

## **Sermon 20: Ephesian 4:30: Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit**

### **OUTLINE**

The Person of the Spirit  
The grieving of the Spirit

### **INTRODUCTION**

If I were to ask you 'why shouldn't the Christian sin?', 'what makes a sin wrong?' we would likely hear a number of different arguments. Today many feel that a certain action is inappropriate because it is not culturally acceptable, it is a taboo, it is not a societal norm and this is what makes an action wrong. This betrays a more post-modern way of thinking where we are trying to live with the premise that everyone has their own truth and that our morality is a societal construct. You will also hear the more pragmatic view that says we should do those things that work for personal and societal benefit and not do those things that cause harm. Here you can see that the rationale behind the morality is the supremacy of human comfort. In contrast to this is the view that says that freedom is the basis of morality, as long as I choose to do what I want, it does not matter whether it hurts me or not, the point is I chose it. And as long as I don't stop your choices then all is good. Then there is the Christian ethic, now you might think off hand that this is an ethic that is based on a set of rules, the law of God, and in part this is true for God's law reflects Him, but Paul gets to the very heart of why a thing is a sin and the ultimate compass for Christian behaviour, Eph. 4:30, 'And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.' The rationale behind all Christian ethics is God. In this verse Paul is seeking to motivate the Ephesians to put off those ways that belong to their old sin dominated lives. He has made the argument on the basis of God's work in having put the old man to death. Here is the second big idea that Paul puts forward to motivate the believer to leave sin behind and pursue love, 'And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.' Put sin aside because it grieves the third person of the Godhead.

Lets remember the context. Paul is in the practical part of the letter calling these Ephesians to be what they are, they are one body and so should be pursuing love and unity; they are dead in Christ and so should be putting off the old ways and putting on the new. Paul has been spelling out the specifics of this in putting of lying and speaking the truth; in putting away all anger; in putting away stealing and in its place industry and generosity; again Paul went after our speech. It is at this point that Paul tells us not to grieve the Spirit. After this Paul goes after speech again, and then urges us to kindness, tenderness and forgiveness in imitation of God. In one sense the call to not grieve the Spirit is linked to every one of Paul's points in the context, our lying, getting angry, sinful tongue lashings, etc can all be brought to this principle, don't do them because they grieve the Spirit. This principle is very effective because it is deeply personal. The Christian ethic is not one set of rules contending with another for your conscience it is a life of pleasing God and not grieving God. It is not a to-do list that we tick off with legalistic scrupulosity but living for the pleasure of our loving and holy God.

Today as we go through this verse we want to take the opportunity to dig a little bit into the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, looking at the person of the Spirit; and secondly we want to think deeply about what it means to grieve the Spirit.

## The Person of the Spirit

Imagine for a moment that Jehovah's Witnesses come to your door, in the interest of witnessing you let them in. The discussion begins to centre around the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and they begin to make certain assertions about the Holy Spirit. They claim that He is not a person but merely a force, much like gravity or electricity. That He is God's power/force by which the Father works, but not a person and certainly not someone to be worshipped. How do we respond? In this first lecture we are wanting to establish that the Holy Spirit is a person and that He is divine.

Let's begin with names. In dealing with any subject we first deal with names. What are some of the names given to the Holy Spirit? Now keep in mind that God communicates something of His person and what He does in these names. Counsellor (Jn 14:16); Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17); Isaiah 11:2 (ESV) "And the Spirit *of the Lord* shall rest upon him, the *Spirit of wisdom* and understanding, the *Spirit of counsel* and might, the *Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord*." Spirit of Holiness (Rom 1:4). Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29). Eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14). Spirit of glory (1 Pet 4:14). Spirit of God (Rom 8:9). Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9). Spirit of the Father (Matt 10:20). The Spirit of the LORD God (Is 61:1). And 92 times He is referred to as Holy Spirit. This is by far the most common name. And just in case anyone wants to argue that this designation is not a name, we can point them to the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 (ESV) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,". Father and Son don't sound like names either, they are more descriptive of roles, but are presented in Scripture as names.

The name Holy Spirit has two parts, Holy, and Spirit. Holy is a fitting description of the Holy Spirit who is God for holiness seems to be the most emphasized aspect of God's nature, being the only aspect of His character that is thrice repeated in attribution to Him (Is 6:3; Rev 4:8). Holy in the OT means 'set apart', and would point to the 'otherness' of His being as well as His purity. He is not a part of this creation, but being divine like the Father and Son He is 'wholly other', and being like them He is also perfectly pure, free from sin.

