

GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

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

To whom was this warning addressed? Was it for people who were unsaved? No, it was addressed to the saints at Ephesus, to people who were believers in Christ, to people who had been sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption.

This startling expression, "Grieving the Holy Spirit" describes a strange but sad fact. It is used only once in the Bible and applied to Christians then. It means to cause sorrow to, to make sorrowful, to plunge into deep sorrow, or to cause acute pain. "Grieve" is a love word. One can anger an enemy, but he cannot grieve him. The words are mutually exclusive. Only one who loves can be grieved. The deeper the love, the greater the grief occasioned by slight or by sin on the part of the one who is the object of the love. The word "grieve" most definitely implies personality. The fact that the Holy Spirit can be grieved is absolute proof that He is a person. You cannot grieve an influence no matter what you do. You cannot bring sorrow to the wind or the sunshine. I cannot grieve your influence. This is something which is possible only to self-conscious personality. Only a person can be grieved. The Holy Spirit can be grieved by what we think, say, and do.

This text also testifies to the Holy Spirit's love for us and interest in us. We do not grieve those who do not love us. We may cause them to be angry, but we do not grieve them. The word "grieve" implies a very close and tender relationship. We are not grieved over the conduct or experiences of those for whom we have no concern. To speak then of grieving the Holy Spirit is to acknowledge His love for us. So, it is a matter of great importance to Him what we think, say, or do. We, ourselves, are grieved when our loved ones fail, or go down in some sin, but we cannot begin to feel it as much as the Holy Spirit does when Christians fail or fall. This fact should cause us to do the things that would meet with His approval. The fact that we cause sorrow to the Holy Spirit by our sins should surely act as an effective deterrent. But not all Christians realize the poignancy of the sorrow which their sins occasion Him. How sensitive to sin this should make us, lest we should so grieve Him, disappoint Him, and cause Him pain!

Our text emphasizes a characteristic of the Spirit that we are in danger of overlooking. Behind these striking words lies the facts that the Holy Spirit, like a good mother, desires the best for His own. When that purpose is thwarted or frustrated, there is deep grief and sorrow. Often, we are so foolish that we prefer the things which hurt and cripple us, and which grieve the heart of the One who purposes and desires better things for us.

I. The Causes of Grief To The Holy Spirit.

In order to have a clear conception of the things that grieve the Holy Spirit, it will be well for us to begin with the surroundings of the text. If you want an answer that is clear and explicit, read the verses immediately preceding and following our text. The injunction of our text occurs in the midst of a list of sins of speech and action, all of which grieve the Holy Spirit. It would be a healthy spiritual exercise to deliberately go through this list and discover whether or not we are guilty of any of them.

1. Unholy imaginations.

2. Impure thoughts.

If you set your heart upon anything that is evil, He will be grieved.

3. Corrupt words.

"Corrupt"—worthless and flippant talk. Isn't this one of the sins of the day?
"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth."

4. Sinful actions.

Indulgence in outward acts of sin.

(1) Ignoring His presence.

Disregarding Him. Thoughtless irreverence toward His personality. Indifference respecting His love. Many Christians live as though there were no Holy Spirit. From Sunday morning until Saturday night they fail to recognize their Heavenly Guest. And who enjoys being ignored? Don't grieve the Holy Spirit by the coldness of forgetfulness.

(2) Neglecting the means of grace.

a. Prayer.

Sometimes it is hurried and unreal. Often neglected.

b. Bible Study.

Bible is seldom read and studied. Often forgotten.

c. Church attendance.

Irregular or infrequent.

(3) Rejecting His teachings.

We grieve the Holy Spirit, when through prejudice, unbelief, or wilfulness, we refuse to accept His teachings and to obey them.

(4) Refusing His guidance.

Thwarting His plans. Someone humorously said, "There are two sides to every question: my side and the wrong side." Well, that is absolutely true of the Holy Spirit. You are either on His side or you are on the wrong side. Every time that you have ever refused His guidance and gone in your own way, you have grieved the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will not force you to follow Him. He leads on and He pleads with you to follow. Many of us grieve Him because we do not have any desire to follow Him to the mountain tops, because we seek satisfactions in the things that cannot satisfy, or because we often still cling to some sin. He is never pleased when we know God's will and fail to comply with it.

(5) Undue devotion to the things of the world.

Worldly pursuits, forbidden pleasures, unholy ambitions, and unhallowed affections. Unnecessary association with the ungodly may hush the voice of the Holy Spirit. His holy jealousy is excited by an unholy love of the world. If a mother sees her child fonder of someone else than of her, she feels it a very hard trial to bear. He is grieved when you love worldly things better. He desires and demands all the love of Christians.

(6) Unconcern about the cause of Christ.

Carrying on His work is the first objective laid before us. The Holy Spirit must be grieved when we do not undertake it. For us to fail to desire and strive after the highest and best must grieve Him.

"I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'M gaining every day,
Still praying as I onward bound,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

That should be the perpetual longing of every Christian heart.

(7) Serving the Lord in our own strength.

He is grieved when we substitute fleshly energy and worldly policy for His subduing, quickening presence.

- (8) Questionable practices.
The little sins, regarded as inconsequential, grieve the Holy Spirit and check His gracious inflow of power. The life of separation from the world is the price of spiritual life and victory. You should not tempt others to do wrong by example.
- (9) Fulfilling the lusts of the flesh.
Galatians 5:16-26. What are some of the things which grieve the Holy Spirit? Galatians 5:19-21 gives an extended list.
- (10) Exhibiting the carnal nature.
All heat and passion, all worry and anxiety, all sins of envy, jealousy, pride, hatred, malice, grudge-bearing, bitterness, wrath, anger, covetousness, lust, gossip, spite, unkindness, and unforgiveness.
- (11) Ingratitude.
Nothing cuts one to the heart more than, after having done his utmost for another, to be repaid with ingratitude. We do like to know that there is thankfulness in the heart upon which we have conferred a boon. The Holy Spirit is grieved when He looks into hearts of professed Christians and sees little love for and gratitude to Christ for all He has done for us.

II. The Consequences of Grieving The Holy Spirit.

1. It will injure our knowledge.
2. It will injure our happiness.
An accusing conscience and broken fellowship cause unhappiness and misery.
3. It will impoverish our lives.
4. It will injure our usefulness.
5. It will injure the Holy Spirit.
Perhaps it is a little difficult to understand how He can be grieved by our attitude and conduct.
 - (1) He is a Person.
No one need fear grieving a mere influence or an abstract power.
 - (2) He dwells within you if you are a Christian.
What does He think of your behavior? Does He like the way you keep house?
 - (3) He controls through love.
He did not come into your life to domineer or coerce. He is satisfied with obedience in love only.
 - (4) He is highly sensitive.
Are you hurting Him with your ways and sins? Sin cuts Him sorely. He hates sin. He does no sin. Will you compel Him to witness sin in your life?
 - (5) He trusts you.
It is a wonderful thing to trust God and to testify to His faithfulness, but it is also a wonderful thing if He can trust you and testify to your faithfulness. Let us prove ourselves worthy of the trust and confidence which He has in us.

The way of recovery from this sin of grieving the Holy Spirit is that of repentance. That is an old-fashioned word, but we need to hear it again and again. It includes a sorrow for sin and a willingness to put it away.