Question: Can the Holy Spirit actually leave a person? What does Psalm 51:11 say about this?

Let’s read the verse:

Psalm 51:11 (ESV):

> “Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.”

The straightforward answer is yes the Holy Spirit can depart from a person. When this happens, the person remains physically the same but spiritually diminished or vulnerable.

Biblical Example: King Saul

King Saul is a prominent example of someone from whom the Spirit of the Lord departed.

1 Samuel 16:14 (ESV):

> “Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.”

This passage reveals a significant theological truth: The Spirit of God can leave a person due to disobedience, and an evil spirit can then trouble that person. This illustrates the spiritual consequences of rebellion against God.

The Reason for Saul’s Loss of the Spirit
Saul’s loss of the Spirit was a direct result of his rebellion and failure to obey God’s commands.

1 Samuel 15:22-23 (ESV);

> “And Samuel said, ‘Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from

> being king.'”

Here, rebellion is equated with sinfulness akin to witchcraft and idolatry, showing the severity of Saul’s disobedience.

The Consequences of Losing the Holy Spirit

When the Holy Spirit departs, a person loses God’s favor, including peace, joy, and spiritual strength.

2 Samuel 7:14-15 (ESV):

> “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.”

God’s steadfast love (or favor) can depart when one rejects His Spirit, as happened with Saul.

The loss of the Spirit leads to inner turmoil, spiritual vulnerability, and susceptibility to evil influences, as demonstrated by Saul's increasing jealousy and cruelty.

1 Samuel 22:11 (ESV):

> "Then the king sent to summon Ahimelek the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's household, the priests who were at Nob; and they came to the king."

Saul's evil actions culminated in the killing of God's priests, showing the deep spiritual decline resulting from losing the Spirit.

Distinguishing the Fruit of the Spirit from Spiritual Gifts

It is important to understand that losing the Holy Spirit does not mean a person stops performing supernatural acts such as speaking in tongues or prophesying.

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV):

> “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

The fruit of the Spirit reflects a person’s character and holiness the inward evidence of the Spirit’s presence. In contrast, spiritual gifts (such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, or miracles) are *manifestations* of the Spirit that can, according to scripture and church history, sometimes occur apart from genuine spiritual fruit (cf. Matthew 7:22-23).

1 Samuel 18:10 (ESV):

> “The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved inside the house. David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had a spear in his hand.”

Even after the Spirit of the Lord departed, Saul continued to prophesy under the influence of a different spirit, proving that the presence of spiritual gifts alone is not evidence of the Holy Spirit’s abiding presence.

Jesus’ Warning

Jesus warned that many would claim spiritual works but be rejected because they lack true relationship and holiness.

Matthew 7:22-23 (ESV):

> “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'”

This highlights the essential nature of the fruit of the Spirit true holiness and obedience over mere spiritual activity.

How Does the Holy Spirit Leave or Depart?

The Holy Spirit can depart when we grieve or quench Him.

Grieving the Spirit:

Ephesians 4:30 (ESV):

> “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Disobedience and persistent sin grieve the Spirit. Like Saul, when we reject God’s Word and continue in sin, we risk losing the Spirit’s favor.

Quenching the Spirit:
1 Thessalonians 5:19 (ESV);

> “Do not quench the Spirit.”

This means suppressing or extinguishing the Spirit’s work by neglecting spiritual disciplines such as prayer, worship, obedience, and holy living. Quenching the Spirit leads to spiritual dryness and ultimately may cause the Spirit to withdraw.

God bless you.

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