers to the desires of our internal, fallen nature – and the sinful values characterized by *selfishness*, rather than *selflessness*. Our flesh tempts us *from within* to seek fulfilment in things that appeal to our old nature. It seduces us with a lie: that we can achieve genuine happiness or true fulfillment through pursuits like wealth, or status, or material possessions, or sexual experiences, or the hollow satisfaction of being seen as ‘successful’ or ‘important.’ But it’s a ruse; these things never bring true fulfilment; read Ecclesiastes.

To set one’s mind on the flesh is a spiritual catastrophe, because, Paul tells us, “The mind that is set on the flesh is *hostile to God*” (Romans 8:7a)! Furthermore, “it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (Romans 8:7b). Rather, it leads us toward every corrupt inclination of our crooked hearts. And so, Paul urges us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:14).

- And the final member of the Ruinous Triad is the Devil, the personal, infernal enemy of God and all of His people. He seeks to lead us away from God through demonic influences and all manner of cunning deception. And he has *a lot* of kids running around today! Jesus told His opponents:

“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

And so, James warns us with the greatest urgency:

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7b).

✚ “Flee” is an interesting word here. Φεύγω doesn’t mean simply to ‘run away’; it means to ‘flee to safety’ – to ‘run away to a safe place.’ You

know what? The devil knows where it's safe for him to hang out; and around a believer who's walking in the power of the indwelling Spirit is NOT one of them!

So, "submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

✚ "Cleanse your hands ... purify your hearts ... be wretched ... mourn and weep ... let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom ... humble yourselves before the Lord ..."

What is this? It's the language of contrition, confession and repentance: the divinely-prescribed remedy for grieving the Holy Spirit of God.

- 5) We have to be careful, Church! The Devil will lie to you! The world will lie to you! And most dangerously, YOU will lie to you!

Human beings have a wonderful facility for bargaining with themselves in ways that compromise their faith and their walk with Jesus. But these are always devil's bargains. They *seem* wise, but they are devilish. James wrote about this too. He warned against letting any manner of sin enter our lives. Why? Because any sin will break our fellowship and grieve the Holy Spirit.

He writes about two kinds of 'wisdom' – the one that "comes down from above" and the one that is "demonic" and "earthly." He writes:

"This is *not* the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly [*'the world'*], unspiritual [*'the flesh'*], demonic [*'the devil'*]. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere" (**James 3:15-17**).

- 6) As I said, when I grieve the Spirit, I push Him away. The closeness, the intimacy dissipates; the ability to hear His gentle whisper gets drowned out by the noise of the world. And when we choose the flesh over the Spirit, we choose the fruits of

the flesh over the fruits of the Spirit. So, love, peace, joy, temperance, self-control, kindness, etc. all languish on the vine.

I trade God's pleroma (πλήρωμα) – spiritual *fullness* (**Ephesians 4:13**) – for spiritual *emptiness*. I feel withered, dry, and heavy. Rather than feeling that God is walking with me, I begin to feel that He's working against me (because He is!).

Mark it down: to say, 'No,' to the Holy Spirit is an act of pride. And again, **James 4:6b**: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." The word translated "opposes" (ἀντιτάσσω) is a SCARY word when God is the subject and I am the object and "opposing" is the action being directed toward the object by the subject! In a sentence, the SUBJECT ("God," here) is the One who performs the entirety of the action ('opposing,' here) against the OBJECT ('the proud')!

And what does ἀντιτάσσω mean? Louw & Nida say it means to "oppose someone, involving not only a psychological attitude *but also a corresponding behavior*."⁶ In other words, not only to be hostile toward, but to act against!⁷ Do you like that when God's the SUBJECT and you're the OBJECT? George Liddell says it means to set one's self "in battle against," or "to be ... in array against; to "resist."⁸ Do you like that when God's the SUBJECT and you're the OBJECT?

We have to be careful with pride! It is the very sin of the devil! In Christian theology, pride is considered the fundamental or original sin that caused Lucifer's fall and transformation into the devil. It's a powerful and destructive root from which all other vices and transgressions grow.

