

Psalms 51:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Analysis

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

This verse reveals David's deepest fear: losing God's presence and the Holy Spirit. Having experienced intimate fellowship with God and the Spirit's anointing for kingship, David dreads separation more than any temporal consequence—death of his child, Nathan's rebuke, public scandal, or political instability.

"Cast me not away from thy presence" (אַל־תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִלִּפְנֵיךָ/al-tashlicheni milefanekha) pleads: 'Don't throw me away from before your face.' Shalach (cast away, throw, hurl) is violent—not merely 'send away' but forcefully reject. Paneh (face, presence) represents direct relationship, intimate fellowship. David begs not to be expelled from God's presence like Adam from Eden (Genesis 3:24).

David knew precedents for losing God's presence: Saul had been rejected as king, and 'the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul' (1 Samuel 16:14). Ichabod ('the glory is departed') was named when the Ark was captured, symbolizing God's presence leaving Israel (1 Samuel 4:21-22). Exile later meant being cast from God's land and temple presence (the ultimate judgment). David fears similar rejection.

"And take not thy holy spirit from me" (אַל־תִּקַּח מִמֶּנִּי רוּחַ קֹדֶשׁ/veruach qadshekha al-tiqqach mimmenni) parallels the first phrase but specifies the Holy Spirit. Ruach Qodesh (Holy Spirit) appears rarely in the Old Testament (also Psalm 143:10, Isaiah 63:10-11), more commonly as 'Spirit of God' or 'Spirit of the LORD.' David

has been anointed with the Spirit for kingship (1 Samuel 16:13); he dreads losing the Spirit as Saul did.

This raises theological questions about Spirit indwelling in Old versus New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon specific individuals for specific tasks (judges, prophets, kings) and could depart (Saul). In the New Testament, the Spirit permanently indwells all believers (John 14:16-17, Ephesians 1:13-14), and Jesus promises, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee' (Hebrews 13:5). Believers under the New Covenant need not fear God removing His Spirit—Christ's atonement and the Spirit's seal guarantee permanent relationship.

Yet David's concern remains relevant: though the Spirit doesn't leave believers, we can grieve (Ephesians 4:30) or quench (1 Thessalonians 5:19) Him, diminishing fellowship and forfeiting blessing. Sin doesn't end our relationship but damages intimacy, joy, and fruitfulness. David's prayer models pursuing restored fellowship after sin.

Historical Context

David witnessed Saul's tragic example: anointed as king, he disobeyed God, and 'the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him' (1 Samuel 16:14). Saul's kingship became a nightmare—jealousy, paranoia, violence, consulting mediums, dying in defeat. Losing the Spirit meant losing God's blessing, protection, and purpose. David, having seen this cautionary tale, desperately pleads not to share Saul's fate.

The phrase 'thy holy spirit' is significant. While the Old Testament frequently mentions 'the Spirit of God' or 'the Spirit of the LORD,' 'Holy Spirit' appears rarely. Isaiah 63:10-11 recalls Israel rebelling and grieving God's Holy Spirit in the wilderness. David understands the Spirit as holy—morally pure, requiring holiness from those He indwells. David's sin grieved the Holy Spirit; he begs the Spirit not to depart.

Old Testament Spirit indwelling differed from New Covenant experience. The Spirit came upon specific individuals (prophets, judges, kings, craftsmen) for

specific purposes but wasn't universally given to all believers. Joel 2:28-32 prophesied future outpouring: 'I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.' Peter at Pentecost declared this fulfilled (Acts 2:16-21)—now all believers receive the indwelling Spirit permanently.

Jesus promised the Spirit would remain with believers forever: 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth' (John 14:16-17). Paul declares believers are 'sealed with that holy Spirit of promise' (Ephesians 1:13), an irrevocable guarantee of salvation. The Spirit's permanent indwelling under the New Covenant means Christians need not fear Him departing as David did.

However, this doesn't mean Christians can sin with impunity. We can grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) through sin, damaging fellowship though not ending relationship. We can quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19), suppressing His influence and forfeiting His fullness. While the Spirit won't depart, unrepented sin diminishes His work in our lives, producing spiritual dryness, lost joy, and weakened witness. David's prayer models maintaining sensitivity to the Spirit's presence and holiness.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does David's fear of losing the Holy Spirit reflect Old Testament Spirit indwelling's temporary nature versus New Covenant permanent indwelling?
2. What does it mean to be 'cast away from God's presence,' and how does Christ's atonement guarantee believers will never experience this?
3. Though the Spirit permanently indwells believers, how can we 'grieve' or 'quench' Him, and what are the consequences?
4. How does Saul's example (losing the Spirit and descending into misery) warn against presuming on God's grace while persisting in sin?

Interlinear Text

אֵל תִּקַּח מִלְפָּנֶיךָ רוּחַ דְּשֵׁב אֵל וְתִקַּח
H408 Cast me not away from thy presence spirit not thy holy H408 and take
H7993 H6440 H7307 H6944 H3947

מִמֶּנִּי:
H4480

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 4:30 (Holy): And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

2 Kings 13:23 (Parallel theme): And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet.

Romans 8:9 (Spirit): But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Genesis 6:3 (Spirit): And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

John 14:26 (Holy): But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

Psalms 71:18 (Parallel theme): Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.

Luke 11:13 (Holy): If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

1 Samuel 10:10 (Spirit): And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.

1 Samuel 16:14 (Spirit): But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

Judges 16:20 (Parallel theme): And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

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