

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #127: GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

By John Temples

Paul gave a command in Ephesians 4 that should give us pause: in verse 30, he said, “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*” The thought that something we might do could cause a member of the Godhead to feel sorrow or sadness should stun us, humble us, and make us want to never do such a thing. And if I am causing grief to the Spirit, am I not also grieving the Father and the Son?¹ “My sin is more than I can bear!” (Paraphrasing Genesis 4:13).

The fact that the Holy Spirit can be grieved reminds us of the fact that the Holy Spirit is a PERSON, not just an influence or mysterious essence. We have no trouble thinking of God as a (divine) Person, or of visualizing Christ as a Person; but somehow, we hesitate to assign Personhood to the Spirit. But here are some qualities of the Holy Spirit that prove that He is a rational, omniscient personal Being:

- Personality/individuality (personal, masculine pronouns are consistently used to refer to the Spirit--John 14:16 et al)
- Life (Galatians 6:8)
- Will (1 Corinthians 12:11)
- Ability to speak (Acts 8:29)
- Intelligence (1 Corinthians 2:10)

The Holy Spirit is a DIVINE Person. He is a member of the Godhead, equal in essence to the Father and the Son. He possesses all the attributes of deity:

- Eternity (Hebrews 9:14)
- Omnipresence (Psalms 139:7)
- Omniscience (all knowledge--1 Corinthians 2:10-11)
- Omnipotence (all power--Micah 3:8, Romans 15:19)

¹ In Psalms 95:10, God declares that He was “grieved” by the stubbornness of the Israelites in the wilderness; and Mark 3:5 says that Jesus was “grieved” at the hardness of heart of the Pharisees.

Since the Spirit is a Person--a being having personality--He can be lied to (Acts 5:3), resisted (Acts 7:51), insulted (Hebrews 10:29), blasphemed (Luke 12:10), and grieved (our text, Ephesians 4:30).

HOW CAN WE GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?

There are two main ways you and I can “grieve” another person: by our actions or by our words. Paul talks about both ways in Ephesians 4. However, it is significant that the context of Ephesians 4:30 deals mainly with our WORDS. Paul mentions **lying** in verse 25; then in verses 29-32, he says: “Let no corrupt **word** proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all **bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking** be put away from you, with all malice.” Note the emphasis on our words.

Why might our words cause grief to the Holy Spirit in particular? Because the Spirit is a WORD SPECIALIST. He deals in words. He inspired the Bible writers, giving them the words that pertain to eternal life. Note:

- “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His **word** was on my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2).
- “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the **word** of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).
- “Now we [apostles] have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in **words** which man's wisdom teaches but [in words] which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”
- “He who has an ear, let him **hear** what the Spirit **says** to the churches” (Revelation 2:7).

We need only think how many times we have grieved other persons by our speech to understand how such a “lover of words” as the Holy Spirit could be grieved

when we speak words of anger, bitterness, profanity, and evil. That is a cruel misuse of one of God's greatest gifts, the gift of speech.

Here are Albert Barnes' comments on Ephesians 4:30: "[And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God] This is addressed to Christians, and it proves that it is possible for them to grieve the Holy Spirit. The word used here - *lupeite* - means properly to afflict with sorrow; to make sad or sorrowful. It is rendered to make sorry, or sorrowful, Matt 14:9; 17:23; 18:31; 19:22; 26:22,37; Mark 14:19; John 16:20; 2 Cor 2:2; 6:10; 7:8-9,11; 1 Thess 4:13. It is rendered 'grieved,' Mark 10:22; John 21:17; Rom 14:15; 2 Cor 2:4-5; Eph 4:20: and once 'in heaviness,' 1 Peter 1:6. The verb does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament. The common meaning is, to treat others so as to cause grief." (From Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997-2014 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

And this from Martyn Lloyd-Jones: "This verse distinguishes Christian ethics from every other ethical system. Other religions have ethical standards, but none of them command their followers not to sin because their sin grieves God. And, Paul is not appealing to his readers to adhere to a certain moral standard simply because it is the right thing to do. He is not even appealing to them to obey these moral commands because it will benefit them, although it will.... Rather, he appeals to them on the basis of their personal relationship with a loving God. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit! Through faith in Christ, you enter into a personal relationship with the Triune God. His Spirit now dwells within you. Your body is His temple. On the basis of these facts, Paul exhorts you to glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Sin strains the personal relationship that you are now to enjoy with the loving, indwelling Spirit of God."