Passages like **Isaiah 14:12-15** and **Ezekiel 28:17** describe Lucifer's downfall as stemming from a desire to elevate himself above God and be equal to the Almighty. In a very fine sermon, Pastor Adrian Rogers described how "pride created the devil."⁹ Pride represents an attitude of sinful autonomy and rebellion against God's divine authority. C.S. Lewis called it the greatest of all sins. Lewis

⁶ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), p. 491.

⁷ It's often "expressed idiomatically as 'to have a mean heart toward,' or 'to turn one's back on.'"

⁸ Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 164.

⁹ Rogers, Adrian, *The Problem with Pride (Proverbs 16:18)*, Love Worth Finding Ministries, December 1, 2018; December 1, 2018; <https://www.lwf.org/sermons/audio/the-problem-with-pride-2223>; cf., Rogers' article, 'The Sin of Pride in the Bible'; <https://www.lwf.org/articles/the-sin-of-pride-in-the-bible>.

wrote: “Pride has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.”¹⁰

Pride is awful because it leads to spiritual blindness – it uniquely blinds us to our own faults and need for repentance. In **Proverbs 16:18**, the wisest man who ever lived warned that it “goes before destruction.” And we’ve just studied the most terrifying thing about pride: it causes God to set a battle plan against us (**James 4:6b**)!

Church, if we’re going to avoid grieving the Spirit, we’re going to have to take God seriously.

Terminating the Past

- 1) Now we’re just getting started with this, but I want to shift to consider this idea of ‘taking God seriously’ – which I see as a fundamental component of not grieving the Spirit.

Watchman Nee was a great blessing to me in my early Christian life; his writing profoundly affected the shaping of my walk with Jesus early on. He wrote a series of books and essays directed toward young believers. He wanted to help them figure out what life should look like after we meet Jesus. I remembered an insightful teaching in one of these that had astonished me at the time – a teaching on the importance of ‘terminating the past.’¹¹ I want to share some of it with you this morning in closing.

- 2) As we know, after believing in the Lord, a person still carries much of their past with them – we saw this with Simon the Sorcerer. The Bible’s primary focus is *not* on our past, but on how we should live after we’re saved. Case-in-point: **Luke 3**, where “the crowds” asked John the Baptist, “What then shall we do?” John responded, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” He did not talk about their past but about their future. Then some “tax collectors” came and asked. “What shall we do?” John answered, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do” (**Luke 3:13**). Then some “soldiers” came and asked him, “What shall we do?” John replied,

¹⁰ Lewis, C.S., *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), pp. 109-112.

¹¹ Nee, Watchman, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee (Set 3)*, Vol. 48: *Messages for Building Up New Believers* (Anaheim, CA; Living Stream Ministry, 2013), chapter 3.

“Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages” (**Luke 3:14**). This shows us that John, who preached repentance, emphasized the things that we should do after we’ve come to Jesus.¹²

So, after reading God’s Word carefully, Nee says, “we find a marvelous truth: God pays attention only to what a person should do *after* he has believed in the Lord. He does not pay attention to the things he has done in his past.”¹³

- 3) Watchman Nee asks, “What then should we do with the things of our past?”¹⁴ He mentions some *truly* fascinating examples and offers some practical advice:

✠ The first thing he talks about with these new believers is idols.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 says that the believers there “turned to God from the idols.” Therefore, he concludes that “when a person believes in the Lord, he must deal with all idols.”

He points to **Deuteronomy 12:29-30** which says, “When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, ³⁰ take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do the same.’”

Brother Nee concludes: “Hence, we are forbidden from being *curious*. **2 Corinthians 6:16** says, “What agreement has the temple of God [US!] with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.” The meaning here is quite obvious. Christians should not visit temples. There are exceptions of course, such as when a person is stranded on a deserted mountain and cannot find a place for shelter at night and there is only a temple for lodging. But generally

¹² Paul tells us that we were “dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:1-3). But he tells us later in the same epistle: “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ! ... ²² put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and ... be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and ... put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:17-24).