Holy Ghost is a name that you may have heard, it is found in the old KJV. It was the old English translation for Spirit, and a poor translation at that. The word 'ghost' conveys the idea of an incomplete disembodied spirit. And this is far from reflecting the fully divine, perfect and complete nature of the Holy Spirit. The word 'Spirit' is a translation for the Hebrew word '*ruach*', which generally means breathe/wind. It is a common word used to describe a strong storm (Job 1:19), amazement (literally breathless) 1 Kings 10:4-5; but when used of the Holy Spirit is meant to intend energy and power (Micah 3:8). The word *ruach* is not meant to explain the Spirit's being as being like wind/non-material, but rather as being full of power and divine energy. If we focused on only this aspect of the Spirit and limited ourselves to the OT teaching we could then fall into the incomplete understanding and heresy of the Jehovah's Witnesses. '*Pneuma*', is a Greek translation for *ruach* in the NT. When we read the word Spirit we should not think as much in terms of immaterial as in terms of God's being. The words are attempts to associate the Spirit's being with God not with describing his immateriality. When we read the word 'Spirit', we should think of God's nature who is spirit, and not all of the other this-worldly associations.

The Holy Spirit is a person and there are numerous ways to prove this. 1 Cor 2:10 tells that the Holy Spirit has a mind, and so because of this personal attribute is able to 'search all things' and know the thoughts of God. No wind can do this. And Rom 8:27 plainly tells us of 'the mind of the Spirit'.

Eph 4:30 tells us of the emotional life of the Holy Spirit, who is able to be grieved. You cannot grieve electricity, but you can grieve a person.

1 Cor 12:11 reveals to us that the Holy Spirit has a will, an ability to choose and decide. Gravity has no such ability to choose. 1 Cor. 12:11 (ESV) "All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."

Rom 8:26 reveals to us that the Holy Spirit intercedes or prays for us, just as Christ does (Rom 8:34, Heb 7:25). Rocks and not even animals can pray; this activity belongs to a person. Prayer, we are told in Rom 8:26, involves groans and deep desiring, and prayer involves more than that too. A force cannot pray, only a person can.

And there are other indications of his personhood. He can be blasphemed (Matt 12:32); He can be lied to (Acts 5:3); He can be obeyed (Acts 13:2).

An argument brought forward by the Jehovah's Witnesses to deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit, is that 'pneuma', the Greek word for spirit, is a 'neuter' noun. Greek nouns have three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter, and people who don't know Greek will think that this means a masculine noun will be a he, a feminine a she, and a neuter an it, making the Holy Spirit an it. But listen to J W Wenham's explanation from the textbook I used in first year Greek:

""In Greek, gender has to do with the form of the words and has little to do with sex. There are masculine, feminine and neuter forms, but 'bread' [in the Greek] is masculine, 'head' is feminine, and 'child' is neuter." Thus, simply because a term is grammatically masculine does not mean that it is actually masculine in gender. Simply because a term is grammatically feminine does not mean that it is feminine in gender. And simply because a term is grammatically *neuter* does not mean that the item is an "it"." (Rhodes pg 213). In fact John actually breaks the rules of the Greek language. When he should call the Spirit an 'it' in the Greek, he calls Him 'He' (Jn 14:26, 15:26). The personality of the Spirit is beyond doubt. So, so far we have established that He is a person, but what sort of person is He? Is He an angel, divine?

Can you give me a list of all the Scriptures or even just one Scripture that teaches that the Holy Spirit is divine?

Next we need to look at the deity/Godhood of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:3-4 tells us that lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God.

1 Cor 12:4-6 uses the words Spirit, Lord and God interchangeably: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone."

Eph 4:4-6 tells us the Father dwells in us, but only the Holy Spirit does; this implies the Father and the Spirit are one.

In Heb 9:14 He is called the Eternal Spirit and only God is eternal.

In Mark 3:28-29 and Matt 12:32 the Holy Spirit can be blasphemed, which is to insult God.

In 1 Cor 2:11, we are told that the Spirit knows the thoughts of God. Who but an omniscient (all knowing) being could know the thoughts of another omniscient being?

In Matt 28:19 we have the covenant name of God revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2 Cor. 13:14 (ESV), "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Blessing does not come to us but from God.

The Deity of the Holy Spirit is not as pronounced as the deity of the Son, yet it is definitely there. This is also to be expected, as it is the Spirit's ministry not to draw attention to himself but the Son (John 16:14).

## The grieving of the Spirit

In this verse Paul is assuming a lot of the doctrine that he has taught in his letters. He reminds us that the Holy Spirit dwells within the believer. This reminds us that a Christian is the one who has the Holy Spirit. Only those who have trusted in Christ are born again and have the Spirit. The Spirit is said to dwell within us both personally and corporately, and this is why all the sins that are against one another, in particular grieve the Spirit who is the one who binds us into one body. Paul here wants us to recognize what sin does. He does not speak about what it does to our mental health, what it does to our relationships, what it brings about in terms of consequences in our families and health, but rather he takes us to the heart of the issue, our sin grieves the Spirit.