<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-36-why-not-sin-ephesians-430>

THE NATURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GRIEF

When you and I grieve someone, that person suffers personal emotional damage. The Holy Spirit, however, is not grieved in such a way as to "suffer" in a literal sense. God is invisible and not subject to physical suffering. When Paul says the Spirit is "grieved," he speaks metaphorically on our account to show that the Spirit

is saddened when we succumb to our own self-will--when we have, so to speak, wounded Him by despising His admonitions.

Barnes says, "We are not to suppose that the Holy Spirit literally endures 'grief, or pain,' at the conduct of people. The language is such as is suited to describe what 'men' endure, and is applied to him to denote that kind of conduct which is suited to cause grief; and the meaning here is, do not pursue such a course as is suited in its own nature, to pain the benevolent heart of a holy being. Do not act toward the Holy Spirit in a manner which would produce pain in the bosom of a friend who loves you. There is a course of conduct which will drive that Spirit from the mind as if he were grieved and pained—as a course of ingratitude and sin would pain the heart of an earthly friend, and cause him to leave you." (Ibid.)

The Holy Spirit's grief is not of a petty, oversensitive nature. "He is grieved with us mainly for our own sakes, for he knows what misery sin will cost us.... He grieves over us because he sees how much chastisement we incur, and how much communion we lose." (Charles Spurgeon)

In short, the Holy Spirit is grieved at our misuse of the divine gift of speech, and saddened at our disregarding what is beneficial for us and following our own will.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The ultimate consequence is loss of your soul. However, like many things in life, the process is usually gradual (and therefore insidious). The progression of the downward fall might be seen in the verbs used in some Bible passages:

1. First phase--GRIEVING the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).
2. Second phase--RESISTING the Spirit (Acts 7:51).
3. Third phase--QUENCHING the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

If the influence of the Spirit (through the words of Scripture and the assemblies of the church) is resisted long enough, there comes a point where God will withdraw His Spirit from the Christian. (In Romans 1, it is stated three times that God "gave the heathen up" because of their resistance to Him.) After his sin with Bathsheba,

David pleaded with God, “Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me,” showing that such a drastic thing is possible (Psalms 51:11).

The Israelites of Isaiah’s day reached that point with God. Listen to these terrible words from Isaiah 63:7-10: “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. For He said, ‘Surely they are My people, children who will not lie.’ So He became their Savior. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. *But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them.*”

HOW CAN WE GUARD AGAINST GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The context of Ephesians 4 tells us what we need to know:

First, PUT AWAY--CEASE DOING--certain things:

- Stop imitating the world (“walking as the Gentiles walk”)--verse 17.
- “Put off” the old, corrupt, deceitful, lustful self--verse 22.
- Put away lying--verse 25.
- Put away anger that leads to sin--verse 26.
- Stop stealing and using dishonest means to earn money--verse 28.
- Refuse to let corrupt, hurtful words pass your lips--verse 29.
- Put away bitterness--verse 31.

Second, DO THESE THINGS INSTEAD:

- Walk worthy of your calling--verse 1. (Your “walk” is the sum total of your life’s activities and speech. Our calling is to follow Christ.)
- Strive for peace and unity at all times within the body of Christ--verses 3-5.
- Speak the truth in love--verse 15.
- Let your mind be constantly renewed--verse 23.

- At all times, let your speech be edifying and grace-imparting--verse 29.
- Be kind to one another--verse 32.
- Be ready at all times to forgive those who wrong you--verse 32.

The best way to avoid grieving the Spirit is to remember the power that your words have. Ponder these thoughts from James chapter 3:

“Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring. If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no

favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.” (New Living Translation)

The opposite of grieving the Holy Spirit is pleasing the Spirit. When we speak words of grace and truth, we do that. Let such be our goal every day.

--John Temples