¹³ *Ibid.*, Nee, *Collected Works (Set 3)*, Vol. 48: *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, chapter 3.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, Nee, *Collected Works (Set 3)*, Vol. 48: *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, chapter 3.

speaking, believers should not visit any temple. This is because **2 Corinthians 6:16** says clearly that we are the temple of the living God. It also says that there is no agreement between idols and the temple of the living God. Unless one is pressed by special occasion or circumstance, it is inadvisable to go near or purposely tour any temple.”¹⁵

This is a fascinating observation coming from a *Chinese* believer! China has roughly 33,000 officially registered Buddhist temples. Many if not most Chinese people who come to Jesus would likely have had an important relationship to a Buddhist temple in their background.

He’s warning believers to be careful to “terminate their past.” He mentions **Psalms 16:4** which says, “The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; ... I will not ... take their names on my lips.” From this he concludes, “Even at the pulpit, we should carefully avoid the names of other gods except in the case of a necessary illustration.”¹⁶

And “a new believer must give up his idols from the very first day of his salvation. He should not mention the names of idols, be involved with fortune-telling, or visit any temples ...

We cannot inquire about the worship of other religions. All these things belong to the past, and we should deal with them. Anything that falls into these categories should be destroyed; they should not even be sold. We should destroy, exterminate, and remove them. I hope that new believers will not take this matter lightly; they have to be very careful about these things, for God is extremely jealous of idols ...

Please remember that you cannot worship any idols; you must reject all of them, even images of the Lord Jesus and Mary. We must deal with this matter thoroughly. Otherwise, we will be distracted to follow another way.”¹⁷

Now, you may say, ‘Wow! That’s extreme.’ But you know what really impresses me in this? What impresses me is that *Watchman Nee took God seriously*, and he was encouraging young believers to do the same.

¹⁵ Nee, Watchman, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee (Set 3), Vol. 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers* (Anaheim, CA; Living Stream Ministry, 2013), chapter 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Nee, *Collected Works (Set 3), Vol. 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers*, chapter 3.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, Nee, *Collected Works (Set 3), Vol. 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers*, chapter 3.

✠ The second thing he talks about with these new believers is improper objects.

Watchman Nee points to **Acts 19:19**, Paul was in Ephesus and many came to Jesus and “a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

Nee says, “This is not a command or a teaching; it is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit moved in such a strong way that the Ephesians brought out all the improper books in their possession.”¹⁸ It says the value of the books calculated to “fifty thousand pieces of silver.” As Lenski puts it, “That was a lot of money to be consigned to the flames. [But] it was one of the best investments these believers ever made. And no one had the brilliant idea of selling these *bibloi* to the pagans and the Jews and of setting the price aside for *sacred use*.”¹⁹

Nee agrees! He writes:

“They did not sell their books and give the money to the church. Instead, the books were burned. If Judas had been present, he certainly would not have allowed this. This was much more than thirty pieces of silver which could have been given to the poor. But the Lord was pleased to have them burned ... After a person believes in the Lord, he should go home and check through his personal belongings. In an unbeliever's home, there is always something related to sin ... Things related to sin must be burned or destroyed; they cannot be sold. There should be a termination of improper things.”²⁰

Don’t you love reading someone who actually *takes God seriously*?

✠ The third area he addresses with these new believers is former debts.

He points to **Luke 19:8-9a**, where Zacchaeus [the former tax collector/thief] stood and said to Jesus, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”⁹ And Jesus

¹⁸ Nee, Watchman, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee (Set 3), Vol. 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers* (Anaheim, CA; Living Stream Ministry, 2013), chapter 3.

¹⁹ Lenski, R. C. H., *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 798.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, Nee, *Collected Works (Set 3), Vol. 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers*, chapter 3.

said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house ...” Nee writes: “Zaccheus did not do this as a result of doctrinal teaching; he did this as a result of the working of the [God in him] ...

Suppose that before you became a believer, you had extorted or defrauded others, stolen from them, or obtained things by improper means. Now that the Lord is working within, you have to deal with these things in a proper manner. This has nothing to do with the forgiveness you received from the Lord, but it is very much related to your testimony ... The restoration of his testimony depended on the termination of his past ... Brothers and sisters, did you wrong anyone in any way before you became a believer? Do you owe anyone anything? Have you taken things home which belong to others? Have you taken anything by improper means? If so, you have to deal with all these things properly.”²¹

✠ The fourth thing he talks about with these new believers is unsettled matters.