The first thing we need to do is try and understand this language of grieving as it describes the third person of the Trinity. All language that describes God is necessarily analogical, it points us to a truth but we must always be careful to say that the language of human experience of emotion fully explains God. You and I experience grief and loss and pain and tears because of our creatureliness. We are subject to the elements, prone to pain because of the nature of our bodies, we are weak. God does not have a nervous system, tear ducts, He is at the mercy of no one and no situation. So the language of grieving must not be taken in such a way that you imagine God crying every time you sin. It is language that does however convey very important truths.

It is very clear from Paul's language that he is emphasizing the holiness of the Spirit and how the Spirit is set against sin the life of the believer. But this word grieve is also precious and speaks to us in the tones of the gospel. An enemy gets angry a loved one is grieved by our sin. This is how Spurgeon puts it: "When I commit any offence, some friend who has very little patience, suddenly snaps asunder his forbearance and is angry with me. The same offence is observed by a loving father, and he is grieved. There is anger in his heart, but he is angry and he does not sin, for he is angry against my sin; and yet there is love to neutralize and modify the anger towards me. Instead of wishing me ill as the punishment of my sin, he looks upon my sin itself as being the ill. He grieves to think that I am already injured, from the fact that I have sinned. I say this is a heavenly compound, more precious than all the ointment of the merchants. There may be the bitterness of myrrh, but there is all the sweetness of frankincense in this sweet term "to grieve."<sup>1</sup> This language of God grieving is deliberately used by Paul to move our hearts. It is there to remind us that we would love when we sin, we act against one who deeply cares for us. His concern over the sin in our lives is not a trigger which provokes wrath, He is holy and loving, that word grief reminds us of this. We must assert that God hates sin as much in the believer as the unbeliever. God is unchangeably holy and does not have two standards. However, because of our justification and adoption in Christ there is no longer any of God's wrath towards us, and this grieving explains this new gospel way in which God relates to our sin.

How do we grieve the Spirit? We grieve the Spirit by our sinning. The law of God is helpful to articulate what that sin is. We sin by way of omission and commission. We sin in our thoughts when we entertain lust, or anger, or covetousness in our hearts. God sees the hidden person of the heart and sees our delight in sin and willingness to sin in the inner sanctum of our thoughts and holds us to account for our thoughts, motives, and imaginations. We sin with our tongues in the words we say, the way we say things, and the effect that our speech has on others. Our deeds, what we do with our bodies, with our hands, our feet, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. All those actions that do not

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1 <https://answersingenesis.org/education/spurgeon-sermons/278-grieving-the-holy-spirit/>

conform to God's holiness, God's truth and God's love these are sin. In particular Paul is concerned with those things that attack and compromise the unity of the church, lying, stealing, anger, slander, ranting, laziness, etc. we please the Spirit with love, holiness and truth.

Likewise we grieve the Spirit when we quench the Spirit, when we are not alert to His inner workings in our lives for sanctification. The Spirit working on concert with our conscience guides us, and convicts us, and prompts us. We must not ignore these inner workings.

Lloyd-Jones when preaching on this verse gives us several reasons for why we should not grieve the Holy Spirit. Firstly, because of the greatness of His person. To act against the Spirit is to act against the third person of the Trinity, the one who is worthy of all worship and obedience. The greater the person in whose presence we are the more circumspect we are with our behaviour, and so we should remember the greatness of His person. Secondly, it is base ingratitude to grieve the Spirit. The Spirit has served us in submitting to the Father and the Son, who has condescended to sweeping out the dung hill of our hearts and renovate it as a temple for God. We must never forget the great work the Spirit has done for us and seek never to grieve Him. Thirdly, grieving the Spirit is inconsistent with the final goal of salvation. The Spirit we are told is the seal of our redemption. His personal presence is given as the guarantee of our inheritance. He is given to keep us for a particular end, a holy and new creation free from all sin and rebellion, all lovelessness and selfishness. To work against His purposes and to grieve Him is working against this goal. Fourthly, to grieve the Spirit is to risk losing His influences in our lives. It is the Spirit who works in our hearts joy, peace, the assurance of salvation. It is He who bears witness with our spirits that we are God's children. We cannot lose our salvation but we can lose our deep sense of assurance and peace and comfort. Fifthly, to constantly grieve the Spirit is to risk His discipline. This discipline takes the form of not convicting you of sin, not warning your conscience, not restraining you but giving you your sin as a punishment for your hard heartedness. Sixthly, if we are handed over by the Spirit this usually results in the Spirit then restoring us with very strong measures. We feel ourselves lost, we suffer terrible burdens of soul and dark times. In restoring us He strongly applies the law and we feel ourselves separated from God as the horror of sin is freshly impressed upon us. Now the true believer cannot be lost but we can feel lost if we play with sin and the Spirit has to restore us.

So in conclusion, consider Paul's perspective on holiness that we are not simply keeping a set of rules but pleasing a person. Consider the intimacy that God has with us and the personal ways in which our sins are an affront to Him. Perhaps at times we wish that we could sin in peace and that it was not so personal, but it is. See the wrong of your sins, see the effect of your sins, see God's holiness and love and unite with Him to conquer them.