Nee points to **Matthew 8:21-22**: “Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” ²² And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

He writes: “When a person is saved, he surely has many unsettled ... matters at hand. These may easily hinder him from following the Lord. What should he do? ... The first “dead” refers to those who are *spiritually* dead. In God's eyes those in the world are spiritually dead. The Lord was saying that the man should let the [spiritually] dead bury his father, while he should follow the Lord. I am not exhorting new believers to not make funeral arrangements for their fathers ...

[But] we must lay hold of this principle: we should let go of unfinished business. If we wait until we have finished settling them before we [follow Jesus], we will never have the time ... This is not to exhort new believers to neglect their family. [It's] that they should not wait until they have settled all their earthly matters before ... they ... follow the Lord ... We should not be bound by matters of the dead. Instead, we should just regard the unsettled

²¹ Nee, Watchman, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee (Set 3), Vol. 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers* (Anaheim, CA; Living Stream Ministry, 2013), chapter 3.

matters as settled. If we want to settle them before following the Lord, we will never make it.²²

Again, you may not agree with brother Nee's conclusions. But what really impresses me here is that Watchman Nee *took God seriously*, and he was encouraging young believers to do the same.

4) And God would ask a lot of this dear brother!²³

- ✠ He was arrested on April 10, 1952, in Shanghai because of his unwavering Christian witness and refusal to compromise his faith or integrate his churches into state-controlled bodies.
- ✠ Following years of isolation and mass accusation meetings orchestrated against him and his co-workers, he was formally tried before the High Court in Shanghai in June 1956 and sentenced to 15 years in prison on false charges.
- ✠ Nee served his sentence in grueling environments, including two labor camps. He was forced to perform heavy manual labor under continuous political propaganda, resulting in severe physical deterioration and protruding ribs due to inadequate nutrition.
- ✠ Despite suffering from advanced angina pectoris (intense chest pain brought about by the heart being deprived of oxygen-rich blood), his captors pushed him beyond his limits.
- ✠ Because of his unrelenting commitment to Jesus, he was kept in strict isolation and all communication was heavily censored. When his wife, Charity, died in 1971 after suffering her own persecution and health decline, Nee was *not* allowed to attend her funeral. Although he was formally sentenced to 15 years, the authorities kept him imprisoned for 20 full years, refusing to release him even after his term expired.

²² *Ibid.*, Nee, *Collected Works (Set 3), Vol. 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers*, chapter 3.

²³ See Griffin, Annette, 'How Was Watchman Nee and How Did He Impact Asian Christianity?', *Christianity.com*, April 15, 2024; <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/watchman-nee.html>. Cf., *Asia Harvest's* article on Nee at <https://www.asiaharvest.org/china-resources/anhui/1972-watchman-nee>.

✠ On May 30, 1972, weakened and dying from his heart condition, Nee was loaded onto a bumpy tractor to be taken to a distant prison hospital and he died en route. He was 69 years old.

The state cremated his body without notifying his family. It later circulated false rumors that he had recanted his faith. This was proven to be a lie by a note found under his pillow after his death. In it he wrote, “[Jesus] Christ is the Son of God who died for the redemption of sinners and resurrected after three days. This is the greatest truth in the universe. I die because of my belief in Christ.” In another letter, written 38 days before his death, he expressed his enduring faith. Despite his severe suffering over two decades, he wrote: “I maintain my joy.”²⁴

Brother Nee *took God seriously*.

5) Now, why all of this this morning? Because this is where it all begins. If we’re to obey Scripture’s command to “grieve not the Holy Spirit of God” we have to begin by really, and honestly, taking God seriously.

We have enough to consider. We’ll continue next Lord’s Day.

Amen.

²⁴ Van Dyke, Amy, Lead Curator of Art and Exhibitions at the Museum of the Bible, ‘I Maintain My Joy: The Life and Ministry of Watchman Nee’; <https://www.museumofthebible.org/magazine/exhibitions/i-maintain-my-joy>.